

CWIC Notes

Connecting Where It Counts

Topic: Humphrey Fellowship Program

Project: A Successful Collaboration with International Impact

Date of Issue: June 2006

Introduction

Since its inception in 1978, the Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program at the University of Minnesota has provided mid-career professionals from selected countries across the globe with a year of cultural exchange, academic study and professional development experience. Fellows are provided with a variety of opportunities intended to foster personal and professional growth, exchange of information, and a deep understanding of the U.S. cultural, political, legal, and economic systems.

When the Hennepin-University Partnership was launched in March 2005, coordinators of the Humphrey Fellowship Program saw an opportunity to enhance their relationship with Hennepin County. In recent years, the state's largest county has been increasingly recognized by the Program as a rich environment for International Fellows to gain exposure to a wide range of local services. As a result, an orientation to the structure, services, and staff of Hennepin County has become a significant component of each Fellow's experience. With the support of leadership in both institutions, the partnership continues to grow and expand to the benefit of all involved.

Initiating Collaboration

Initial engagement between the Humphrey Fellowship Program and Hennepin County was spurred by the existence of the Hennepin-University Partnership. Enthusiastic leadership brought to the table by both institutions took the collaboration to the next level and led to its continuing success. One idea at a time, the soil for a successful partnership was fertilized.

Gaining Momentum

When staff from the Fellowship Program first approached the Hennepin-University Partnership, it was with a specific need. A

Fellow from the People's Republic of China, Bioaxia Wang, was looking for a professional affiliation that would allow her to gain hands-on experience in the area of government decision making. Tom Walkington of Hennepin County's Office of Planning and Development saw the potential value of working with the vice-mayor of Laizhou City in Shandong Province, which has a population approaching that of Hennepin County, and took the initiative to ensure that Ms. Wang's goals were met.

Ms. Wang, however, was not the sole beneficiary of this professional affiliation. This relationship eventually brought Mr. Walkington to China, where he toured several cities and universities and gave presentations on the topic of performance measurement in local government. In addition, Mr. Walkington became the Program's key contact in designing a full-day introduction to Hennepin County that also served as an orientation to local government for the 2005-2006 Fellows.

This orientation took place on November 1, 2005, and received wide support on the part of Hennepin County. In turn, Fellows came to value site visits more highly than they had previously, and several expressed that their experience with the County was the most satisfying part of their entire year. During the day, the International Fellows were introduced to County Board members and Department Heads. They gained exposure to the size and scope of County services, which are extensive enough to parallel the regional or national services for many of the international fellows, making the knowledge gained from this experience more transferable. County Administrator Sandy Vargas welcomed the Fellows to a reception and luncheon in the Government Center, where each Fellow was paired with two

County staff, each with a specialization matching their interests. Following the success of the orientation, the Fellows expressed interest in seeing the points of delivery for County services, and a second day involving visits to two Department of Corrections sites was arranged for February 2006. These tours allowed Fellows to interact not only with service providers, but with recipients of County services as well.

This welcoming and educational format served as a catalyst for further person-to-person connections between Fellows and County staff, including the placement of three International Fellows at County sites for their professional affiliations. Hennepin County sees this partnership as a way to contribute to international understanding and the expansion of professional relationships and in turn, a means of exposure to broader thinking about public service and democracy.

Fellowship Program Coordinators and County staff plan to continue this successful model in future years and to build upon the relationships it has formed between the University and the County. Ideas for expansion include incorporating more time with policy makers, including a session with the Native American Families Program, providing Fellows with the opportunity to further engage with the Department of Corrections through community service projects, and devoting time to the election process during the upcoming election year. In the words of the Program's Professional Development Coordinator Margot Laird, "This year's events very much captured the idea of synergy and mutual exchange, and built connections that will continue in some capacity."

Elements of Success

The collaboration between the Humphrey Fellowship Program and Hennepin County exemplifies several important elements of a successful partnership that are highlighted by Kenneth M. Reardon of Cornell University's Department of City and Regional Planning:

- Partnerships that do not allow both parties to achieve their institutional self-interests do not survive. In this case, both parties were able to achieve institutional self-interest. While these interests were more clearly laid out on the part of the Fellowship Program, which depends on an extensive network of affiliated professionals, the Program's mission to provide opportunities for a rich exchange of information and form lasting ties between U.S. citizens and their professional counterparts in other countries caught on quickly among employees of a county experiencing increasing diversity and changing demographics. The relationships fostered mutually beneficial cross-cultural communication and information sharing.
- Successful partnerships require significant executive leadership and visible support. Executive-level support for the Hennepin-University Partnership exists from

both Hennepin (County Board and County Administration) and the University (Senior Vice President Robert Jones and the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs). This strong and visible support conveys the message to staff that there is value to both organizations in making connections like the one for the International Fellows Program, and also continues to guide the Hennepin-University Partnership.

- "Organizational boundary-crossers" seem to play a pivotal role. Staff at the Humphrey Institute and Hennepin County identified value in working outside of organizational bounds. Both Tom Walkington and Margot Laird took on leadership roles and were willing to understand and work with the operation of the partnering organization.
- Successful partnerships develop slowly and require willingness to reflect upon, learn from, and adjust to challenges. Collaboration developed one step at a time. After each successful event, the value of the relationship was reinforced. As positive feedback was received and reflected upon, new ideas arose and were put into effect.

References

Reardon, Kenneth M. 2005. "Straight A's? Evaluating the Success of Community/University Development Partnerships." *Federal Reserve Bank of Boston's Communities and Banking*. Summer 2005: 3-10.

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