How university educators and researchers tackle community problems is the focus of this new book. Based on case studies of projects in six different California regions, it examines both the risks and opportunities involved in applying university expertise to controversial local issues. Several commentaries compare the six cases and offer general lessons about making the transition from traditional disciplinary knowledge to the less structured and predictable world of local conflict.

Among the risks discussed in this analysis are the career uncertainties faced by university people, especially those trained in the laboratory sciences, who get involved in public issues that are not amenable to the application of scientific information and principles. On the positive side is the realization that universities—especially land grant institutions—have the obligation to direct their knowledge and skills to off-campus problems.

Much of the book is focused on the strategies for engaging effectively in public policy work at the community level, including aspects of project selection, timing, and collaboration with local actors. The case studies were written by county advisors and campus specialists of the University of California Cooperative Extension who directed recent projects. The community issues they describe deal with water quality, farm animal facility siting, public lands, Hispanic leadership, military base reuse, and Native-American reservations.

The California Communities Program provides direction and focus for UC Cooperative Extension's research and outreach work in the area of community development. The aim is to strengthen the leadership capabilities of local citizens, fortify community self-governance, and enhance local and regional economies.

About the authors

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