



Executive Summary

New Routes to Community Health

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From 2006 to 2011, *New Routes to Community Health* brought together immigrant-led groups, local media organizations, and community institutions in eight cities to use storytelling and media making to address the health concerns of immigrants and refugees.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) funded the national program to build the capacity of immigrants to speak for themselves regarding their health challenges and those of their communities by creating local media, multimedia, and social media. The RWJF Board of Trustees authorized *New Routes* in November 2006 with funding for up to \$4 million to the Benton Foundation. MasComm Associates in Madison, Wis., managed the program.

[Read the full report.](#)
[Learn more on the program's website.](#)

CONTEXT

Just over 1 million newly documented and undocumented immigrants arrive in the United States each year. These already vulnerable people often face serious obstacles to gaining access to health care. Many lack health insurance, some have limited English proficiency, and their cultural customs and views of illness and medicine may differ from those of most Americans. Limited information about the U.S. health care system also prevents immigrants from seeking care for themselves and their U.S.-born children.

New Routes to Community Health built on *Sound Partners for Community Health*, an RWJF national program (November 1996 to July 2006). The program funded

collaborations between public radio stations (and later public television stations) and community organizations across the United States to increase the awareness of and involve citizens in local health care issues.

THE PROGRAM

New Routes planners envisioned going beyond traditional public broadcasting to tap other forms of community media that spoke to the needs of immigrants and refugees, such as cable television, commercial radio, video, and online media. To pursue that goal, each of the eight *New Routes* sites had three key partners:

- An organization that worked directly with and was led by immigrants
- A local media production center (i.e., a television or radio station) or other media organization (i.e., an advertising agency)
- A managing partner—often a university—that oversaw the fiscal and administrative aspects of the program¹

KEY RESULTS

According to a report *From Charting New Routes to Building New Bridges*, reports from and interviews with the national program staff, and the *New Routes website*, the program produced the following results:

- Project partners produced TV and radio features, telenovelas, first-person narratives, live theater, print materials, and social marketing campaigns in Amharic, Chinese, Creole, French, Lao, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, and Vietnamese—all designed to improve the health of immigrant communities and call attention to their needs.
- The collaborative storytelling and media-making process built immigrants' production, journalistic, message-framing, and leadership skills, as they solicited, managed, and promoted the interests of their communities.
- Immigrant leaders who emerged through *New Routes* used media making to bridge generational, cultural, legal-status, and language boundaries.
- Immigrants and refugees used *New Routes* to focus on the often-taboo subject of mental health.

¹Each site received a six-month planning grant of up to \$20,000, and up to \$205,000 over 33 months to pursue its project.

AFTERWARD

The Benton Foundation, which provided oversight to the program—and later the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation—will continue to host the *New Routes* website. Several of the eight sites have also continued work begun under *New Routes*. For example:

- The Domestic Worker Safety & Dignity Project in San Francisco collaborated with national advocates to produce a YouTube [video](#) in 2011 in response to *The Help*, a movie tells a story of domestic workers in Jackson, Miss., in 1972. The video shows how little has changed for domestic workers, and calls for passage of a California bill of rights for those workers.
- A 2011 [opinion piece](#) in the *Washington Post* drew attention to a film by Abriendo Las Cajas, the *New Routes* project in Oakland, Calif., about the lack of federal oversight of the content of Spanish-language broadcasts.

Program Management

National Program Office: MasComm Associates, Madison, Wis.

Oversight: Benton Foundation

Program Director: Beth Mastin
