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For Immediate Release: Thursday, Aug. 11, 2011

Survey Report Released on New Media's Impact on the Judiciary

WASHINGTON, D.C. – A survey report released today gives the judicial community in the United States its first year-to-year comparison data to further unravel how social media and broader changes in the media industry are impacting state and local judges and courts.

The results of the 2011 CCPIO New Media and the Courts Survey reveal:

- While more judges report using social media profile sites than last year, they still cautiously approach their use of social media profile sites in their professional lives in order to avoid compromising professional codes of ethics.
- Judges also appear to recognize that the surge of social media use is permeating every aspect of citizens' lives. An increasing number of judges report verbalizing routine juror instructions that include some component about digital media use during trials.
- It also appears that the institutional use of social media profile sites is gaining acceptance. The survey shows a 7.6 percent increase in the number of respondents who agree that courts as institutions can maintain a social media profile site without compromising ethics.
- In addition, there was a concurrent 5.1 percent increase of those who report working at a court that maintains such a site.

The survey was conducted by the Conference of Court Public Information Officers, an organization of more than 100 communications professionals working in state and federal courts in the United States and worldwide. Partners in the project include the National Center for State Courts in Williamsburg, Va., the nation's leading center for research assistance to the country's state court systems, and the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University.

The survey findings are part of a national collaborative research project now entering its third year, which for the first time measured the impact of new media on the courts, and identified the cautious approach courts have taken toward new media out of concern for possible adverse effects on professional ethics and court proceedings while identifying the opportunities these new communication tools afford the judicial system to enhance public understanding of the courts.

The complete project report, "2011 CCPIO New Media Survey, New Media and the Courts: The Current Status and A Look at the Future" is available on the CCPIO website at www.ccpio.org.

More than 15,000 individuals in the court community were invited to participate in the electronically distributed survey. Of the 713 individuals who completed the survey, 238, or 33.4 percent were judges, magistrates or other hearing officers, up 2 percent from the 2010 survey. The majority of the respondents were court system staff.

“The research continues to clearly show that judges and courts recognize the importance of understanding new media and the value in communicating in new ways to build public trust and confidence in the judicial branch,” said Thomas Hodson Director of the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University. “The slow methodical steps courts are taking represent a respect for the unique challenges and opportunities presented through social media technologies.”

Survey results explore use rates by court personnel and courts as institutions of social media profile sites like Facebook, microblogging services like Twitter and visual media sharing sites like YouTube.

Some of the hesitancy by courts to embrace social media may be explained by differences between the court and social media cultures:

- New media are decentralized and multidirectional, while courts are institutional and largely unidirectional.
- New media are personal and intimate, while courts are separate, even cloistered, and by definition independent.
- New media are multimedia, incorporating video and still images, audio and text, while courts are highly textual.