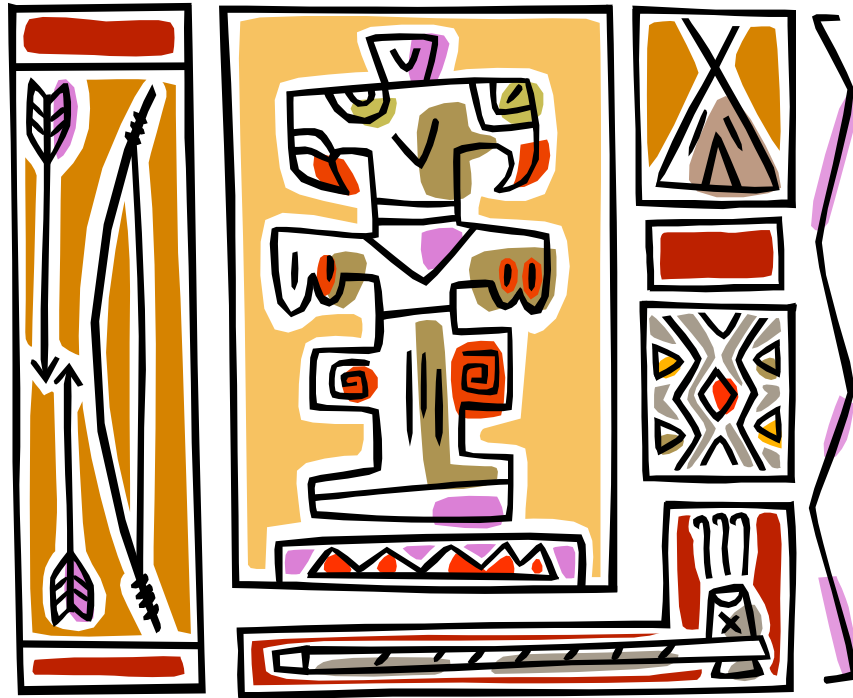


Lessons Learned



Patterns Arising From Diversity

LESSONS LEARNED

Throughout the Healthy Nations Initiative (NHI) projects, each site developed responses to the four target components—public awareness, community-wide prevention, early identification and treatment, and aftercare options—outlined in the call for proposals. Notwithstanding the unique qualities and cultures of the grantees, there were many shared similarities and patterns in the development and execution of most, if not all, of the Healthy Nations sites. Some of these similarities can be explained due to common factors regarding the institutionalization of governmental processes learned by Native populations and organizations over years of exposure. Such patterns arise from the education of most of the directors, again reflecting the educational system at large. Further explanation for these patterns arises from years of prescriptive program development that has dominated federal grants and federal and state governmental relationships toward American Indian communities.

Lastly, one must recognize that the HNI itself had a somewhat prescriptive nature in the articulation and demands concerning the four outlined components. This prescriptive nature was most evident during the Phase I period and the first two years of Phase II. During this period most directors noted, and the documentation substantiated, considerable and exacting attention to addressing each target area was emphasized over unique local/cultural adaptations. Later emphasis allowed far more flexibility in addressing these four areas. These latter adaptations reflected more local culture and conditions.

The above is an attempt to articulate some of the reasons for the patterns arising; many of the lessons learned are more principle-based with latter site-specific adaptations. These principles, and the activities that grew from them, defined the mobilization and the impact of HNI. The outcomes of applying these principles are, not by necessity, all positive. Some lessons grew from conflict and tension while others exacted pain and anguish from both the NPO and the grantees. Many others, though, are lessons that were anticipated with hope and realized in the natural evolution of the project regardless of where and by whom. In total, the lessons and patterns reveal processes and junctures that can be translated to a smoother implementation of future opportunities.

Following the description of the patterns and lessons, I will attempt to offer some interpretation of them from the overall context of HNI. I will also make suggestions about how the particular pattern could inform new grants as they venture into working in Indian country. These patterns may inform those seeking to advance substance-abuse-related programs within Native American communities. There is probably nothing absolutely unique about these patterns or the suggestions. The power lies in the fact that the processes underlying their discovery or creation are one of community ownership and site-specific adaptation. To witness the fruition of even small increments of reclamation of culture, hope, and enthusiasm from the fabric of some of these communities is gratifying and encouraging.

Local Leadership

Few sites maintained a single director throughout the entire two phases. While this situation demonstrated the ideal, it serves as both a contrast and benchmark. Generally, the most successful projects, regardless of where and how funded, relied on strong, visionary, and talented leadership. This principle was proved again by this project. HNI did not explicitly set out to invest in or to develop individual leadership and local talent. Almost as an assumed outcome, leadership was not listed on the RWJF program roster. This lack of targeted support and planning around leadership created opportunity and frustration throughout the grant cycle. The overarching management philosophy placed HNI programs under local control. What ensued indicated that insufficient resources were allocated to maturing this important component. Under this arrangement, the assignment of directors by the tribal leadership supported the self-determination philosophy and the arms-length relationship that the NPO exercised with each governing body. While consistent and true to the attitude of HNI about dictating specific programming and process components, it did foster a stop/start pattern in program evolution. As one director amply stated after taking over the program in year 3 of phase II, "I told our governing (tribal) board that they had missed a grand opportunity."

Many of the early directors were unfamiliar with the processes of working with a private foundation. The cultural difference, although mitigated by the expertise of the NPO, between usual governmental line-item programming and this new RWJF community-empowerment model experienced early and frequent

strains. During Phase I and early Phase II, most site visits were attempts by the NPO and NAC to motivate programs toward better reporting compliance, financial recording, and addressing the four Initiative components. Many of these meetings were perceived as threatening the funding stream. Some of them were. For the directors and each HNI site staff, fear of losing the grant dollars consumed much energy. Likewise, fear of lost funding increased political pressure from tribal or organizational leadership on HNI directors and staff and sometimes resulted in personnel changes. Some of the changes were forced from the top down while many resulted from personal frustration and reaction. Unfortunately, this proved to undermine the nature of many projects during the grant. This changing leadership landscape resulted in an ambiguous map of the site programs, especially the guiding principles underscoring HNI. Each leadership change, whether at program or governmental level, shifted the allocation of resources, the focus of attention, and the interpretation of the goals. Defensive stances, protective measures, and positive documentation became the primary foci instead of the institutionalization of infrastructure and mobilization philosophies.

Many directors were young and inexperienced. The NPO attempted to address the leadership issues in the semi-annual grantee meetings and the site visits. Many directors noted that the structure of the grantee meetings was such that their needs of sharing “Indian” style were not routinely met. The actual or perceived task of presentation and preparation diminished the possible effectiveness of these gatherings. There was a formalism that contrasted with

unspoken needs and more open sharing that were enunciated only in later years or after the fact. The defensive posture and need to present the most positive product resulted in lost opportunities to address directly the individual issues of each site.

The grantee meetings, for the most part, served to introduce novel ideas and facilitated some program cross-fertilization but generally were reported as falling short of constructing a lattice work of grantee directors. One director commented that it felt competitive in the poster sessions; another stated that the intensity and demands were burdensome; while another spoke of feeling resentful that more personal weekends were consumed in the life of HNI. Most directors recognized the positive intent and efforts of the NPO, NAC and grantee meeting committee while acknowledging different levels of support available at these meetings. The constant changing of directors contributed to the less-than-optimal effectiveness of the grantee meetings. Consonant with the effect of such changes at each individual site, the personnel changes disrupted the abilities to form the lattice work of site leaders envisioned by the NPO. The loss of history of the program caused by the introduction of each new participant at the grantee meetings separated some programs from essential relationships and dictated a slower pace of evolution and leadership development.

Likewise, site visits, especially early on, were interpreted more as technically oriented and procedural rather than personnel and program supportive. Some sites described them as “heavy handed.” Again, most sites experienced a sense of urgency for satisfying documentation and reporting

requirements. This early focus taught discipline and accountability but somewhat at the cost of stabilizing personnel, honing the visions, and attacking implementation barriers and challenges. As was the case across most sites, grantee leadership responded more acutely according to fear or political alignment. This created disconnects and re-visioning during site visits and often highlighted significant deficits in the understanding of the principles and directions of HNI by new directors, staff, and governing bodies. As in many grant-funded projects, leadership changes made the HNI somewhat ahistorical, creating a stop/start mobilization process. The leadership problem—the difficulty of retaining directors and staff—plagued the project and underscored a central focus for increased support.

Governmental organization and influence were important factors. We can see a difference between those on reservations or small communities and those from larger organizational, urban structures. All sites struggled with components of leadership and responsibility issues, but in the reservation and remote sites, changes in the political wind often meant significant changes in direct leadership of HNI. Most sites witnessed at least two changes in the governing leadership of the tribe or parent organization. Priorities changed; political favoritism prompted leadership changes; and HNI became engulfed in the rush to survive under the new governmental organization. This created a precarious thread of programming and philosophy for many sites. Under these conditions and the nature of historical reporting rationale, an area where more “reporting” requirements should have been directly translated for the grantee into intra-

agency and tribal support, directors were reticent to express struggles and need for help in order not to draw attention and prompt a site visit. Especially early in the grant cycle, this would sometimes precipitate leadership changes. The fact that most HNI leadership was not given an influential administrative location within the governmental bodies, further exacerbated this cascade of events. HNI in some sites was placed in third- or fourth-tier-management levels creating an even greater influence void and an increased susceptibility to changes in the governmental structures and, therefore, programming directions.

“Burn out” became a factor for many HNI staff. The internal struggle with tribal organizational changes, politicized funding priorities, and the perception of increased HNI program demands, particularly in the first four years, left some directors strained and vulnerable. Because of the limited personnel resources at many of the sites, successful directors were recruited to do other work outside HNI. Leadership growth and program success many times meant overwork. Over time and through the struggles associated with HNI, local leadership grew and many of the directors arose to prominence through success, endurance, and opportunities and have become significant leaders within the tribal communities.

HNI leadership growth is paradoxical. While interfering with the evolution of specific site programs or components, the loss of HNI personnel did reap some global benefit. Today, many of these ex-directors and staff occupy significant positions in tribal and community organizations. There are vice-presidents, tribal program managers, school principals, and board members who share and have implemented the HNI philosophy and exert ongoing impact in

their communities. Such a noted outcome, that has an ongoing possibility to shape the future, may well be the major long-term impact of the Initiative. Balancing the cost of individual program components as well as the frustration quotient for those involved with the more global contribution to greater community should be explicitly studied.

Human Resources

Beyond just the directors and HNI staff, each community realized significant benefit from the project. Volunteerism and activity coordinators from within each community gained valuable experience, community recognition, and management skills. Local individuals with a community focus and unrecognized leadership qualities are never totally absent in Indian Country. The nature of indigenous cultures is the fact that social structure is sustained on unheralded and hidden natural leadership. Some HNI programs tapped into this pool of resources. Through flexible funding of local ideas and culturally appropriate activities (food, gifts, etc.), the natural leadership, especially during the latter stages of HNI, emerged from the community. Giving voice through financial support and program development, many HNI directors and staff nourished local talent and cultural spokespersons. Community change is only effective from the grassroots, and all parties eventually were able to articulate and facilitate this paradigm. Traditional voices such as elders, youth, and other concerned citizens are generally drowned out by visiting experts, centralized idea brokering, and outside modeling. Even when the experts are Indian, research results and urban

models—different from the cultural context—often dictate approved activities and, more insidiously, pre-select desired outcomes. HNI evolved in such a way as to dispense, in part, with the expert model and privileged academic ideas. Interestingly, the structure of the HNI grant both limited and stimulated this growth. The four prescribed areas carried an intrinsic logic model, pre-selection of outcomes, and activity rationale. On the face, they necessitated a connection and internal theory of change between the target area and the activities. Many times, local ideas lacked this explicit connection but, nevertheless, produced intended and similar outcomes. Likewise, many of the more powerful effects are not readily measurable or describable in written quarterly reports, especially given the *post hoc* analysis employed. The local human resources developed through HNI are durable and perpetuating assets. The opportunities and legitimization offered by HNI to community shapers and embedded leaders continue to mold the community attitude toward wellness and health. Human resources discovery, growth, and support constitute much of the more robust institutionalized outcomes of the Initiative. This principle of supporting natural leaders paid great dividend to those sites and should be a more-discussed aspect of possible and powerful outcomes in any future programs.

Flexible Funding

Flexible funding proved to be significantly important. Given the history of governmental program prescription and line-item accountability, the contrast demonstrates one genius of the HNI. Although it took considerable time and

effort to shake loose from these historical constraints and conditioned learning, most HNI sites funded items and activities that previously could never get past finance departments, let alone granting agencies. This latter-stage financing structure and attitude represented a significant cultural departure for both RWJF and an unexpected change for the tribes. To the credit of RWJF and the NPO, “outside-the-box” funding of activities was allowed and eventually encouraged. This process did not run smoothly, and the call for better communication and oversight from the Foundation in helping the NPO, site directors, and tribal governing bodies negotiate the conditioned barriers was noted in more than one interview. Nevertheless, the overwhelming success of flexible funding is unprecedented. Providing food for gatherings, tee shirts for participants, money for horse feed, computers for families, feathers, leathers and beads, speakers and dancers, and tuition for training are just some of the unique and potent uses of the money. Consistent with community ownership, HNI staff attempted to provide reasonable monetary support for local cultural ideas and needs. At a few sites this financial freedom turned into a sense of unstructured license threatening the partnership that the Foundation had intended and negotiated. NPO reaction was, therefore, to restrict uses of grant funds in those circumscribed situations. This increased pressure on the directors and programs through political avenues. The first years appeared as a global reaction to the few sites that confused freedom with license. As the sites and leadership clarified their different interpretations of the financial accountability and uses of the funds, the restrictions became more targeted for those sites. Eventually, the funding

structure reached a balance between historical cost centers and novel and responsive financing.

The recent and threatening Federal government position of fraud and abuse surrounding use of funds was not the prevailing intent. As HNI matured, the flexible funding attitude encouraged creativity and local empowerment. This attitude, through time-tested relationship with the NPO, engendered trust, created seed resources for novel projects, and demonstrated a flexibility lacking in traditional funding mechanisms. Experience would conclude that some of the funds were not used appropriately and, at times, ill-advisedly, but instead of targeting that minority of uses, the NPO and RWJF seemed to grow more committed to the flexibility and creativity of latter-stage HNI financing.

One downside to this funding mechanism and attitude is that, even today, communities who were supported in their efforts, but lacking in resources, inquire about funding possibilities. HNI set a standard that no other source has risen to match. Tribal governments, federal grants, and most private grants severely limit the use of funds to explicitly circumscribed programs and program components. Many directors lamented that this rich but limited resource of HNI, when discontinued, created a significant slowing of community change, a flagging of enthusiasm, and a silencing of some natural voices, or at least substantially reduced forums where traditional voices were showcased, heard and attributed status. Many ex-directors and tribal offices still field calls asking for some support for ideas generated within the community. The dialogue about flex funding has

found some audience in select governing bodies. This principle, however, does live on through those ex-directors guiding new programs.

National Advisory Committee

In the usual fashion of RWJF, a strong and expert National Advisory Committee (NAC) was selected and invited to participate. Their role preceded the release of the RFP and was active during the winnowing of potential sites and into the developmental and implementation phases of the HNI. The experience and understanding of issues for Native people could not have been better represented. Nevertheless, there was confusion surrounding their role and relationship to the grantee sites. Directors indicated that the knowledge, energy, and utility of the NAC were not exploited sufficiently. Questions abounded about how to approach them, what to expect from them, and even the appropriateness of doing so. Some indicated that they felt that the NAC was to support the NPO while others were less certain about any role. All suggested that the NAC could have been involved more advantageously than was the case.

NAC members—but not all NAC members due in part to scheduling, time commitments, rural settings, and travel requirements—frequently accompanied the NPO staff on site visits. They attended the Grantee meetings but were usually not featured. Only a few of the directors indicated telephone or electronic communication with a NAC member. This is perplexing and is a weakness. These experts held needed wisdom in a relationship that the NPO could not occupy. One director suggested that an a single and assigned “NAC mentor

would have been great.” Some directors questioned building a relationship due to the inconsistency of site assignments among the NAC. Whatever the reason, the NAC was not as important to the grantee sites as could have been or was wished. A more defined role and the assignment of a particular NAC member to a single site as a mentor would have broadened the relationship, provided a separate and stabilizing force, and offered a wealth of leadership supports to the sites, program leadership development and liaison to the grant administration.

National Program Office

The NPO served multifaceted roles. As consultants to RWJF headquarters, developers of the grant implementation processes, compliance administrators, and liaisons between the cultures and enforcers of accountability and responsibility, the NPO seemed poised to be misunderstood. From this list of roles, it is no surprise that some confusion and aggravation followed their relationships with the grantees. The NPO contained a world-class group of researchers, academics, and Native American experts with connections and history with most of the sites. Strong personalities and high expectation characterized the NPO. Early patterns of relationships between the NPO and the grantees indicated tension and frustration. Trying to monitor and hold accountable while mentoring and directing was complicated and difficult for the NPO. The goal was not to dictate the evolution of the HNI but rather to guide and encourage. This met with less-than-optimal success in the initial stages of the grant. The first four years appeared to be a learning process and experience for

both the NPO and grantee sites. The NPO demonstrated great patience with many sites as they translated the RWJF culture to the sites and vice versa. Admirably, the NPO balanced the forces and expectations of both parties through uncharted intersections of cultures, visions, and contextual realities. The NPO brokered the cultural understanding and helped to locate mutual intersections and lessons. Helping the sites report their activities was difficult and consuming. Added to that was negotiating the financial reporting necessary for any grant. Many directors indicated a suspicion about disclosing difficulties to the NPO. Each site noted areas of struggles and failures, many in politically demanding situations, that, in retrospect, they felt would have been easier to negotiate and resolve if the relationship with the NPO had been different. The confusion was between the mentoring and monitoring roles of the NPO. The tribe and the NPO, more accustomed to a monitoring role, therefore limited the relationship to one of tension and sometimes antagonism, which often exists in grant/contract structures.

This was not the intent or purpose of the NPO. Rather, it was an outgrowth of the context and history in which HNI developed. The NPO was a victim of conditioned learning, reflexive expectations, and multiple roles. As time went on, with some changes in the NPO, maturing on the part of the grantees, and greater insight on the part of RWJF, the relationship evolved into a mentoring and supportive role. This situation supports the conclusion of the leadership section: A more explicit mentoring arrangement outside of monitoring would have been preferable.

Culture as the Theory of Change

Cultural reclamation has become so discussed and pronounced as the savior of Native people that the true power is often lost in hyperbole. It seems so natural and indisputable to engage culture that we neglect articulating or documenting their actions and effects. The HNI privileged culture in a manner unlike most other programs. Without transforming culture and traditions into tools of intervention, HNI allowed important cultural and traditional strengths of grantee's community life to arise from the current bearers of such traditions. It was important to allow the living cultural traits to be situated within contemporary time and space. Unique to HNI is the pattern of culture infusion across all sites. The "hows" of implementation defined the different and site-specific cultural applications. Linking the activities directly to a logic model addressing substance-abuse prevention and treatment would fall short of explaining the effects of culture. HNI demonstrated the ability of cultural and traditional activities, over time, to infuse diverse community arrangements with a sense of commonality and connections. The barriers that were overcome did not address all the challenges inherent to cultural reclamation. Many communities, especially those sites constituted of more than one tribal people (confederated tribes, urban Indian sites, and multi-site grantees), experienced resistance and sometimes vociferous objection to instituting or participating in "traditional" ceremonies or activities. Some objected on grounds of not paralleling their personal understanding or specific tribal traditions. Others suggested that the reclamation countered their Christian conversion. Still others resisted partly out of fears of

regression in their struggle for acculturation and acceptance. This posed a challenge and growth opportunity for grantees. Most sites found more neutral or less ceremonial activities drew the most robust response over time.

Cultural backgrounds and histories also played an interesting part in meetings and operations of grantee gatherings. Open ceremonies reflected the spiritual nature and openness of Native People. Meetings were routinely opened with inclusion activities and prayers representing different religious and spiritual orientations. This is very different from meetings in most secular and academic settings. Highlighting the cultural fabric was the complementary ease with which spiritual, cultural, and procedural information was combined seamlessly in the presentations and planning of activities. A refreshing lack of political correctness in concerns of beliefs and identity surrounded many of the activities. HNI gave support and validity to such open exchange and demonstration, thereby solidifying the legitimacy of being “Indian” in mainstream forums. Such respect transferred from RWJF and the NPO to the grantee directors and staff sustained a two-world existence through understanding and, more importantly, participation by those outside this cultural context.

HNI sought to move culture from the silent and private universal background to a position of vibrant foreground. As previously stated, HNI attempted to avoid objectifying and manipulating culture by way of making it a tool of change; rather it privileged cultural and “tradition” as the best nourishing context—an irrefutable force not to be obscured or controlled. HNI acted as a stimulus for partial cultural reclamation by allowing grantee sites to integrate

tradition with western procedures. Many sites invested their resources in cultural activities, especially those targeting youth. The disconnect between the elders and youth was articulated and responded to by each site. The trajectory of this reconnection took different routes but, in the end, acted as reclamation of traditions within the communities. Explicit programs structuring elder/youth encounters in determined circumstances occurred at many sites. Other programs were less direct. Diversions programs, genealogical curiosity, hunting parties, and adopt-a-grandparent acted to connect the elders and youth. Traditional sports, tribal youth leadership courses, and dance and drumming groups were components of cultural maintenance and reclamation, substance-abuse prevention, and health-protective interventions. Culture, as many directors voiced it, was the “medicine” to apply to the sickness of substance and alcohol abuse.

Linking the messages of prevention research with traditional wisdom and cultural understanding evolved as the most potent vehicle of education and early intervention. HNI allowed the communities to shape the prevention message and utilize a familiar mechanism to deliver that message. A trans-generational effect unfolded through this process. Strong messages of identity and pride grew for and from elders, adults, and youth. The stronger pattern effects came from embedded messages instead of blatant pronouncements about prevention. Acknowledgments, cultural associations, and efforts to bridge the two worlds of the youth bore the most plentiful fruit. Early in the HNI, efforts toward community prevention and public awareness had a more direct anti-drug campaign tactic. As the different sites evolved, the methods of how to disseminate information

became less formal and more wellness oriented and included greater cultural participation. This is an important pattern that emerged across all sites.

Transforming Activities To Principles

During the first four years, the HNI directors placed great emphasis on each Initiative component. Separate programming attempted to address each area and was undertaken by each site. HNI became another branch on the tree of services at each site. Efforts were made to develop and maintain unique programs associated with HNI. Herein lies another contradiction of the granting structure. Although two of the components required involvement in direct intervention, the financial structure prohibited use of funds for direct interventions. Some of the directors mentioned that this was a confounding problem. All sites had previously established clinical services models and agencies funded by other financial sources, and most sites experienced attempts to absorb HNI into these existing structures. Many directors spoke of their struggles trying to avoid being swallowed up by their service sector. They also expressed their frustration with the insistence and NPO requirements to explicitly address intervention and aftercare. Remaining separate but gaining influence into decision making at the clinical level proved alienating during the first years. At these sites, this tension created a divide between HNI and established tribal providers. The clash of philosophies, i.e. community informed versus clinically driven, proved, at times, too devastating to foster meaningful collaboration and significantly diminished the important mutual sharing. Other sites created

adjunctive activities that were either grafted onto existing programs or depicted in ways to fulfill the required attention to the component. Eventually, the sites stimulated programming that reflected the intent of the call for proposal and was consistent with the embraced community philosophy. Youth activities, cultural camps, hikes, drumming, and such events were supported by HNI. Early on, these presented a confound. These did not usually fall within the generally understood definition of intervention and aftercare—at least clinical models. More than just a semantic difference, it was not until the last two years that most sites and the NPO advanced a more flexible definition of intervention and aftercare. Cultural activities that were adjunctive were now seen as equally potent as the western models. This constituted one of the most significant philosophical transformations of HNI. The sites demonstrated that supporting the community and their attempts to address substance abuse through nonprofessional routes proved additive and complementary to existing systems of care. Many of the institutionalized aspects of HNI reflect this transformation and subsequent inclusion into the structure and application of interventions.

The intersection of the clinical models and prevention focus of HNI clarified the tension between these two models. Those sites that initially employed clinically trained directors responded to the grant requirements with agency-based perspectives and generally had less community direction. Those that hired less professionally and clinically prepared individuals faced the historical pressure to become responsive to clinical needs, again at the expense of community. Natural evolution of all programs leads to less clinically oriented or

academically sanctioned solutions. The voice of the community, punctuated with widespread support and participation, became a major force informing the last two years. Eventually, the HNI philosophy infiltrated the fundamental fabric of services within the site. This transformation of stand-alone programming resulted in a more global mixing and apportionment of resources and attention. A two-world view of the solution arose and remains in most grantee sites.

Sustainability

From the first, sustainability was a marker for both grant inclusion and program success. As with most grants, the intent was to stimulate a substantial change that would elicit support and demand perpetuation. Encouragement to address the projection of Healthy Nations or its components into the future was included in the call for proposal. In the background of many meetings and technical support site visits was the message of institutionalizing the particular activity. The formative analysis of each site indicates that the last two years were the most productive and successful. Stability and leadership seemed more integrated at each site, in particular, during this period. Just as the program was experiencing the peak of its impact, the funding ended. The prospect of individual activities being taken over from within the host organization was diminished by the program's maturity timing. Without sufficient "peak" time to become a community expectation or having proved irrefutable organizational worth, which was an original premise anticipated in the HNI vision of the future, many of the activities died along with the funding. Those programs and activities that enjoyed

a longer successful exposure to the community were, for the most part, institutionalized.

The evolutionary pattern of the early years would predict such a current resources-limited existence for most activities. Even though most programs extended their program via no-cost extensions, sustainability was recalcitrant. Reality in Native communities is that grant money dictates a substantial portion of services and infrastructure. Outside of basic services and economic development, a majority of the sites utilize granting to survive. The statistics indicate that the level of services is below that of the dominate society. Grants, therefore, fill voids and many times create shifts in service direction as dictated by the funding agencies. This posed a significant challenge for the sustainability of Healthy Nations.

Most tribal governments were unable to commit to the level of activities enjoyed during the HNI. Finding other grants to propel Healthy Nations activities into the future required both energy and time. Both of those commodities were preciously in limited supply for most directors. Grant writing and receiving are talent intensive functions for which many of the directors had limited exposure and opportunity to acquire. Support from associated agencies or tribal entities were short in coming. The competition for survival drove the pursuit of grant funding instead of a modeled logic of sustainability. Some sites did leverage their association with Robert Wood Johnson Foundation to procure other funding. In no case was the money as flexible or available to community-informed activities. Some activities ended with being sponsored by outside agencies or transformed

into the targets of the new grant. While not fatal to every program component, such significant changes in the direction and philosophy of these activities distorted the trajectory of Healthy Nations.

Little technical support was offered to the grantee sites to pursue sustainability. Although an expectation and a tacit message, formal planning and resource identification were lacking. More than one director mentioned frustration at not receiving more concrete directions, help, or clear explanations of HNI sustainability concepts. Emotional reactions to the end of the programs were common and indicated a commitment frustrated by limited resources. Again, the NPO had a naturalistic stance in witnessing the tribal or organizational response to the end of funding. Previously, many of the governing bodies had interacted with the NPO in simply trying to avoid losing the funds. There is scant evidence that efforts were made to convince these same bodies to extend their limited resources into these HNI components. While some organizations certainly did, most quickly moved their focus to the next grant subject, thus failing to seize an opportunity to exercise the expertise and strength of the NPO and NAC. The directors were consumed in documenting the program accomplishments and looking for new jobs. Further, one director mused about the possible positive outcomes of having the Foundation mediate with other granting agencies, including the government, to help extend the life of Healthy Nations. The musing was curious but potentially a viable suggestion worthy of serious consideration. Sustainability was bounded by the progression of each site toward a demonstration of worth and effectiveness. The length of the grant, unusual and

exemplary, was insufficient to create a momentum strong enough to maintain a whole program survival. Sustainability became a mosaic of activities and, primarily, philosophies grafted into the next iteration of targeted funding. The New Mexico Fighting Back site demonstrated, both statistically and philosophical stability, that length of granting on a consistent theme with adequate flexibility resulted in more permanent programming.

Evaluation

The experience of assembling this evaluation taught a great lesson. Most sites reported only being vaguely aware that any sort of evaluation or outcome assessment was going to take place. As cited in Dr. Taylor's section, challenges and barriers to completing any formal data collection and evaluation were strongly present. For the qualitative sections, directors needed assurance that right/wrong, good/bad judgments were not going to be leveled. Most were anxious to have their story told and have lessons and patterns gleaned from their efforts. Formal evaluation, the kind that requires evidence that the "needle on the outcome measures moved," was not provided by RWJ and it was not desired nor expected by many of the HNI sites or personnel. Without explicit, measurable outcome targets and instructions to be able to demonstrate such movement, the HNI project is difficult to evaluate. Sites were encouraged to describe the activities conducted, addressing the four Initiative components without the burden of outlining the explicit intent or effect. During the interviews, most directors indicated that people had been positively impacted, but the nature and

actual results of such impacts were, at best, speculative, and subjective. This is a weakness of the project.

Unquestionably, the final evaluation product that you are reading is not the type arranged for in the last two years of the project. Many intervening variables had more than likely diminished the recollections and evaluations. Nevertheless, if the project would have been initially structured with evaluation as an expectation, arguments for extension, institutionalization, re-funding, and retrospective evaluation would have been made easier. This critique of the project is more valid for the quantitative sections, but it also applies to any formative evaluation.

The exclusion of any formal evaluation component until the last two years has a wisdom known only to those who decided. Reported discussions, opinions, and challenges to formal assessment were completed at RWJF and with the NPO. There was an early call for proposal for an evaluation component that was deemed too structured, costly, and possibly stifling to the intended creativity and evolutionary hope of HNI. It is true that many Native communities are weary and frustrated by research and statistical portraits of their lives. The lack of evaluation possibly liberated natural forces, many described in this document. The informative perspective created from a more non-judgmental position is refreshing and important. The narratives of each site are glimpses of the formation of Healthy Nations. Inferential data and shadows of measurement are the results. Probably, a combination of formal and natural evaluation could be instituted. Without making evaluation a burden or allowing data points to occupy

the focus of such a project, the teaching to the test phenomenon, having an explicit contract to help the Foundation to understand the impact of their investment seems essential.

Place In the Tribal Organization

Evidences from the narratives support the conclusion that placement in the organizational chart was directly related to the success of implementation of Healthy Nations programs. Most sites experienced both favorable and unfavorable attention from leaders such as tribal chairpersons and department directors over the duration of the HNI. During times in which a positive relationship was present, programs seemed to gain hold. This can be explained in part through a decline in internal competition for Healthy Nations resources. The protective nature of leadership association liberated project staff energies toward establishing the programs. Where applicable, all sites experienced a change in direct up-line leadership. These transitional periods often were accompanied by a change in Healthy Nations directorship changes. As priorities, philosophies, and objectives of each new community administration or government were unfolding, Healthy Nations underwent periods of re-entrenchment and re-directioning. For those that were left more exposed by their placement in sub-categories of the organizational charts, the iterations of the program were more extreme. The prospect of resisting challenges to the programming choices, attempts to divert funds into other projects, or the hopes of

sustainability were greatly diminished. Placement in prominent organizational positions offered more stability and coordination.

The negative aspect of such placement revolved around politics. More than one site experienced the leveraging of Healthy Nations for political reasons. The fallout of this kind of political co-opting led to alienation of some sectors of the service population. In some cases, the program was ostracized from the main body of related programs.

Successful programs and effective ideas draw close associations and elicit loyalty and serve as prime targets for political maneuvering. Healthy Nations experienced both the positive and less-desirable aspects of close association with authority. Although disruptive by way of political susceptibility, the organizational placement produced greater stability and more access to power centers. Working to place similar programs in higher positions in organizational charts and with greater governing board contact will ensure a more successful trajectory of future projects. Fortunately and confirming a sensed reality, the grass-root support, belief in, and voice for the HNI projects permitted the overarching philosophy and vision of HNI to survive and grow among the political winds and changes.

Summary

The lessons learned are many. Patterns can be deciphered through analysis of the cycles and efforts surrounding the Healthy Nations Initiative. A long-term view is necessary to realize the evolution of community prevention and

positive outcomes. The age-old wisdom of good leadership remains true for this project. Strong, visionary, and supported leaders created the most lasting program components and philosophies. Such leadership qualities were present at all levels of the Initiative. Length of funding positively impacted that outcome. When the goal is community change, the guiding factor must be that “time is essential in the healing.” Realizing the limited resource base inherent in Native communities, granting agencies embracing such global objectives need to exhibit endurance in providing resources for such projects. Flexibility must accompany such lengthy commitment. Truly listening to the community, privileging local culture, and instigating a grassroots health revolution demands “out-of-the-box” thinking and, therefore, funding. Willingness to invest in ideas unproved, pay for consumables, and subsidize what seems like supported employment began to emerge as wise and visionary. Surrendering the hegemony of theory to the sweat of pragmatics is a leap of faith, but one that Healthy Nations began to demonstrate as sensible and prudent.

Healthy Nations started as just another grant program. The first four years proved that breaking away from old standards is very difficult. Phase I and two years of Phase II were a developmental stage of individuation and separation from old paradigms and outside dictation of services and models of health. Following this four-year struggle with its expected stops and starts, the programs entered into a maturing phase. The similarity between sites in the content of program components belies the striking differences that the context and culture played in their manifestation. This is particularly true with the selected

participants and their interpretations regarding the program's meaning and application. No evaluation instrument can adequately or fully measure the single life touched or the community spirit renewed through Healthy Nations. One marked accomplishment was the recognition by tribal leadership around the Initiative and its importance while the project was underway.

Although most specific programs stimulated by Healthy Nations did not survive the end of funding, the ideas, hopes, and philosophy of community empowerment and strength undeniably infiltrated the fabric of service provision. These principles are demonstrated in the institutionalized behaviors exhibited by the tribes, agencies, and communities. Such incarnate ideas are the substance-free pow-wows now sponsored by many of the tribes. Community events honoring culture, youth activities, and safe and healthy lifestyles increased or were made stronger. Drug-free workplaces and behavioral accountability of leadership demonstrated the institutionalized HNI vision. Tangible evidence for the overall effect of HNI in the life of the community is found on the tee shirts of the youth, in the school hallways, and in the policies considered, passed, or envisioned that govern community and tribe. Most important were the private institutionalization of hope, strength, and action in those individuals who participated, embraced, and believed in their own processes.

The "just another grant" evolved into a movement based in the homes of each community and energized by volunteers and natural leaders. These local and untapped resources added to the many people trained and experienced through employment with Healthy Nations. All grantee sites contained a rich

source of change energy and through Healthy Nations, liberated hope and engaged people. The Healthy Nations Initiative set about as an experiment in prevention and ended with inspiring fourteen American Indian/Native Alaskan groups to assert their own brand of healing, reaching for the same goal.

