



HIRI's Community Collaboration Projects

Innovation and change of a scope that will significantly affect communities always involves organizations and people working together, whether in an organized or informal way. Strategies for community collaboration are often a part of systems change, through group activities called "partnerships" or "collaborations." These approaches can help build community buy-in and organize the work of change. Funders often require them; nonprofits may see them as useful solutions to their problems of declining resources and increasing complexity, and communities frequently demand them as evidence that key stakeholders are being brought to the table.

Since community collaborations are complex human enterprises, behavioral sciences can contribute much to their creation, operation and evaluation. Not all collaborations are successful, and often the reasons are squarely in the psychological domain. For many years, the nonprofit Human Interaction Research Institute (HIRI) has conducted research, developed knowledge resources, and provided technical assistance about community collaborations from this psychological point of view.

HIRI's research activities include a pioneering study of multicultural coalitions throughout California; and a six-year national evaluation of two Federal grant programs, in which communities created community collaborations to help implement innovative mental health service or youth violence prevention programs. HIRI also studied collaborations that were part of a 19-site youth violence prevention grant program of the John S. & James L. Knight Foundation; and explored a large national sample of partnerships in the arts, also for Knight Foundation. The Institute has examined community partnerships in corrections; results from this work were presented at a conference sponsored by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation in July 2005.

HIRI is collaborating with Pennsylvania State University and Iowa State University on an 11-year, \$30-million controlled research study of a strategy for promoting implementation of evidence-based interventions for youth development and youth problem-solving, using a community partnership model. Agricultural extension agencies are a key partner in this approach. Work is now underway expanding the model into other states.

In its ongoing philanthropy work, HIRI has studied collaboration strategies for smaller foundations as part of efforts to increase the impact of philanthropy on community change. Results from this work, sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, were published in 2004.

In Fall 2003, Springer Publishing Company released HIRI's book, *Evaluating Community Collaborations*, the first major publication on this topic. Other HIRI publications on this subject include *Casebook on Youth Violence Prevention Projects - Four Key Elements for Success*, which provides an intensive examination of eight youth violence prevention programs implemented in schools, using a community collaboration model; and a 2011 special issue of the *American Journal of Community Psychology* (edited by Thomas E. Backer and Nancy G. Guerra), focused on mobilizing communities to implement evidence-based practices in youth violence prevention.