

Welcoming Initiatives in California

The Institute for Local Government's Public Engagement program partnered with Welcoming America to support the launch of the first two welcoming initiatives in California. Both communities - Redwood City and Oakley - undertook intensive multi-sector planning efforts with local officials as substantial partners, and adapted the leadership development, public engagement and strategic communications components of Welcoming America's model. California's Welcoming Initiatives - **Redwood City Together** and **You, Me, We = Oakley** - are funded by the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, Y&H Soda Foundation and the Zellerbach Family Foundation and began implementation in 2011.

Redwood City Together

Redwood City Together is coordinated by Redwood City 2020 (www.rwc2020.org) a collaborative composed of Redwood City, local schools, San Mateo County, the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and their Communities (Stanford University), Kaiser Permanente, and the Sequoia Healthcare District. The RWC 2020 collaborative also serves the unincorporated bordering community of North Fair Oaks, which has an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse community. Hispanic residents now make up more than one-third of the entire city's population, and in the 2010-11 school year, the Redwood City School district was 71 percent Latino and almost 49 percent of elementary students were English Language Learners.

Highlights from Redwood City Together

- Builds on existing services and activities with welcoming-related education and engagement components to engage longer-term residents and recent immigrants.
- Steering Committee includes elected and nominated local officials, city, county and school staff, community college staff and faculty, non-profit leaders, youth engagement specialists and congregational leaders.
- Successfully recruited and recently completed an intensive training for "welcoming" ambassadors.
- Incorporating welcoming messages into city-wide events; book groups and author events at the Redwood City Library, "integration" discussions in the Community Dialogues sponsored by the Sheriff's Office; and community dialogues and informal gatherings in community/ congregational settings.

Locally Developed Messages

No matter where we were born, we all want the same thing for our families - safe streets for our kids, neighbors who watch out for each other and warm, welcoming communities where we can all thrive together.

Redwood City continues to change and Redwood City Together believes we're most successful as a community when we recognize the strength in our diversity without losing sight of the values we share. No matter what our background is, we all want safe streets for our children, and neighbors who look out for each other, and a thriving community where we can all prosper together.

You, Me, We = Oakley

You, Me, We = Oakley (www.youmeweoakley.org) is a partnership between city officials, public school administrators, community-based organizations and congregations in one of the state's newest cities. The City of Oakley has experienced rapid growth – evolving from almond orchards to suburban subdivisions in a short period of time. The community is now home to longer-term residents of Italian and Portuguese descent, recent immigrants from Mexico and the Philippines, and families from urban environments seeking a “place for families in the heart of the delta.” Following an intensive planning process, “You, Me, We = Oakley” is now implementing a program involving local leadership, dialogue and communications to enhance the “welcoming” orientation of the city government and area schools, as well as of local residents.

Highlights from You, Me, We=Oakley

- Unanimous vote by city council and school boards to pass welcoming proclamation.
- Bridge Building Workshop with a panel of legal and law enforcement experts and community members.
- Citizenship Drive for eligible legal permanent residents in partnership with the International Institute of the Bay Area and the Contra Costa Interfaith Supporting Community Organization (CCISCO), the local PICO affiliate.
- Fair & Impartial Community Services Training scheduled for police officers and community services agencies of the city.
- “Creating a Welcoming Community” essay competition for middle and high school students in the Oakley schools.
- Welcoming presentations to community organizations including Girls Scouts Troop Leaders, the local Soccer League and information booths planned at community events.

Locally Developed Messages

Here in Oakley, we all want the same things for our families—safe streets for our kids, neighbors who watch out for each other, and a warm, welcoming community to call home.

Oakley values our traditions of community, hard work, and family. As our city continues to grow and change, it's important to recognize and celebrate the contributions that all of our residents make to our rich culture and shared prosperity.

Our success as a community depends on building a strong, integrated community where everyone feels welcome and respected. That's what makes Oakley a place for families—and a place worth sharing—in the heart of the delta.

The Continued Role of the Institute for Local Government

The Institute continues to facilitate learning and exchange across the two welcoming initiatives. The Institute also continues to promote the welcoming initiatives among local officials at conferences and workshops organized by the League of California Cities. These presentations aim to provide tangible resources to support the effective integration of immigrants and to stimulate discussion among local officials about the role of “welcoming local governments” in that integration process.