

There are clear signals that the sectors are reaching beyond their own organizations to address communitywide issues.

### Promising Areas

The news is very good for cross-sectoral partnerships in the nation's largest cities. A majority of business, nonprofit, and local government leaders are working together to address major community issues. But there are places and situations where more could be done and where bridges could be built. There are opportunities for business to use its leadership to critically analyze the problems and provide needed expertise toward the solutions; there are opportunities for the nonprofit sector to be the information and brokering arm of the community—joining needs with resources;

and there are opportunities for local governments to take the lead in bringing the problem solvers together on a regular basis in order to make the community more aware of the issues facing it and their impact. Approximately half of all respondents reported that their community had no formal mechanism or organization to bring the sectors together around critical issues.

The survey data were rich with the documentation of the existence of strong partnerships in the largest metropolitan areas but there is still room to strengthen and develop local efforts. The following recommendations spotlight additional areas of exploration for all three sectors that can sustain existing efforts and open new vistas for partnership.

## Specific Recommendations for Successful Partnerships

### BUSINESSES

#### *It's more than writing a check.*

- Contribute expertise in management and marketing—not just financial resources.
- Conduct regular briefings with nonprofit and government leaders to ensure understanding of the problems facing your community and to prioritize the potential impact on employees and your region.
- Know the roles that nonprofits and specific government agencies play and what issues they are addressing.

### NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

#### *It's more than just funding.*

- Make marketing, media relations, and public awareness priorities to increase visibility and understanding of your issues.
- Communicate the impact of your program. Tell the stories of lives changed as a result of your work and resources.
- Solicit professional help—beyond fund-raising—from businesses in marketing and management strategies.

### LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

#### *It's going to take more than government.*

- Recognize the contributions and resources that other community sectors can make in solving problems and solicit their opinions and assistance.
- Take advantage of your ability to convene or facilitate collaboration by assembling diverse leaders to address problems.
- Make information sharing among partners, potential partners, and the public a priority.

*For a copy of the data highlights report, contact the Pew Partnership at (434) 971-2073 or visit [www.pew-partnership.org](http://www.pew-partnership.org)*



# In It for the Long Haul: Community Partnerships Making a Difference

### Executive Summary

America's tradition of working together is alive and well according to a survey of 600 of the top business, nonprofit, and local government leaders in the 200 largest cities. The survey, conducted in July 2001, by the Campaign Study Group for the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, probed leaders about the status of partnership in their communities, why partnerships are important, and the kinds of interactions across sectors that have become business as usual. The clear message from these cross-sectoral leaders was that working together is not only better but essential. Over ninety percent of the leaders across sectors and locales said loud and clear, "working with others to solve problems takes more time but works in the long run." Further, these relationships have worked over the long haul because each sector feels that it has an important niche to fill.

- Business leaders placed the most value on their ability to deliver volunteers, money, expertise, leadership, and their business approach to problem solving.
- Nonprofit executives viewed their expertise in community issue areas, their desire to improve their communities, their volunteers, and their coordination and planning skills as their most valuable assets.
- Local government leaders cite their financial support, their pool of volunteers, their coordination and planning skills, their interest in community improvement, and their leadership skills as their key contributions.

The importance of community partnerships has taken on a greater significance since the tragedy of September 11th. Even before September, every community in the country was feeling some effects of the recession. At the federal level, we have seen a significant decline in the budget surplus. Critical areas such as education, healthcare, and job training must get in the funding line—the portions are smaller.

While federal support is critical to the launch and sus-

**Pew Partnership for Civic Change poll shows sectors working together to solve community problems.**

tainability of many basic human services, we learned from the survey that community partnerships can be invaluable in assisting a community to take the resources available and make them stretch further. They do this in three very tangible ways: first—community partnerships can raise visibility on local issues—it is hard for communities to solve problems they do not know about; second, partnerships can assist communities set priorities for the allocation of resources; and third, community partnerships can unleash new talents and resources to address old problems. This survey gives some clues about how and with whom this can be done and toward what end.

### *How do the sectors see the problems?*

When polled about the issues of critical importance to their community, the leaders weighed them differently but ultimately there were several problems that appeared on all three sectors' lists. Nine issues—illegal drugs, affordable healthcare, the lack of affordable housing, the lack of living-wage jobs, teenage pregnancy, the lack of affordable childcare, insufficient public transportation, too many unsupervised children and teenagers, and the lack of affordable care for the elderly—rank among the top problems according to each sector's leaders. These priorities across sectors provide considerable room for discussion and coordinated efforts to solve identified problems.

An area where the three groups of leaders clearly diverged was on the severity of problems facing the community. Local government officials proved the least likely to believe their communities have serious problems. At the opposite extreme, nonprofit leaders were more often than not the most likely to describe the same range of issues as posing serious problems for their communities. The

opinions of business leaders tended to fall between the two other groups although they generally expressed attitudes closer to those held by government officials. This lack of agreement on the severity of the problems challenges the ability to agree on priorities—in fact, it almost guarantees disagreement and the need for deliberation—in times of economic scarcity. This finding provides a powerful opportunity for communities to assess their situations and to come to some consensus as a community on the long-term impact of social problems on the three sectors and the community at large.

One surprising finding from the survey dealt with local government and its perception of the community. These leaders were the most positive about the quality of life in their communities and the most likely of the three sectors to express a “go it alone” attitude toward problem solving. This disjuncture with other sectors suggests the need for an “honest broker” process in communities led by leaders from all sectors that gathers facts and figures about community issues. There should be a clear and agreed-upon assessment of the baseline data and information that relate to community issues.

### How well do partnerships work?

Despite disagreements about the priority of issues, the ability of local partnerships to join interests with multiple resources has had overwhelming success according to those surveyed. Seventy-two percent of business leaders and approximately fifty percent of nonprofit leaders and local government leaders reported that the partnerships they have been involved with have been very successful. Only two percent or less indicated that their cooperative relationships had not been successful at all. This satisfaction with cooperative relationships begs the question, “What does it take to have a successful partnership?”

Respondents said that the two most important components of successful partnerships are: 1) a formal collaboration to which each sector contributes; and 2) long-term relationships and commitment. Other factors cited were dedicated people, open communication, ability to draw on multiple resources, ability to achieve objectives, and mutual trust.

### What do partnerships do?

With all the talk about partnerships, we were very

curious about the work of the partnerships: how each sector perceives partnership and its own role in collaborations. The respondents gave a clearer picture of both. The categories of partnership run from the particular to the general but generally rest in three areas: information sharing, financial and in-kind support, and tackling tough issues together.

### Information Sharing

At the most basic level, these cooperative relationships began with the sharing of information. Nearly three-quarters of all nonprofit executives reported that their organizations currently send newsletters outlining their work or their resources to local business leaders and almost seventy percent correspond with local government.

Approximately two-thirds of the government officials interviewed also indicated that the city or county where they work distributes information about their programs and resources to the local business community and local charitable organizations.

Similarly, almost half of the business leaders interviewed said that their companies offer a community resource directory to all employees.

Validating the interaction between the sectors, half of all nonprofit leaders said that they had had an unsolicited offer from their local government in the last year to share information. The most frequently offered information was U.S. Census/demographic information, funding/financial information, and public health information. The nonprofits themselves count on the local government as an information source with two-thirds requesting data from local government over the last year.

### Financial and In-Kind Support

Money and in-kind support were seen by all sectors as vehicles to join with community organizations to solve problems. Ninety-six percent of companies donate money to nonprofits according to the respondents. More than half of the business executives said that their companies match employee donations to charity. More than three-quarters of local government leaders reported that their local government provides funding to nonprofit groups. Seventy-nine percent of the business leaders surveyed said that their

companies donated used or surplus equipment to local non-profit organizations. Further, sixty-nine percent of business leaders reported that their companies provide educational scholarships.

Approximately half of the nonprofit leaders said that their organizations had received public relations assistance, technology expertise, and strategic planning assistance from a local company. Local government was also a strong player in providing technical assistance to local nonprofit organizations with fifty-four percent providing such assistance.

Vast majorities of local government officials (89%) and nonprofit executives (82%) said they provide local community groups free access to their facilities for meetings or other activities. Slightly less than half of business leaders indicated that they make their corporate facilities available for the same purposes.

While financial support by the government and business sectors was strong, so was the attitude toward civic participation that was fostered in the workplace. Nearly nine out of ten business leaders and eight out of ten government officials indicated that their employers have organized programs to encourage employee charitable donations.

### Tackling Tough Issues Together

There was a clear indication that the sectors are discussing the challenges and opportunities facing their communities—and acting on them. Almost three-quarters of the business and nonprofit leaders and ninety percent of the government leaders said that they work with other groups in the community to address important community issues. Although partnerships take different forms and directions, the survey found they clearly tend to be forged around key issues facing the community. When leaders were asked what they do specifically in the community to address problems several action strategies emerged.

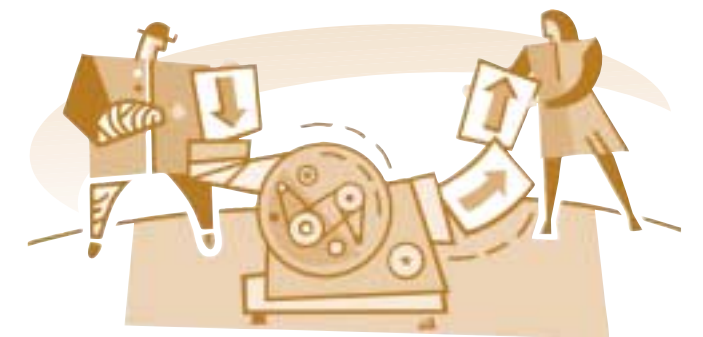
- First and foremost, the leaders of the different sectors know each other and communicate on a regular basis. Nearly two-thirds of the government officials and slightly more than half of the business leaders surveyed said they meet regularly with local charitable and other nonprofit leaders.
- Second, they provide direct services to community organizations beyond giving and create a culture of caring within their organizations. More than half of all business lead-

ers said their companies had organized employee participation in a formal mentoring program. This number reached seventy-five percent among those companies that indicated working closely with leaders from other sectors. About half of government leaders and nonprofit leaders said they do the same.

- Third, fifty-four percent of the business leaders surveyed said that their companies gave employees paid time off to volunteer. Perhaps more surprising, forty percent of government officials said that their localities provide employees with paid time off to volunteer. As a way to recognize employees for their volunteer activities, three-quarters of the major employers have a formal recognition program.
- Fourth, eighty-six percent of

business leaders and eighty-one percent of local government leaders say their employers organize employee participation in community activities such as walk-a-thons, food drives, and neighborhood clean-ups. Likewise, eighty-three percent of the nonprofit leaders surveyed said they actively enlist the support of suppliers and clients to volunteer or help solve a community problem.

Beyond these specific activities, leaders from business, local government, and nonprofit organizations serve on boards, commissions, and committees aimed at community



problem solving. More than half of both the business and nonprofit executives indicated that either they or someone else within their organization had offered to serve on such a board in the last twelve months. More than half of the business and nonprofit leaders said that a county or city government had extended an invitation to serve to someone in their organization. Almost seventy percent of local government officials said that they had invited a local nonprofit leader to serve on a problem-solving commission and seventy-five percent had invited one or more business leaders to serve.