

THE STATE OF IDAHO
SUPREME COURT



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NEWS RELEASE

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IDAHO SUPREME COURT RECEIVES NATIONAL HONOR FOR SERVICE TO RURAL AREAS

(Boise) – The Idaho Supreme Court has been selected by the Justice Management Institute (JMI) as the recipient of the 2009 award for justice system innovation and improvement.

The JMI award recognizes the Idaho Supreme Court for its implementation of several significant innovative programs that enhance access to courts and improve the delivery of court services as well as its leadership in improving justice in rural areas.

Justice Management Institute President Dr. Barry Mahoney noted that Idaho is a geographically large state, with few large population centers. “In this predominantly rural environment delivering high quality judicial services is inevitably challenging,” he said. “The Idaho Supreme Court has led the way in meeting this challenge in Idaho, and in doing so has provided a model—or set of models—for state court systems throughout the nation.”

Idaho Supreme Court Chief Justice Daniel Eismann accepted the award on behalf of the Court and expressed his gratitude to Mahoney for this recognition. “We have long been committed to expanding court service resources to the rural areas of the state. We recognize we have a large and diverse state with varying needs and concerns. ‘One-size-fits-all’ simply will not work in Idaho. We want all citizens of Idaho to have access to justice and court services, including innovative solutions to difficult societal problems.”

Mahoney identified five key areas in which the Idaho Supreme Court has exercised leadership in introducing effective court programs that reach residents in rural areas of Idaho:

1. **Assistance for self-represented litigants:** Idaho pioneered the development of court assistance offices to provide direct assistance to Idahoans who need help in understanding how to seek resolution of their legal disputes. During 2008, over 38,000 persons obtained help directly from court assistance offices at county courthouses throughout Idaho.
2. **Technological innovation:** Idaho courts have undertaken a ground-breaking project to enhance access to the courts through effective use of technology by partnering with Idaho Legal Aid Services to develop interactive on-line forms and instructions. The forms are available to citizens involved in litigation related to divorce, child custody, and child support issues—areas in which

there is a high degree of self-representation. To date, more than 16,000 persons have used the on-line guided interviews and forms needed for court proceedings.

3. **Children and families:** The Idaho courts have initiated an array of innovative programs aimed at protecting children and families including domestic violence courts, parent education classes and mediation programs.
4. **Problem-solving courts:** Idaho has developed a number of problem-solving courts, with strikingly effective results. Idaho was one of the first states to make drug courts, DUI courts, and mental health courts function successfully in rural environments where it is difficult to access treatment services. Idaho has 54 drug and mental health courts that supervised nearly 2,000 offenders in 2008. Evaluations of ten of these programs reveal that they have achieved significant reductions in recidivism. They are cost-effective and in many cases they enable individuals to become productive and responsible members of society.
5. **Overcoming language barriers:** As in many predominantly rural states, courts in Idaho often have litigants and witnesses before them who speak little or no English. The Idaho Supreme Court has established a training and certification program for persons who are interested in providing court interpreter services. The Administrative Office of the Courts also works with the National Consortium on Court Interpreter Services in developing effective ways of ensuring that language barriers do not become insuperable obstacles to providing high quality justice.

Mahoney singled out Idaho as being at the forefront of states that have recognized problems that affect the public in rural areas in each of these areas. "The innovations have broadened access to justice for citizens throughout the state," he said.

The Justice Management Institute is a non-profit organization, based in Denver, Colorado, that is dedicated to improving justice system operations in the U.S. and abroad. JMI's Board of Directors consists of individuals who have had extensive experience in justice system operations and innovation as judges, court managers, and consultants.

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