



Harwood Public Broadcaster Reader

Introduction:

The Harwood Public Broadcaster Reader is a collection of 10 blogs to help you think about deepening your [local relevance while you build the civic health of the community](#). Written by Rich Harwood and posted to www.harwoodonline.org, these 10 pieces touch on issues such as turning outward toward your community, the power and potential of public broadcasters, and questions for all public innovators.

The essays and the list of questions that follow can help you use to go deeper and explore how these ideas apply to your work and station. Sharing these with your staff and others in the community is a great way to talk about your reflexes and practices in your work. How do different people in the station or community see these challenges? You may be surprised by just how many people in your station share your view of what public broadcasting can be.

The Harwood Public Broadcaster Reader includes the following blogs:

Turn Outward in Tough Times

The Tyranny of Techniques and Process

How Public Broadcasting can Better Serve the Public Good – and You Too

Why Do We Need Public Innovators

Do You Have a Deserving Family?

The Authenticity Campaign

Who Can Hear Us?

Finding the Sweet Spot

Get the Stimulus Package Right: Fund Community-Ready Projects

10 Questions for Public Innovators

You can read more of Rich's blogs at www.harwoodonline.org. You can download additional copies of the Harwood Public Broadcaster Reader in the resources section of the [Stations Turning Outward](#) page. You can also order hard copies by contacting Aaron Leavy at The Harwood Institute (aleavy@theharwoodinstitute.org).



Turn Outward in Tough Times

Nov 10, 2008 by Rich Harwood

Last week I was in San Diego with public broadcasters who were asked what they would do if they had to cut their budgets by 15-40%. Unfortunately, such a question is no longer academic for many groups and organizations. Hard times are here, and notwithstanding promises of "change," a quick economic rebound isn't likely. But so many times when we face crises and choices, our instinct is to look inward for answers. My advice: turn outward first.

There's a great deal of talk among foundations, at national conferences, and in many publications about the tough times we face. For many groups, money is tight. I suspect very few groups will be immune from the current economic downturn. Budgets are being slashed, staffs cut, programs gutted.

Experience tells me that when most of us feel under intense pressure, we turn to some trusted tools. Many organizations undertake new strategic planning, rebrand themselves, and figure out ways to generate more membership dues while trimming services. In taking such steps the impulse is to look within the organization to save ourselves, our work, and reassemble our efforts.

Recently, I spent the day with some organizational leaders facing their own challenge of shrinking resources. Over a three hour period the conversation was focused entirely inward. When I got up to speak I made the following observation: while their mission is to serve communities, barely anyone had talked about their relationship to community. Instead, the conversation focused on how to incrementally cut budgets, or conversely how to slash operations.

Indeed, the conversations revolved around how the organization could save **itself**. The essence of holding a **public** mission was lost in the desire to survive. Some people tell me that trying to maintain their public mission at this time is difficult. It is not that they want to do away with it, but they cannot see how to keep it robust.

My response is simple and straightforward. It is in these times that you must turn outward toward your community. The task is not to engage in marketing research, though that might be helpful, but to gain clarity on the following points:

- What are the real needs and aspirations of people in your community -- and how do they relate to your organization's mission;
- What are the essential priorities for your work -- so that your efforts are relevant and significant within the community;
- What does impact mean -- so that you are focused only on those areas where you are making a genuine contribution;
- What assets do you have to put up against this work -- and what other assets exist somewhere in the community?



Without having clear answers to such questions, how could we possibly know where to focus and what shape our organizations should take? How could we know what to cut, where to refocus, which staff we most need? How could we do yet another strategic planning exercise; what inputs would we use? Would rebranding ourselves, again, matter?

When each of us steps forward to engage in the work we do, we make a basic (usually implicit) choice about the direction we face. Most of the time, we face inward toward ourselves, our colleagues, our organizations. I'm suggesting we assume a different posture, one that has us turn outward toward our communities. By looking outward we discover what we need to know to make the tough choices we face, and find paths for change.

We are coming off an election in which hope and change were the watchwords. Part of that change will come from the work that you and many others are doing to make a difference in our society. Even with all the excitement about change, I know this period of economic downturn will be hard for many of you, and I hope that you find the resources, insights, and colleagues you need to move ahead in your work and efforts. You're fighting the good fight: now, let's turn outward.

Ask Yourself:

- 1. Look at the four questions posed in this blog. How would you answer the questions posed above?**
- 2. If you aren't sure about how to answer the questions, what could you do to find out what you need to know?**



The Tyranny of Techniques and Process

Feb 26, 2008 By Rich Harwood

The messages of hope and change that dominate our political discussions these days have made many people giddy about the possibilities for public life and politics. But, if we do not wish to slip back into business as usual, we must beware of our own inclinations and proclivities to rely on techniques and process as a substitute for making hope real. Instead, our task now is to reorient ourselves outward, toward the people and communities we serve, or risk squandering the opportunity before us.

In our rush to re-engage people and marshal civic resources, we can fall prey to our own good intentions. Good intentions aren't enough, and alone won't get us where we want to go. In our use of techniques and process, we can crowd out the very judgments we must make to create conditions for hope and change. We can assume a false sense of progress and security, and sidestep the very battles we must fight to produce change.

There's so much to say here, but let me offer a handful of examples of where we turn to technique and process and how they can take us down the wrong path:

- We can resort to yet another strategic planning process, deftly moving programmatic boxes around, and yet still not focus on the essence of community challenges and what it takes to address them.
- We can actively engage people in the community and still never change how our own organization takes in the new knowledge, learns from it, and applies it to daily work.
- We can create elaborate processes that still overlook the poor, those who haven't had a voice, or those in neighborhoods we do not know. Our own unexamined assumptions and fears can prevent us from changing how we fundamentally do things.
- We can efficiently pull down best practices from web sites and reports, pursuing a "plug and play" strategy, but never fully examine if those practices really fit our context.
- We can go through yet another branding process in our organization and still not answer the fundamental question: What is our role in the community and what impact do we seek?

My own sense is that many people make a beeline to techniques and processes simply as a way to be "doing something." Others use techniques and process to combat their own internal fears about ambiguity and the unknown, thus providing a tidy step-by-step recipe for action. Still others may be looking for the silver bullet, the quick way to solve the problem at-hand and move on.

Many of us operate with the implicit assumption that so long as we are moving forward, so long as we can say something is happening, so long as we are moving down our task list, we can claim that progress is being made. But is it? The danger is that we become "activity happy, and yet action deprived."



Tools, techniques and to-do lists may assuage our own doubts, may give us a sense of progress, but a completed check list or some such other step won't necessarily lead to change. I worry that our impulse to grab a new technique or process is a way to insulate ourselves from facing difficult truths. We can forget that not every child has access to a good education; that many people are without healthcare; that even as we become a more diverse society, we are turning inward - away from one another. Each of our communities faces its own difficult truths, and we all struggle with how to adequately and honestly address them.

The problem with the tyranny of techniques and process is that it can be a stand-in for our own need to step up and make judgments on how best to make a difference. It robs us of the possibilities for reshaping public life and politics and discarding business as usual. For sure, I believe there is a role for techniques and process, as tools to help us implement our larger ideas and aspirations in public life. But this requires that we have clarity about our intentions and purpose, that our actions create genuine opportunities to make hope real.

So while new techniques, processes and tools have a place, we need something more. We need to reorient ourselves. We need to turn outward to the very people and communities we serve. It's time: please, join me in the fight against the tyranny of techniques and process.

Ask Yourself:

- 1. How have you felt pressure to pack your day with activities and long to-do lists, only to wonder if they're going to add up to impact?**
- 2. How could you make choices that would create action rather than activity? What would that look like?**



How Public Broadcasting can Better Serve The Public Good - and you too

Dec 4, 2007 By Rich Harwood

I want to give you an update on our collaboration with the [Corporation for Public Broadcasting](#), which is producing some really promising results for public broadcasters seeking to improve their community's civic health through their work and deepen their own local significance. The good news: this work holds important insights for any potential boundary spanning organization in any community. Here's why.

Last week my colleagues and I met in Las Vegas with the 12 public television and radio stations we've been innovating with since the beginning of the year. It was our third workspace with these stations, and our work will extend through 2008. We've been working with CEOs, station managers, producers, community engagement directors, and others to apply Harwood ideas, frameworks, and tools to their own context. As you know, no one size fits all!

One of the most exciting parts of the Vegas session was when each station took time to draw a picture of the role they hope to be playing in their community in two years. The pictures, done on large sheets of newsprint, were simply amazing (we hope to put them up on our website soon) and helped to crystallize and name the progress each station has made up till now and their aspirations moving forward. Here are some of the key themes that emerged, which represent both on and off-air actions:

- Serve as a “mirror” to people in the community so that people can “see themselves” and “see their shared realities.”
- Become a “central connector” and “weaver” of groups and activities in the community so that people and organizations can re-connect and re-engage.
- Create “safe space” (on and off air) so that the community itself can define local challenges and together work through issues and tensions.
- Bust “ingrained narratives” now plaguing the community, which are rooted in the past, and which hold the community back.
- Help “fill in the holes” of people’s understanding about the community, and to see and hear other people they don’t ordinarily come into contact with.
- Literally “tear down the wall” - actual parts of the station’s building - that stand in-between the station and the community.
- Create “new pathways” for people to step into the public square to discuss contentious issues like immigration.
- Use music to engage people’s imagination and help forge new connections.



What's clearly emerging from this work is that public broadcasters can become true boundary spanning organizations. So, too, can other organizations in communities, places such as community colleges, United Ways, community and private foundations, volunteer centers and service-learning groups, public education funds, public libraries, and lots of others.

There are some key questions we've been focusing on in our innovating with public broadcasting, which are relevant to all potential boundary spanning groups. These include:

1. What space do public broadcasters wish to occupy in the community - are they simply broadcasters or something more?
2. What does it mean for public broadcasters to do their work in such a way that it actually strengthens and builds the civic health of our community - and how should one even think about how to define civic health and what are the levers for change?
3. How can public broadcasters come to "know" their community in such a way that their work, on and off air, is deeply rooted in the reality of the community - and what would be the definition of "public knowledge"?
4. How can public broadcasters create new pathways for people to re-connect and re-engage in community life - pathways that are meaningful to people and which lead to other possibilities?
5. What would it mean for public broadcasters to track and measure impact - with individual staff members, as an organization, and within a community - so they can figure out if they are moving the needle and making a difference?
6. How should public broadcasters think about partnerships and collaborations - so that they help make a difference, and not just create more activity?
7. How can public broadcasting stations develop the internal organizational culture to support this kind of work?
8. Of course, there are many, many other questions and challenges to this work. But I wanted to give you a quick update on it.

And as you may also already know, we're talking with other groups similar to public broadcasting about forging new strategic alliances so that our ideas, frameworks, and tools can be embedded, applied, and disseminated. *Let us know if you want to be part of that.*

Meantime, you may want to check out our upcoming [Public Innovators Labs](#) (Austin, Baltimore, and soon Vegas!), where you can learn about and take home some of these ideas and approaches.

Finally, it is efforts like those of the public broadcasters that keep re-invigorating my own sense of possibility and hope that we can create change and authentic hope in our communities.

Ask Yourself:

1. **Pick two or three of the questions above and take a second to answer them.**



Why Do We Need Public Innovators?

Oct 16, 2007 By Rich Harwood

Many people have written about the talent deficit in the non-profit and civic sector. Today, I want to focus on one big part of it. While the talent deficit is very real, maybe the most pressing facet of it is our lack of [public innovators](#). These civic change agents are essential to helping organizations and communities create change and authentic hope. But we need many more public innovators if we are to make the progress we seek.

Consider the following challenges and think about the kind of person it will take to create meaningful progress:

- Recently, my colleague John Creighton and I completed a report for the [Kettering Foundation](#) which found that many organizations believe they cannot undertake civic engagement and deliberation efforts because they lack the staff capacity and know-how to design, implement and follow-up such efforts. The work is hard to do and do well.
- In their new book, [Come On, People](#), Bill Cosby and Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint (a leading psychiatrist at Harvard University) argue that to bring about hopeful change in people's lives and create the necessary daily support systems, we must create more locally-generated efforts that involve, engage, and tap into local people's voices, talents and gifts. Anyone who has attempted such work knows how difficult it can be.
- The other day a colleague told me that while his group has the skills and core competencies to implement quick, one-off projects in communities, the local leadership does not exist to spark deep and lasting change within communities. But how can they help develop that leadership?
- Another friend who leads a national organization with hundreds of local affiliates told me recently that one of their most pressing challenges is developing and supporting the talent within communities to initiate and lead meaningful change efforts, especially those that occur long periods of over time.

Each of these challenges requires more than just recruiting more people who can run organizations, make programs work, and manage the books. They demand that we find and cultivate and support a particular kind of civic change agent, one who can help to bring about a certain kind of change. I call these change agents, "[public innovators](#)." Less heralded than social entrepreneurs, public innovators form the backbone of our communities. And our own research suggests that communities need a critical mass of these innovators to help create the conditions necessary for change in our society.

But what do public innovators do? Based on our years of research and on-the-ground experiences, public innovators must know how to gain a deep understanding of the rhythms and conditions of their communities so that they can understand the context within which they're working. Public innovators must also know how much capacity their community has for action and design initiatives that reflect that knowledge. They must know how to authentically engage people so the community can generate the knowledge, public will, and civic energy to move forward. They must understand that change emerges over time and they must cultivate pockets of change in ways that promising ideas and innovation do not get choked off or dissipate. Public innovators must know how to open up new spaces for discussion, innovation, and learning so that people can get things done – not just talk.



Meanwhile, public innovators must be “ruthlessly strategic;” they must know that they cannot afford to become “activity happy” and lose their focus, when fundamental choices must be made to bring about lasting impact.

Many organizations claim to develop leaders who are able to do these and other things. Oftentimes they create ways for local leaders to connect with one another (“meet and greets”) or provide training programs that teach a specific skill or a process for dealing with conflict. But learning a new process or skill is not the same as learning a new sensibility about one’s work or how to be “ruthlessly strategic.” So, while many of leadership training efforts have value, they do not cultivate and support public innovators and fall short in helping us meet the kinds of challenges described in *Come On, People*, or those described by my friends and colleagues.

To address these problems and challenges [we must cultivate more public innovators](#).

Ask Yourself:

- 1. How can you develop public innovators within your station?**
- 2. How might your work in public broadcasting help people in the community recognize themselves as public innovators, or connect these people to each other?**



Do You Have a "Deserving" Family?

Oct 30, 2007 By Rich Harwood

This was my reaction when listening to an ad on WFLR 96.7 FM a Christian-contemporary station while driving from Detroit to Battle Creek. The ad began simply enough, asking listeners to help support families unable to meet their winter heating bills. It was actually heart-warming. But then the ad abruptly changed.

It went on to tell listeners about WFLR's holiday-season partnership with Aspen Heating and Cooling, and that each listener was now invited to visit the station's web site (myflr.org) to nominate "one deserving family" who would become eligible to win a new furnace from the good folks at Aspen. The web site says, "Nominations are being accepted until November 7, with the winning family announced on November 14."

Twice more I heard this ad while in Michigan. And with each subsequent airing, my disbelief grew.

- Since when do we anonymously "nominate" poor neighbors to receive such care? Is this some new kind of charitable approach, where if a well-to-do person deems you needy enough, you can receive help? If not, what then? Are you to stay at home shivering in despair?
- What about the next time the station runs this competition: will they choose to pick three "needy finalists," who will then go on-air to make their case so the rest of us can pick the winner? Is this the new kind of citizen-driven philanthropy everyone seems to be talking about?
- Exactly what does the phrase "one deserving family" mean? As a child, if your family doesn't get the new furnace, is your family somehow un-deserving? What happens this winter when your family can't afford to heat your home?
- Then there's the obvious question about once people nominate a family, and the "deserving family" wins the new furnace, do we just move on to the next issue? Does one's limited participation in the station contest fulfill their need to look beyond themselves and be responsible for one another?

I can hear some of my colleagues now: Rich, you don't understand, we must make use of all available means to engage people in society's common concerns. Further, they say, the old ways of making people feel guilty, or asking them to sacrifice for others, or simply appealing to the angels of their better nature no longer work in our fast-paced, consumer-oriented society. Our job now is to adapt the tools of advertising, public relations, and gimmicks-of-all-kinds to engage people. We must entertain and be entertaining. Indeed, by "voting" for your favorite needy-family we can each become an active participant in society - after all, isn't that what American Idol has taught us?

For as long as I can remember, there have always been raffles and other efforts to support people in need by groups such as Rotary Clubs, Knights of Columbus and others. But have our marketing, public relations, and other strategies to capture people's attention run so completely afoul that we've lost sight of what is required to make society work? When do our attempts to "game" public life blur our very ability to keep sight of the essence of what brings each of us to our work?

I know that simply raising our voices and imploring people to care will not bring about the progress we seek. There is already too much noise and fatigue and isolation in society; attempts to push and cajole people only cause them to retreat further from public life. But is the solution to merely give in to those who say that people



won't care, or that people can't connect their self-interests with the interests of others, or that people merely want to be left alone? I believe such arguments miss the undercurrents of what's happening in our society.

People do care. People want to be part of something larger than themselves. People know that we must believe in something deeper than simply unfettered consumerism. Trust and hope and, yes, even love, do matter (as does being ruthlessly strategic in our change efforts!). We must not cede the public square to those who tell us that the only way to engage people is to mimic what happens in a shopping mall.

We can't control what everyone else does. But we can direct our own efforts and help to create conditions in our communities that root out such cheap gimmicks like holding raffles for "one deserving family." I know lots of deserving families.

Ask Yourself:

- 1. Is there a difference between raising the profile of an issue and engaging people around the issue?**

- 2. How does this promotion fit with The 3A's of Public Life?**



The Authenticity Campaign

Aug 21, 2007 By Rich Harwood

Karl Rove this weekend was on FOX News Sunday talking presidential politics and he got at least one thing right. What people really care about in a candidate, he said, is whether they reflect a sense of "authenticity and reality." True enough, but to make that hope real will take more than empty rhetoric and posturing.

On Sunday I was on a nationally-syndicated public radio program, [To the Best of Our Knowledge](#), which focused on the role of authenticity in food, the arts, and politics. When first called about the program earlier in the week, I was told that some people they've talked with believe that authenticity is too hard to discern nowadays; that it no longer holds real meaning.

Many people do seek to "manufacture" authenticity and play games with it. We are bombarded with messages, ads, products - yes, candidates, too! - which are so pre-packaged it's hard to tell sometimes what is real and what isn't. But that's the point, isn't it?

For years now, people have been saying that they do not believe their reality is reflected in public life and politics; they feel that too many politicians, news media, local leaders, among others, actually distort their reality for their own personal or political gain.

But the difference between candidates who are authentic versus those who play politics as usual is discernable. These differences can be clear and compelling, and especially over time. Consider this handful of juxtapositions:

- Someone who seeks to reflect our reality in their words and actions versus those who distort reality and tell partial truths for their own benefit.
- Someone who genuinely seeks to take into account the wholeness of a situation - different perspectives, ambiguities, and tensions at play - versus someone who refuses to acknowledge other points of view or that any complexity exists.
- Someone who actually attempts to address people's lives, their concerns and where they live versus someone who promotes wedge issues and offers up simplistic, bumper-sticker solutions.
- Someone who you believe has your best interests at heart and exercises a sense of affection for public life (even when you disagree with them) versus someone who engages in slash and burn tactics with dangerous disregard for civic health.
- Someone who demonstrates respect for their opponents and yet engages in tough debate versus someone who constantly impugns their opponent's motives and is mean-spirited.

I could go on. But one thing is for sure, there are no absolutes here. That said there is clarity: there's a huge gap between what people want from candidates and political discourse and the sorry state of what we have today. People can discern authenticity; each and every day you and I make countless judgments about whether something or someone has authenticity.

My own work suggests that while many people have retreated from public life and politics into close-knit circles of families and friends, there's a real yearning to re-connect and re-engage to something larger than ourselves.



If a candidate wants to tap into this yearning - if they are serious about bringing about change in America; if they believe we must forge a new sense of common direction in our country; if they want to engage people in something larger than ourselves, then they will need to be authentic.

Who knows which candidate will have the authenticity to capture people's trust? But I feel sure of this: [Authenticity](#) counts.

Ask Yourself:

- 1. What role do public broadcasters play in helping people to see reality?**
- 2. To what extent would people say your station has the best interest of the community at heart?**



Who Can Hear Us?

Jul 24, 2006 By Rich Harwood

Here's my new proposal: anyone who holds a leadership position of any kind should have to speak (let's say, no less than three times a year) before audiences they know disagree with them, or are even hostile to their views. I've been thinking about this idea for awhile; but I was reminded of it again as I watched President Bush speak before the annual NAACP convention last week.

For six long years the president refused to make the trek to the NAACP podium. Indeed, NAACP and White House officials have been squabbling since day one of the administration. Who knows exactly who or what started the descent into disrespect? But the political calculations worked out this year and the two groups finally got together.

Let's face it many leaders do everything they can to avoid audiences that hold opposing views. Such venues can be uncomfortable. It's not unusual to hear leaders offer up contorted and silly explanations for why they can't make an event.

But there are important reasons why we must force ourselves to enter into these uncomfortable spaces. Too often in public life and politics, we find ways to avoid one another; we too easily detach ourselves from the concerns of others; we can come to see people merely as opponents; we demonize people without second thought or reproach. Under such circumstances, the "other" becomes objectified – someone who lives outside our realm as if they occupy a different orbit.

Now, sometimes leaders split the difference and find ways to attend uncomfortable events. The conventional wisdom can be to go to the event, make nice, smooth over differences that may exist, even seek to appease the other side. It's all an exercise in dignified civility. The question here is, when does civility become an excuse for failing to face up to our real differences?

So, I have something different in mind when I propose that we force ourselves to speak to audiences with whom we have disagreements, even where hostilities may exist.

- The mere act of showing up, and making oneself present, is a public acknowledgement of other people's humanity – a very human signal of respect that despite our disagreements, we live in a common space.
- The pointing out of why real disagreements exist requires a leader to offer an idea, a line of thought, an argument and thus for others to see that there is a thoughtfulness and thoroughness that informs that individual.
- There is a kind of entreaty at work in this approach – a call and the potential for a response. Even if the response is negative, we know there has been an exchange.
- Clearly demarcating where there are real disagreements in ideas or policy allows for a discussion to be joined – there is something to be discussed and debated, even if it can't be readily resolved.
- Showing up means that any attempt to demonize others must be done with full accountability. If you want to take the tough shots, you must be present.



- Finally, entering these less-than-supportive environments forces the speaker to use language that serves to engage and not push away people. For after all, the speaker seeks to illuminate his or her views, to take care in what they say, and to strive to be understood rather than to obfuscate or serve up platitudes.

Think about someone you know who gives speeches, maybe even yourself. Then consider the depth and resonance of their voice if they were present in the setting I've described. Would their voice quiver as their words ring hollow, or would their speech reveal the forthrightness and passion of their views? Three times a year we should give such talks and listen for the sound of our voice. Who can hear us?

Ask Yourself:

- 1. Where would you go to give one of these kinds of speeches?**
- 2. What else would you need to know so that your speech would ring true for others?**
- 3. Are there groups or parts of your community that you avoid? What might they say about your work?**
- 4. To better know your community, who else do you need to hear from?**



Finding the Sweet Spot

Feb 26, 2007 By Rich Harwood

As I travel the country, I find myself talking about the “sweet spot of public life”—how we can take action on specific issues and build community at the same time. This past week was no different. I spent two days with 40 leaders of local collaboratives in Newark, NJ, good people who are urgently focused on strengthening families and children.

The challenges in Newark (and Essex County) are tough, long-standing, often depressing—but doable. In these communities, people often feel that no one speaks for, or listens to them. Finding sustainable pathways for improving their local conditions can be hard. People worry that they are being left behind. And truth be told, many people are falling through the cracks.

The collaboratives sit at two critical nexus points in relationship to these challenges. They work among people in neighborhoods trying to create change; and they sit in-between “official” city structures and the local neighborhoods and communities to ensure that all people are at the table of public discussion and decision-making. Indeed, they serve as essential connective tissue that can help to bring about a greater sense of community wholeness.

A recurring theme of the conversation in Newark is how to tap people’s own potential to create change and come together to forge stronger communities. But what does this mean? How does it happen? How does it sustain itself? This is a challenge I hear everywhere I go.

We must design initiatives that not only focus on a specific issue, but that also build the relationships, leaders, networks, and norms of communities—the stuff that makes communities go—what I call “public capital.” In Newark and Essex County, there were three key components of public capital that need attention if the community is to effectively address its core concerns around families and children:

- Cultivating leaders—there is a real need to identify and engage “untapped” leaders in the community who hold authority and authenticity in the eyes of residents. These leaders can help engage, inspire, and support people and their causes in ways that leaders outside the community simply cannot;
- Creating safe space for discussion—there is a real need to create safe spaces in which people can come together to identify their aspirations, wrestle with competing values, and find ways to join hands in building a stronger community and strengthening families. The conversations that are now taking place too often focus on complaints and expert-framed policy issues that fail to move individuals and the community forward;
- Building networks—there is a real need to build networks in which organizations and leaders can learn about each other, build trust, and discover new ways (or strengthen existing ways) of working together. These networks reduce the time and costs associated with mistrust, the spinning of wheels, the pointing of fingers, and the inaction which results when we are unable to overcome obstacles



The importance of finding the sweet spot cannot be over-emphasized. For it is not merely an academic point, or something simply to theorize about.

Rather, the challenge is how can we move ahead? Let's face it, whether in Newark or in other communities, we will never have all the resources, time, and people we want to address the challenges before us. Instead, we must find ways to leverage our resources for making progress. That, I believe, requires that we find the sweet spot. Then we can have the very capacities we need to act on the challenges we seek to overcome.

Ask Yourself:

- 1. How could your work help deepen your station's relevance in the community *and* build public capital? What might that look like?**

- 2. Where is your sweet spot?**



Get the Stimulus Package Right: Fund Community-Ready Projects

Mar 3, 2009 By Rich Harwood

Billions of dollars of stimulus package money are now headed to a community near you. As they fly by, recall that much of the debate was framed by whether enough "shovel-ready projects" were ready to go. But there's another question we must answer: Do we have "community-ready projects?" Our response to this question will determine our long-term effectiveness and impact.

President Obama cited two main goals for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. First, create millions of new jobs; second, invest in key areas of society to ensure the nation's long-term growth and health. This is a tall order at a time of enormous economic and social upheaval and widespread anxiety. But progress is possible if we focus on the right targets.

The act funds essential community services and opportunities for community change - for instance, there's funding for new community health centers; grants for local arts groups; dollars for school facilities and programs; support for youth activities, and community and rural development. Add to these provisions another \$50 million dollars for a new initiative for non-profit capacity building grants and the potential for change expands further.

Sounds good, but we all know that simply shoveling money out to communities will not lead to the change we seek, or the sense of possibility and hope we yearn for. Instead, we must make sure local efforts are actually connected to communities, reflecting the real needs and aspirations of people, and create the necessary capacity to achieve our goals.

To ensure results, we should apply a "community-ready projects test." The test has four criteria:

1. Community Context - organizations and groups spending stimulus dollars should hold an understanding of local challenges and people's aspirations. What's more, they must know how much capacity for change exists within the community, and how much they will need to create. Taking action without first understanding the community's context is like opening the window to the Treasury Department and hoping stimulus dollars will somehow reach the right targets. They won't.

2. Authentic Engagement - through the stimulus package, there is the opportunity to engage people in communities to tap their own potential to make a difference and join together to build a common future. But too many current community-based efforts merely pretend to engage people, proffering false hope, and window dressing. Community-based efforts should show that they are creating genuine pathways for people to engage in community-building, problem-solving, and decision-making.

3. Impact - many local programs and efforts seek to gain credibility by ramping up "activities" that will wow people and offer the promise of change. But if we are serious about creating change, then those who lead local efforts must be willing to be "ruthlessly strategic." They must be willing to make hard choices on where and how they can make a difference. They have a responsibility to act for impact not just show. For too long we've been activity happy, yet action deprived.



4. Sustainability - clearly an important part of the stimulus package is to jump-start the economy, but it is also an investment in putting local communities and the nation on a different trajectory for long-term growth. To do this, the money flowing to local communities must be used in ways that create sustainable change on specific challenges and that expand or create new community capacities. We should adopt new metrics to gauge our effectiveness on the path to sustainability and that keep us on track.

To be "community-ready" a project would demonstrate that it can meet these four criteria. This need not take long, nor be belabored, but it must be done. If the overriding goal for the stimulus dollars is effectiveness and impact, then let's step up and make sure we do the job.

People's confidence in government, their communities, and themselves will depend on how well we can meet the challenges before us. This will require that local projects be connected to people's real concerns and the community's aspirations. Only then can we make a true difference. If we act now, we can make good on our urge to do good.

Ask Yourself:

- 1. What do these four tests make you think about your own work? Is there any connection?**
- 2. Looking at the four tests (Community Context, Authentic Engagement, Impact, and Sustainability) where is your station strongest, and where could you stand to improve?**



10 Questions for Public Innovators

May 21, 2006 By Rich Harwood

I'll be leading our Public Innovators Lab this week in Baltimore, Md., which always brings to a head some fundamental questions about people's efforts to create change in communities. Here are some questions I hear over and over again from public innovators. See what they spur in you.

1. How can I get other people to see why I'm pursuing the path that I am in my work?
2. How can I position, or reposition, my organization so that it's not only providing worthy services or programs but is in the business of being catalytic and creating deep change?
3. How do I move my organization or group beyond simply embracing the easy answers through the programs we pursue, the uses of technology we adopt, the events we stage, and get us focused on the hard work that is required to bring about change? How do we avoid watering down our mission?
4. How do I keep our efforts aligned with the reality of our capacity, so that we have a real chance to achieve results, instead of frittering away time and resources on things that sound good but ultimately won't move the needle?
5. How can I put my work in a larger conceptual framework – so that it's possible for me and others to see the bigger picture of what we're trying to do and why?
6. How can I sustain people's engagement over time, especially when things get tough or move slowly?
7. How do I take effective action when too often there is limited capacity within our own communities for action?
8. How fast can I expect progress to come, and what should I do when everyone around me expects change seemingly overnight?
9. How can I engage my funders and supporters who don't want to take the time to truly understand what we're trying to do?
10. How can I keep myself going as I pursue my path?

These and other questions pervade almost every conversation I have with public innovators. I have heard them from leaders of large, burgeoning national organizations to folks who lead small community-based groups.

What do you think? Print out the list of questions and try answering them yourself. Send in one or more of your responses so others can benefit, too.

In the meantime, I'll be posting some thoughts on these, and hopefully you'll be hearing from some of the individuals attending our Public Innovators Lab as well.

Ask Yourself:

1. Pick two or three of the questions above and take a second to answer them.

