

## From the Funder's Perspective

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This special issue of *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* devoted to a survey of the field and applied conflict resolution research is especially welcome and timely. There is an increasing call from many quarters for knowledge about the appropriate applications and demonstrable outcomes of conflict resolution–related practices. At the same time, “industry-like” forces in the field tend to focus our attention more narrowly on specialization within the field. In response, the authors of this issue provide an important compilation of field research and evaluation literature across a broad sweep of the conflict resolution landscape.

This is a very useful piece of work. The similar format of each review article encourages the comparison of findings across sectors. The commentaries help to place the knowledge gained in a more dynamic framework that is particularly useful as the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation makes its exit from a nearly two-decades-long role as a field builder and supporter. The foundation hopes that the collective work presented here will aid practitioners, field-related organizations, researchers, users of these processes, foundations, and others to better understand what we know about the utility, quality, and impacts of conflict resolution practice, as well as provide a base on which further knowledge-building efforts can be considered and pursued.

The review articles are impressive for several reasons, not the least of which is the sheer volume and breadth of material covered. There are rich sources of information across all of the reviewed topic areas, not only about techniques, processes, and satisfaction-related indicators of success but about substantive design and impact studies that support the claim that the conflict resolution field has added considerable and measurable value to our society's ability to address disputes and controversies successfully. There may indeed be fewer studies that adequately document the systemic impacts of conflict resolution programs and processes, as suggested by

Robert Baruch Bush's survey (forthcoming) of conflict resolution scholars asking what intellectual work remains unfinished in the field, and knowledge gaps certainly exist throughout all the practice areas. Yet the assembled literature suggests that we may know more, and may prudently make more claims, than at least some observers of the field may have anticipated. With regard to another concern raised by Bush's survey—that actors in the conflict resolution field have done an inadequate job of advancing policymakers' and parties' receptivity to conflict resolution options—the authors of this issue suggest there is a wealth of information to bring to bear on this continuing challenge.

It is particularly important that these reviews and commentaries appear in a journal such as *CRQ*, which has a broad practitioner readership. The accumulating knowledge about these various communities of practice has direct application to the design of programs and the strategies and tools of practitioners. Individual practitioners have an ethical responsibility to become and remain acquainted with the collective learning that will allow them to more accurately represent their practice to relevant constituencies and potential clients and to continue to improve their own work. It is also fitting for the Association for Conflict Resolution to maintain such a journal for its members and the field and to seek ways to move relevant learning into the minds, models, materials, and skill sets of its members. This "translation" into usable knowledge is another sort of ethical responsibility and can be supported in many ways, including association publications, the Web site, section and chapter work, and section and association meetings. Perhaps the ACR Research section, as well as other groups, may help to complete the circle by encouraging a better integration of the knowledge-building needs of practitioners with the capacities of the academic and research community.

The very soon to be post-Hewlett Conflict Resolution Program world will require that additional leadership and stewardship be demonstrated by the leading conflict resolution organizations. By some measures, the Hewlett Foundation has played only a small part in the full activities of a very broad, diverse, and many-membered field. At the same time, the foundation's role in the creation and support of leading practitioner and support organizations, academic programs, and innovative knowledge-building and field-building initiatives has been substantial and in some cases perhaps critical to the field's development. One might reasonably argue that in some cases, what Hewlett funded helped to define the contours and parameters of the field itself. In the areas of knowledge building,

the Hewlett Foundation's role has been unique, with a significant number of academic programs, theory centers, and other institutions and organizations receiving support.

It may therefore be of some benefit to use this issue as a jumping-off point for a discussion about whether there is some slack to be picked up—and by what entities—relating to the ongoing and strategic agenda of building and using knowledge related to the conflict resolution field. There are questions about how knowledge gets transferred effectively, in various directions and for various purposes, among scholars, practitioners, parties in conflict, and the general public. How can the research included here, for instance, be packaged and made more available to policymakers? How can such research be expanded with better data sets, sample sizes, and, where appropriate, experimental or quasi-experimental designs? How can actors in the conflict resolution field, including academics and practitioners, establish more effective means of communicating and collaborating with one another in general and in specific endeavors? How does the specialization of practitioners, and the fact of scholars spread across a variety of disciplines, affect the field's ability to learn and to grow wisely and well?

In general, how do we continue to advance the state of the field's knowledge? And whose job is this, especially with the Hewlett Foundation's departure from its lengthy field-building and stewardship role? The conflict resolution world is fundamentally different in its accomplishments and its challenges than it was even a few years ago. It is probable that the way we think about the nature of the field itself, organize and support its institutional forms, identify and address important areas of inquiry, and craft and implement supportive communication strategies all need revision. There are tremendous opportunities for creative work by existing and new scholars, for thoughtful (and at times courageous) new collaboratives of researchers and practitioners, and for the development of a broader contingent of funders, to address these questions. For this to occur, it is important that individuals, organizations, and institutions in the field step up to take an active role in the considered reflection on these issues and to ensure that investments in the intellectual capital of the field continue. This will require less defensive practitioners, and practitioner organizations with their heads out of the sand and a broader view of their responsibilities. It will also require an academic community working more proactively against the isolation and specialization that can often result in ignorance of work in other sectors and disciplines, and of practice generally.

Practitioners and scholars alike will read, refer to, and, most importantly, use this issue of *CRQ* for some time to come. I thank *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, the Association for Conflict Resolution, the Indiana Conflict Resolution Institute, and each review and commentary author for their respective contributions to this issue. I extend a special note of appreciation to Lisa Bingham, director of the Indiana Conflict Resolution Institute, and Tricia Jones, *CRQ* editor, for having the vision and leadership to create and bring this idea to fruition. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and its Conflict Resolution program area in particular, are very pleased to be associated with such an important issue of *CRQ*.

### Reference

Bush, R. B. *The Knowledge Gaps Project: Unfinished Work, Open Questions*. Forthcoming.

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