

# Local Policy Partnership Spotlights New Research Areas

by Peggy Rader

The Hennepin University Partnership (HUP), the only known major university-county partnership in the United States, is in the process of determining its focus for joint research on major policy areas for 2009–2010.

The HUP staff have been developing next steps for moving forward in four policy areas identified as most critical and achievable during an April strategic planning session attended by almost 30 key leaders from both the University and Hennepin County. The idea behind the planning session was to bring focus to a small number of issues to help HUP have the greatest impact possible in Hennepin County. The four major policy areas that have been singled out are:

- ▶ human capital development through educational attainment
- ▶ child well-being with a focus on vulnerable youth
- ▶ healthy behaviors (or building healthy communities)
- ▶ understanding the impact of the baby boomer population bubble

“The titles and the language around them aren’t set in stone, but came from the participants who were trying to provide the clearest possible direction for exploring these issues,” says Kathie Doty, director of HUP.

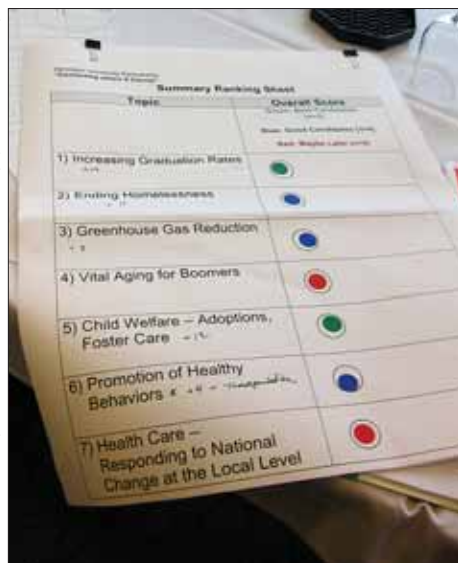
HUP was launched in 2005, based on the concept that University researchers and county government leaders could more effectively address important local policy issues by working together. To date, its most active policy areas have been in public transportation and light-rail development, reading programs for boys, homelessness, and measurement of the health of the community.

“From my perspective, the University of Minnesota and Hennepin County are anchor institutions in the state,” says senior vice president Robert Jones. “The partnership continues to

leverage the best of both institutions, especially during these critical times in Minnesota.”

Janis Callison, Hennepin County commissioner, agrees. “We need a partner to do this work, and no better partner exists than the University of Minnesota,” she says. “We need your ideas, we need your ability to gather and analyze data, and we need your energy. Your resources give us the opportunity

Photo courtesy of the Hennepin-University Partnership



for evidence-based decision-making, using reliable data and tapping available research expertise to better inform policy discussions.”

The guidelines for determining proposals for HUP’s policy areas for the next year were that they address a significant public policy issue, result in research intended for publication, and lead to positive impacts in the community.

The proposal named “human capital development through educational attainment” was chosen because all participants at the planning session believed that educational success affects success in all other areas of life. The group emphasized that the proposal is

not aimed at school reform, but would ideally investigate the relationship between academic success and success throughout life.

The group decided that the proposal for “child well-being” should be among the top three and cautioned that it should not be too narrowly defined but should include consideration of such educational issues as increasing graduation rates.

“Healthy behaviors” was seen as a proposal that could encompass issues around vital aging and other issues that were brought to the table initially.

The original list of issues for participants to consider included increasing graduation rates; ending homelessness; child welfare—adoptions, foster care; vital aging for boomers; greenhouse gas reduction; health care—responding to national change at the local level; promotion of healthy behaviors; effective delivery of government services; rethinking the role of government; children’s mental health; environmental—solid waste management; community impacts of the economic downturn—housing and employment; and sorting of the population. At the beginning of the planning session two additional topics were added: the plight of African American men, and immigrants in Hennepin County. Session participants ended up rolling several of those topics into broader policy areas with new titles.

The complete April 29 planning session report is available online at [www1.umn.edu/hup/documents/HUPPlanningSessionReportPDF.pdf](http://www1.umn.edu/hup/documents/HUPPlanningSessionReportPDF.pdf). For more information about the Hennepin-University Partnership, visit [www1.umn.edu/hup/](http://www1.umn.edu/hup/).

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