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New York Civic Health Index 2011

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Despite Tough Economic Year, NY Civic Health Stable

Participation in Civic Responsibilities and Duties Low like Volunteering and Voting Trail Nation **New Yorkers Highly Social and Informed; Engagement in Group Meetings and Community Participation Lacking**

Loudonville, NY – During this difficult economic period, New York residents score at or above national rates on social connectedness and access to local information. Using recent data from the Siena College Research Institute (SRI), they trust people and local institutions with some trepidation while still consistent with national trends. However, New Yorkers are somewhat less likely than the average American to volunteer, give to charity or participate in the duties of citizenship including voting or attending community meetings or events, according to the 2011 New York State Civic Health Index released today.

The Civic Health Index was produced by SRI and the Siena Office of Academic Community Engagement in partnership with the State Commission on National and Community Service: New Yorkers Volunteer and the National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC). NCoC has produced national and state civic health assessments since 2006. The report was presented today at Siena College.

Civic health is a measure of the participation and engagement in communities and society. Healthy communities will benefit, and citizens in those communities will display social connectedness, trust in people and institutions, responsibility to address social needs, interest in current events, and participation in civic duties.

“Statewide Civic Health is tough to measure. Based on multiple questions, we provide a score for New York on Social, Trust, Responsibility, Information and Duty. With scores between 58 and 67 percent of the possible, New Yorkers have meaningful social interactions, strong levels of trust in their community and keep themselves well informed. But lower rates of volunteering, charitable giving and especially attendance at community meetings result in lower measures of Responsibility and Duty for New York. Moving the needle will require not only awareness and promotion, but also, making Civic Health part of what New Yorkers do and our leaders endorse,” according to SRI’s Director, Dr. Don Levy.

“Many New Yorkers do volunteer to help address the significant need they see in their communities and generously offer assistance to neighbors. Many that would like to help don’t know where to or how to despite their desire to do more. Still, eighty-percent believe volunteering has a substantial impact on the lives of those that need assistance. The capacity for more volunteers is there ready to be tapped,” Levy adds.

“Trust, connectivity, and collective effort are critical to addressing pressing social problems and building communities that thrive socially, politically and economically,” says Kristi Tate, Director of Community Strategies at NCoC. “The findings of the New York Civic Health Index help us better understand the areas where New York communities are thriving and where we can all work together to develop new strategies to advance civic vitality.”

The New York Civic Health Index is available online at the NCoC website: www.ncoc.net/NYCHI2011. The report and more information will also be available on the New Yorkers Volunteer website: www.newyorkersvolunteer.org.