

California Communities Launch Initiatives to Strengthen Relationships between Immigrants and Longer-Term Residents

Two California cities are implementing welcoming initiatives to improve understanding and strengthen relationships between immigrant community members and longer term residents. **Redwood City** and the **City of Oakley** have undertaken multi-sector planning efforts with a substantial partnership role for local officials. The Four Freedoms Fund, Silicon Valley Community Foundation and Y&H Soda Foundation funded the planning phase and the latter two have recently approved grants for the implementation in Redwood City and the City of Oakley.

In Redwood City, this immigrant welcoming effort is called “Redwood City Together.” It is primarily an undertaking of 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. This collaborative also serves the unincorporated bordering community of North Fair Oaks, which has an ethnically diverse and significantly less affluent community than many other communities in Silicon Valley. The “Redwood City Together” initiative builds on existing services and activities that are offered by Redwood City 2020 and others, and adds new welcoming-related education and engagement components that together will engage longer-term residents and recent immigrants in a two-way immigrant integration process.

“You, Me, We = Oakley,” is a unique welcoming partnership that includes 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.” Oakley has completed an extensive planning process, adapting the Welcoming America model of local leadership development, public engagement and strategic communications, to promote immigrant welcoming in their community. They also plan to enhance the “welcoming” orientation of the city government and area schools, as well as by local residents.

Such work has been pioneered in eighteen other states by Welcoming America, a national, grassroots-driven collaborative that works to promote mutual respect and cooperation between foreign-born and U.S.-born Americans (www.welcomingamerica.org). In California, the Institute for Local Government (www.ca-ilg.org), the nonprofit research and education affiliate of the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties, has partnered with Welcoming America to support these first two local welcoming efforts in California.

Strengthening Communities: Building Relationships between Immigrants and Longer-term Residents, a session at the League of California Cities’ City Managers Department annual meeting in February 2012, will highlight Oakley and Redwood City’s immigrant “welcoming” strategies. This interactive session features city managers that will provide information on the purposes and goals of each city’s immigrant welcoming efforts, the components of each “welcoming” plan that has been developed, and strategies for successfully planning these multi-sector initiatives.

The Institute for Local Government provides information and resources to support effective and inclusive public engagement in California cities and counties, as well as selected immigrant engagement/integration initiatives (www.ca-ilg.org/immigrantengagement).