

Organizing Justice Education Activities



GUIDE FOR ESTABLISHING AN OJEN COMMITTEE

There are many active OJEN Committees throughout Ontario based in both large and small communities. Through the hard work and planning of these committees, students and their teachers enjoy a wide range of justice education activities that start with court visits and can include mock trial tournaments, law symposia, resources and professional development for teachers, and Law Day events.

Many of the existing OJEN Committees were spearheaded by a judge of either the Ontario Court of Justice or the Superior Court of Justice. Some of these Committees have since appointed a chair who is a member of the bar or a court staff. Other members of the committee can include lawyers, justices of the peace, law and civics teachers, school board representatives, Legal Aid Clinic staff, law librarians, trial coordinators and other court administration staff. While there is no strict requirement for who should sit on a Committee, there should be representatives from the justice and education sectors. Encouraging the participation of the education sector may require flexibility with meeting times and location to accommodate both the school schedule and the court schedule.

Suggested steps for establishing a new OJEN Committee include:

1. Identify members of the judiciary who are involved in or interested in justice education. A judge from both of the Superior Court of Justice and the Ontario Court of Justice as well as a justice of the peace makes for a strong judicial presence. The involvement of the judiciary can be very important when starting a new program, as they are able to lend credibility and authority to the event or project.
2. Contact local schools boards, both public and catholic or local private schools. Many school boards have a senior staff person who oversees the History or Canadian and World Studies curriculum, and identifies and disseminates resources and ideas to classroom teachers. Department heads, principals and classroom teachers also lend a valuable perspective.
3. Invite others who have shown an interest in justice education to join the first meeting of the Committee. Remember that the private criminal bar and the civil bar have enthusiasm and ideas that can easily be overlooked if the Committee focuses too much on the criminal or courthouse based staff and lawyers.
4. Call the first meeting at a convenient time and location. When inviting people to the first meeting, send out the latest edition of the OJEN *Courtrooms & Classrooms* newsletter, as well as other descriptive examples available on the OJEN website - www.ojen.ca - or by contacting the OJEN office on 416 947 5273. A suggested agenda for a new OJEN Committee's first meeting is available below.

5. At the first meeting, discuss the benefits of justice education to generate excitement about getting involved. Teachers may be able to provide stories about the impact that direct contact with the justice system has had on their students.
6. Discuss the range of possible activities, the expected time commitment and other logistical details such as time and location of meetings.
7. If the Committee decides to proceed on an ongoing basis, select a first project to introduce into the community or the courthouse. OJEN staff can provide templates or samples and ideas for initiating many of the projects or events that have been organized in other locations.
8. The number of meetings per year and the length of these meetings will depend on the number and magnitude of projects undertaken by the Committee as well as the time commitments of the Committee members. Generally, OJEN Committees meet 4 to 6 times per year.
9. Sub-committees are often created allowing certain members to work on specific projects. For example, Law Day events are often planned by a sub-committee, as are Mock Trial Competitions, and Summer Law Institutes
10. Many Committees have found that repeating successful events, or reorienting new members is easier if minutes have been taken at past meetings. Below is a template for setting an agenda and taking minutes that minimizes the effort spent on these tasks.
11. OJEN Committees decide which activities or programs to undertake. Some of OJEN's most innovative ideas were generated by a local Committee considering the needs of its community. Therefore, Committees are also encouraged to develop new justice education initiatives. OJEN staff members will be happy to assist in new endeavours.

For more information on how to establish a new OJEN Committee and for information on any OJEN program, please call Sarah McCoubrey, OJEN Executive Director at 416 947 5274.



GUIDE FOR SUSTAINING AN OJEN COMMITTEE

Sustaining a pool of committed volunteers over a number of years, or as people's job assignments change, is a challenge for any community-based initiative. These ideas are strategies to help with that process. Once the Committee is established, the commitment and leadership of each committee member is crucial. Active participation from members of both the justice and education sectors will provide the community with a diversified view on justice education, and will offer a wide range of expertise and resources.

When a member leaves the Committee for whatever reason, planning for their replacement will ensure that the Committee does not lose expertise and energy. Asking departing Committee members to identify a colleague, or approach a successor to their position to discuss OJEN and the work of the Committee will help to create a continuum of involvement. Personal recommendations from current or past Committee members can help to ensure the level of enthusiasm of any new potential members.

Whenever possible, an overlap of the departing and the new Committee members is recommended. This will provide the new member with the opportunity to learn about the various projects s/he may be

responsible for, as well as provide an occasion to ask any questions of the departing member. Alternatively, having the departing Committee member orient the new member allows the new member to participate immediately upon joining the Committee. OJEN has developed a series of possible topics that may be addressed by a departing members when orienting their replacement (see below).

Managing time commitments is a good way to ensure that Committee members do not leave the Committee because they are unable to manage the workload. Be realistic about the speed with which the Committee expects to complete projects. Recruit others to assist with the actual delivery of the event. Consider rotating the administrative responsibilities of taking minutes or chairing the meetings so that no one person feels over-burdened by these administrative tasks.

Keep in mind that many educators are not used to working collaboratively with judges. They may initially be timid or reluctant to disagree. If the input of teachers, or any other members, is not encouraged, they are likely to stop attending.

Court staff, particularly judicial secretaries are often asked to, or volunteer to, send out meeting reminders, collect confirmations and take minutes. Administrative work was probably not the extent of the justice education involvement that they hoped for. Most people get involved with OJEN because they would like direct contact with students and teachers. A committee is more likely to retain its administrative support by ensuring that that person is appreciated and invited to assist with the delivery aspects of the projects as well.



ORIENTATING YOUR SUCCESSOR ON AN OJEN COMMITTEE

Getting up to speed with all of the past and present projects and activities of an OJEN committee is easier if orientation is provided to the new Committee member. Outgoing committee members could consider passing on the following:

1. Information on OJEN as a provincial justice education organization of which OJEN Committees are a vital part.
2. Information on OJEN Network Partners.
3. Existence of resources and support from OJEN provincial office:
 - a. OJEN website - www.ojen.ca
 - b. OJEN newsletter *Courtrooms & Classrooms*, and other communications
 - c. Program templates and other planning assistance
 - d. Mock hearing scenarios
 - e. Curriculum resources
 - f. Committee support
 - g. Volunteer recognition ideas
 - h. Volunteer thank you letters from OJEN office
 - i. The OJEN Chief Justices' Award
4. How long the Committee has been in existence, and who established it.
5. How long you have been a Committee member, and how you got involved.
6. Information on members of the committee, their affiliations, and the Committee projects they are involved with.
7. Details about how often the committee meets, how Committee communications are sent out, and how programs are determined and implemented.
8. Details about current and planned Committee programs, including program highlights.

9. Ideas for communications with program constituents (such as the judiciary, the bar, educators, and court staff).
10. Obstacles to communicating with program constituents.
11. Key roles you have played in Committee programs.
12. Ideas on specific roles (for example sending out electronic copies of the OJEN newsletter to educators or lawyers).



SUGGESTED AGENDA FOR A FIRST OJEN COMMITTEE MEETING

1. Welcome and introduce everyone and provide time for each attendee to describe their organization and role.
2. Highlight the provincial scope and structure of OJEN, and the role of OJEN Committees.
3. Disseminate OJEN curriculum resources.
4. Provide samples of OJEN programs offered in other regions.
5. Discuss existing justice education activity that could be expanded or made available to more students.
6. Request ideas from educators about students' needs.
7. Discuss and select as initial project to focus efforts on.
8. Agree on meeting schedule, location and administrative roles (email list, minutes, meeting reminders).



GUIDE FOR EASY OJEN COMMITTEE MEETING MANAGEMENT

We have likely all had experience sitting on various types of Committees, both well run and poorly run ones. The following are a few ideas to minimize the administrative work associated with an OJEN Committee.

1. Solicit meeting agenda items a few weeks in advance of the meeting. This reminds people of the meetings and avoids the Chair having to speak to too many items.
2. Prepare a simple agenda and distribute it either before or at the meeting.
3. Start the meeting on time. This is particularly important for teachers who may find evening meetings to be late as it is. A prompt start is important.
4. Coffee, juice or snacks at the end of day can make a meeting much more enjoyable. Contact the OJEN office for ideas about how to cover the cost of snacks.
5. End the meeting on time. Develop the practice of carrying items to the next agenda or addressing them electronically if the agenda is too full.
6. Consider conference call meetings at lunchtime or meetings in schools or other locations to distribute the time and travel requirements.

Minutes Chart

The Minutes Chart Template below is one suggested form of taking minutes that is easy to do both at the meeting and afterwards. Simply insert each agenda item onto the chart before hand. Record only significant discussion points or a summary of the tone of the discussion. Record any decisions or action items in the third column. Referring to the Third column when creating the next agenda will help to ensure that steps have been completed. Circulating the completed Minutes Chart a few days after the meeting, by email, reminds members of items they may have volunteered to do. This Minutes Chart and a sample Agenda are both available as Word templates on the OJEN website.



OJEN Committee Meeting: Minutes

Call to Order (time): Prepared by:	Present:	Date: Location:
Agenda Item	Discussion	Action Items and / or Decision
1. Approval of past minutes		Approved
For Review & Decision		
2.		
3.		
4.		
For Information		
5.		
Other		
6. New Matters		
7. Date of future meeting		