

THE HARWOOD INSTITUTE

The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation holds this core belief; as a nation, communities and individuals we can do better in improving public life and politics in America. And we must.

Our mission is to work with people who want to take responsibility for improving public life and politics. To make progress, we believe that fundamentally different concepts, language, assumptions and practices are called for.

We work to sustain change among individuals, organizations, and communities. And we have found that to be effective, our work must occur on different scales – from the individual to a region or the nation. But, no matter the scale at which we work, we focus on the fundamentals in public life and on building public capacity – so that public life can work and people can hold a sense of hope about the future.

The Institute’s daily work is a constant interplay between public ideas and making change happen. The Harwood Institute focuses on:

- **Research** – we produce research and frameworks on how to understand public life and how it works, how to gauge its strength and what to do to strengthen it.
- **Initiatives** – we design and lead on-the-ground initiatives that put into practice our research and frameworks, innovations and ideas – to become beacons for learning and hope for what can be achieved when we all think and act differently in public life.
- **Public Leadership Schools and Seminars** – we develop public leaders – and “center of strength organizations” – that have the needed sensibilities and practices to make public life work.
- **Tools and Processes** – we craft tools, materials and processes that put new public ideas and practices into actionable steps, so that people in their own communities can do the work they need to do.
- **Forums** – we convene people who want to take responsibility for public life – to examine how public life works, and challenge themselves in how to make progress in it.

Here is how we work with people, organizations and communities across the nation:

- **Building in-depth knowledge of how communities work and change.** We help communities understand their stages of community life; how different strategies for change relate to different stages; and how to gauge and actively develop public capital. When such context is missing, too many conversations and actions go awry.
- **Understanding how to leverage public action.** We work with foundations, civic groups, schools and others to think hard about what it means to make short- and long-term strategic interventions and investments in communities to bring about change – especially as these activities relate to the stage of a community’s life, its public capital and rhythms of change.
- **Infusing new public sensibilities and practices.** We conduct rigorous and well-tested training to infuse leaders and organizations with (indeed, to challenge them on) new public sensibilities and practices – which we find are often critical to bringing about

effective and lasting progress. We call this area of our work “Thinking & Acting Publicly.”

- ***Creating innovations in civic engagement.*** We have spent years learning about why and how people engage – especially given the civic norms of a community, the nature of the substantive challenges at hand, and a community’s stage of life and public capital. We craft engagement materials and processes that bring these insights to life. The heart of our civic engagement work is to generate new norms and social covenants within our fractured society.
- ***Producing clarity on complex public concerns.*** We discover and reveal how the public mind works. Different *types* of public concerns move through society in quite different ways. It is imperative to understand people’s webs of concerns, points of ambivalence, emotions, assumptions, language and values so as to produce public knowledge and sound programs. We have focused on public concerns that cut to the core of America’s most pressing challenges.
- ***Generating a new public story.*** We have created an understanding of the central importance of public narrative and stories in our lives, and how to help people *genuinely* move from anxiety, despair and/or complacency to self-trust and hope – a shift that is key to generating a community’s sense of possibility and confidence. Central to our work is the understanding of why approaches such as public relations, boosterism and so-called “educating folks” often fail, in fact backfire; and why an alternative in public life is so vitally necessary.
- ***Measuring results and accountability.*** We design and implement new measures and benchmarks for change in communities, organizations and leaders. Our belief is that civic action of all kinds must demonstrate results and that those of us who work in this area must not shy away from accountability; indeed, the very idea of accountability must sit at the center of how we approach our work.

Many organizations may focus on one or two of these areas, but it is the very interdependence between and among them that generates a rich understanding of public life, how it works, and what it takes to make progress. The Harwood Institute has a long history of working in these areas with a broad spectrum of groups and individuals.

The Harwood Institute is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that works within a long tradition of small, catalytic and public-spirited organizations in American history that have sought to improve public life and politics. The Institute was founded in June 1997 by Richard C. Harwood and is based on the work of the for-profit Harwood Group, founded in 1988.