COURT COMMUNICATIONS: NOT OPTIONAL
PRESENTED BY MEMBERS OF FLORIDA COURT PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICERS (FCPIO) ORGANIZATION

MODERATOR:
Nick Sudzina, FCPIO Immediate-Past President and Trial Court Administrator, Tenth Judicial Circuit

PANELISTS:
• Eunice Sigler, FCPIO President and Director of the Office of Government Liaison and Public Relations, Eleventh Judicial Circuit
• Gay Inskeep, FCPIO Member and Trial Court Administrator, Sixth Judicial Circuit
• Tricia Knox, FCPIO Member and Senior Court Consultant, Office of the State Courts Administrator
The FCPIO (Florida Court Public Information Officers) organization is a tax-exempt, educational nonprofit corporation, incorporated in 2007.

Goal: to promote the sharing and development of best practices and highest standards of professionalism among Florida’s Court Public Information Officers (PIO’s).

FCPIO membership: Both full-time dedicated PIO’s as well as court employees who perform PIO functions as part of another position.

Early history: In 2002, Florida Supreme Court Chief Justice Charles Wells directed all Florida state courts to appoint a PIO, giving formal recognition to the importance of professional court communications with the public and the media.

PIO’s appointed statewide from 2003 to present.

Subsequent Chief Justices continued to recognize the importance of court PIO’s, and fully supported the formal incorporation of the FCPIO organization in 2007.
• Late 2015: under the leadership of Chief Justice Jorge Labarga, the Florida Supreme Court developed a Court Communication Plan with input from judges and staff from all Florida State Courts.

• The Communication Plan was adopted by the Florida Supreme Court and enacted in January, 2016, formalizing methods for improved communications between the courts and the media and public, as well as between the courts and their legislative and justice partners.

• In March, 2016, Chief Justice Labarga formally charged the FCPIO organization with developing implementation guidelines for the Communication Plan, to be used by all Florida state courts.

• In progress: the FCPIO established committees to focus on specific areas of the plan - Social Media, Web Content, and Speaking with One Voice Committees. The Planning Committee focuses on future educational programming for the organization, based on the Plan.

• Goal: the FCPIO will train its members and provide all state courts with written implementation guidelines for their consideration as they enact improved court communications under the Plan.

• Reporting: the Chief Judges of every state court will report to Chief Justice Labarga once a year on their advances in court communications under the Plan.
FLORIDA'S COMMUNICATION PLAN

Why COMMUNICATION PLANNING is necessary –

21st Century Communication - Rapid changes in communications and technology – social media, websites, improving education outreach, finding new ways to promote the courts.

Consistent Communication – Need statewide cohesion in efforts: unifying messages, communication templates, social media guidelines, educational programs, website content.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ENHANCING PUBLIC TRUST AND CONFIDENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building Relationships:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Media Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Government Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Public Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding Public Information and Education &amp; Outreach Efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Courts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making Courts Understandable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involving the Public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training Judges &amp; Employees in Media Relations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPEAKING WITH ONE VOICE: USING KEY COURT MESSAGES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using KEY Court Messages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting a Unified Message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivering Information Consistently</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPROVING COMMUNICATION METHODS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding and Using New Technologies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Social Media Platforms, web apps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Monitoring Technology Trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Creating Consistent Web Content on Court Websites</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRENGTHENING INTERNAL COMMUNICATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improving Internal Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing Employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding Roles &amp; Responsibilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Key Court Messages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Our Message:</th>
<th>Desired Response from Audience:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Judges and court personnel | ✓ Everyone is valuable.  
 ✓ Everyone works to achieve the mission and vision of the judicial branch.  
 ✓ Everyone’s unique role impacts the court system. | ✓ Speak enthusiastically and with pride about the quality and impact of their work, and court initiatives.  
 ✓ Understand the mission and vision of the judicial branch.  
 ✓ Support, protect and defend the judicial branch. |
| Public | ✓ The judicial branch is transparent, responsible and accountable.  
 ✓ The judicial branch is fair and impartial.  
 ✓ The judicial branch is committed to our mission and vision. | ✓ Speak knowledgeably and favorably about the judicial branch.  
 ✓ Respect for the judicial branch.  
 ✓ Understand the role of the judicial branch as a co-equal branch of government.  
 ✓ Understand the citizens’ role in electing and retaining judges.  
 ✓ Understand the important function the judicial branch provides the citizens of Florida. |
| Court Users (non-attorney), i.e. litigants/ parties to a lawsuit, defendants, victims, witnesses, jurors, pro se filers | ✓ The judicial branch is fair and impartial.  
 ✓ The judicial branch is committed to ensuring court procedures are understandable.  
 ✓ Everyone is treated with dignity and respect.  
 ✓ Everyone has an opportunity to be heard. | ✓ Speak favorably about the judicial process and treatment received by judges and court personnel regardless of case outcome.  
 ✓ Respect the decisions of the judiciary.  
 ✓ Understand decisions and their future responsibilities.  
 ✓ Comply with court orders.  
 ✓ Engage in future law-abiding behavior. |

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*What a great exchange of ideas. We need to do this more often.* – Court administration staff
IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

• Finding a Home – Plan managed by the Florida Supreme Court Public Information Office.

• Enlisting Support of FCPIO Members to support local efforts and develop statewide communication initiatives.

• Four Year Implementation Schedule - Local flexibility depending on resources.

• Building Support from the Top - The Chief Justice as the CHEERLEADER, promoting the Plan and keeping chief judges informed.

• Yearly Summary - To the Chief Justice (Judicial Management Council and Chief Judges meetings).

• Training – Engage and train PIOs and other court personnel from the beginning.

NCSC Court Community Communication

Annual FCPIO Conference
Charges to FCPIO members from Chief Justice Labarga:

1. Work with your staff in the years ahead to **recognize opportunities** to deliver positive messages **promoting your court** and the important work it does. We must tell people the good things we do.

2. Remember the importance of the plan’s emphasis on speaking with one voice by **incorporating the Plan’s key court messages in your official court communications.** There must be consistency in our message to the public.

3. **Strive to find new and creative solutions** that allow your court to communicate more clearly and meaningfully with all of your audiences. The technology we use today may be replaced by something even better in the future, so keep your eyes open for it.
Charges to FCPIO members from Chief Justice Labarga:

4. **Adopt new technologies and improved methods** that enhance public access to court information and improve your ability to successfully communicate with the people we serve. Courts must adapt to the 21st Century’s methods of communicating.

5. Work to **improve your internal communication** to increase the flow of information and improve the work environment in your court. Make sure your own staff knows what your goals are as a court.

6. **Become the communications leader and a champion for improving communications** efforts in your court. The courts need people who will lead our new communications effort and understand what a truly great opportunity it is.

7. In the years ahead, continue to build a network of information professionals like FCPIO that support each other and work together to improve all aspects of court communication. **We must work as a team.**
FCPIO ESTABLISHED FOUR COMMITTEES TO MOVE THE PLAN FORWARD

1. Social Media research and policy development
2. Minimum Web Content identification
3. Communication Template development
4. FCPIO Conference and training committee
MEDIA RELATIONS
GAWKER CASE

RIGHT NOW

JURY NOW DELIBERATING HULK HOGAN LAWSUIT
WRESTLER SUING GAWKER.COM OVER SEX TAPE
HANDLING A HIGH PROFILE CASE

COURTS MUST ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF THE MEDIA, TRIAL PARTICIPANTS & PUBLIC
PRESERVING THE COURTS’ CORE PRINCIPLES

- Protecting the Rights of the Accused
- Maintaining an Open & Transparent Process
- Ensuring the Integrity of the Trial / Preventing a Mistrial
Establish Media Committee
Issue Credentials
Assign Media/Public Seating
Need for Overflow Courtroom
Video and Still Distribution
Rules Regarding Laptops/Cell Phones
Interviews - Media Staging Areas
Media Parking
WiFi
Websites for Motions, Orders, & Evidence
Consideration of Victim(s), Witnesses, and Family Members
JURY CONSIDERATIONS

- Safety
- Sequestration
- Juror Privacy
- Post-Verdict Letters to the Jury
- Post-Verdict Follow-up
- Cameras
- Sketch Artist
- License Plates
- Talkative Jurors
- Facebook "Friends"
- Social Media Sites

Pinellas County
Jurors NOT Welcome!!!
POST-TRIAL

- High Demand for Interviews
- Dealing with Unfavorable Media Coverage
- Insults & Threats via Social Media
NEWS V. ENTERTAINMENT

High-Profile Trials in the Age of Social Media and 24/7 News

Understanding the Difference

• Journalistic Standards
• Budget for Interview Exclusives
• Competitors (But with a mutually beneficial relationship)
BUILDING MEDIA RELATIONS
BUILDING MEDIA RELATIONS

✓ Ask the journalist what deadline they are working under, and **make efforts to meet reasonable deadlines**.

✓ **Return calls promptly.** If you can’t provide an answer or the information requested right away, write or call them back and give them a realistic estimate of when the information can be provided.

✓ **Avoid “no comment.”** “No comment” always gives the appearance of being evasive or hiding something – an impression no government entity should ever give. There are better ways to phrase this response.

✓ In instances when judicial ethics rules prohibit responding to certain questions, rather than say “no comment,” say “**I can’t respond to that question and here’s why [and explain the ethical restriction].**”
BUILDING MEDIA RELATIONS

✓ **Be helpful.** If you can take a moment to explain legal processes, put the reporter in touch with another contact in the courts who could help with their story, and in general go the extra mile to be helpful, this will result in a better and more accurate story. In addition, most reporters will appreciate and remember this. Journalists who were treated well will respond in kind in their treatment of the courts on difficult issues.

✓ Remember that journalists are just doing their jobs – **avoid taking difficult questions personally.** Good journalism often involves difficult questions. (Watergate, Pentagon Papers, Snowden, Panama Papers)

✓ An approach that always works: **Follow the Golden Rule.**