

The Redwood City 2020 Collaborative: Building Capacity for Community Youth Development

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This case study describes the genesis of Redwood City 2020. We examine how its partners respond to youth's ever-changing needs, the pressures of economic shifts, and policy changes. We consider factors affecting the collaborative's success, and the challenges it faces as it seeks to continue, deepen, and extend its support for community youth development.

Introduction

"...revitalizing a city requires leaders who can work cooperatively across boundaries; leaders who can work in networks of responsibility with all who share common goals; leaders who know how to listen to the voices of participants."¹

John W. Gardner

Civic leaders have long argued that democracies are most vibrant when initiative, leadership, and ownership are dispersed among a diverse cast of actors at all levels of the political system. Nowhere is this kind of joint action more important than at the local level, where programs and policies have a direct impact on the character and quality of community life.

Many community leaders acknowledge the value of joint action, but establishing collaboratives to inform decisions, facilitate action, and extend resources remains a challenge. Even when such collaboratives exist, they seldom make more than superficial changes because individual interests stemming from political jurisdiction, agency domain, or professional turf tend to supersede collective interest in broader community well-being.

The Redwood City 2020 collaborative is an exception to this discouraging picture. It shows that civic capacity can be created and mobilized for community change and illustrates the ways that community leaders can create new resources and make existing programs and policies work to collective advantage.

Redwood City 2020 is jointly governed by representatives from the City of Redwood City, the County of San Mateo, the Redwood City School District, the Sequoia Union High School District, Kaiser Permanente, Sequoia Healthcare District, and the John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities at Stanford University. Its community-based partners include the Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center, Youth and Family Enrichment Services, Citizen Schools, and Jewish Family Children's Services. Through Redwood City 2020, elected officials, public managers and community leaders jointly define community goals and establish priorities for action.

¹ John W. Gardner, *Living, Leading and the American Dream* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2003) 167.

A focus on youth

The centerpiece of Redwood City 2020 is young people, which is noteworthy because few communities, even those with functioning collaboratives or partnerships, have placed youth at the core of their mission. Through Redwood City 2020, public, private, and nonprofit partners work together to pursue cross-sector policies and programs and to build overall community capacity to support youth.

The characteristics of Redwood City – as a backdrop for this successful collaboration – are fundamental to its work. Redwood City is located in San Mateo County, California, about halfway between San Francisco and San Jose. Including the unincorporated area of North Fair Oaks, which Redwood City 2020 also includes in its focus, the area is home to about 90,800 residents. Its population varies tremendously ethnically, with over half its residents identifying as White (66%), nearly a third of its residents as Latino (38%), and the remainder primarily comprised of Asians (9%) and African Americans (3%). The City is diverse in the socio-economic status of its residents as well. Median income in the City itself is \$66,700,² but neighboring North Fair Oaks has a lower median income of about \$55,000, both of which are higher than the median income in California as a whole and the U.S. median income. In Redwood City, 6% of residents fall below the federal poverty line, but in North Fair Oaks, 15% of residents – and 17% of children under age 18 – are poor. Redwood City's K-8 school district serves both Redwood City and North Fair Oaks and has a student population that is not representative of the community as a whole, with higher concentrations of Latinos (67%), other non-white students (9%), and students from low-income families – more than half the students are eligible for the free or reduced-price lunch. The Redwood City community is, as a county supervisor put it, a “microcosm of the peninsula...pockets of need, pockets of wealth.”³

² This section relies on data that can be found at <http://factfinder.census.gov/>, http://www.greatschools.net/cgi-bin/ca/district_profile/795/, and <http://www.redwoodcity.org/about/population.html>.

³ This quote and all that follow come from interviews conducted in the summers of 2003 and 2004. See the last page for a full list of participating organizations.

Even with the dual realities of this community, Redwood City 2020 has been successful in creating momentum toward a youth-centered agenda. As a result of this collaborative, civic leaders are working together to support youth and their families. These partners take as a premise that resources and opportunities to support youth development require community change, and thus embrace the concept of community youth development as defining their work.

Founding a community collaborative

Getting started

Getting started is the hardest part of building the relationships and shared understandings essential for an effective community collaborative. Who should convene and participate? What are the incentives? Why should community leaders and public managers disregard traditional, cultural, jurisdictional, or organizational boundaries to collaborate on new initiatives?

In the early 1990s, a number of community-based coalitions emerged to tackle substance abuse, teen pregnancy, and violence prevention in Redwood City. Although each group operated independently and focused on a single issue, they all shared a desire to work more closely with public agencies. One set of stakeholders turned to Maureen Borland, the recently appointed director of San Mateo County's Human Services Agency, for leadership. Borland's agency responded by providing the seed funding that launched the *South County Coalition for Prevention of Substance Abuse*. For about a year, a group met to develop the purpose and goals for this coalition. They envisioned a relatively simple structure and hired Beth Ross as Executive Director to help community groups identify and tackle neighborhood concerns. The coalition was purposeful, but still very much learning by doing. As Ross recalls, people were “beginning to think collaboratively, or wanting to, but not quite knowing [how], struggling with what that might look like or what it might do.”

Taft Elementary School, located in one of the city's poorest neighborhoods and serving a predominantly Latino student body, quickly emerged as a starting point for the new coalition's work. The school was dealing with substance abuse related problems in its vicinity: a

number of methamphetamine houses were located near the school and, on several occasions, drug paraphernalia had been found on the campus. Ross came on board just as Taft's then principal, Caroline Currie, began to reach out to a neighborhood association and other community leaders for help. The City supported their initial joint efforts to create a drug-free zone and this work led to conversations among the Taft community about how they could support children and youth. Ross continued to work with the principal and a neighborhood group around broader school planning issues. In her view, her role was to "work with the community and help bring in resources, bring things to bear on the issues that were important to them." Ross brought prior experience with the Healthy Start program, California's school-linked services initiative, a background that seemed particularly relevant to the emerging community priorities. The group decided to look into creating Family Resource Centers, resources of the type featured by the Healthy Start initiative.

Learning from others

Other communities' experiences proved to be a critical asset to the burgeoning partnership in developing plans for the Family Resource Centers. A representative at Kaiser Hospital approached Human Services Agency Director Borland about attending a Healthy Communities conference sponsored by the National Civic League. The conference was designed for teams of community members who attended quarterly sessions over the course of a year. With support from Borland, Ross agreed to participate, along with Currie and a representative from Kaiser. According to Currie, the conference "changed our lives" and set the course for the new partnership. Reflecting on the conference, they realized that their work would be more compelling if it was organized around a broad community agenda versus a single issue. They also concluded that it was not a good idea to focus just on substance abuse, but to take a broader view of contributing factors in the community. As Borland put it, "It became clear to all of us that you can't deal with just one issue at a time. You really have to look at it holistically." In terms of impact, as well as appeal, the potential benefits of a more comprehensive youth-focused initiative – a healthy community – became apparent. Planning for the Family Resource Centers got underway under that banner.

Convening leadership

This expanded vision for developing a healthy community spurred a larger meeting with City and County policymakers – including the City and County managers – and some of their staff. At the time, it was unprecedented that these leaders would come together to plan or even converse, but this collaboration proved to be effective. The policymakers, like the neighborhood residents, were convinced that the Family Resource Centers offered a clear and immediate way to help the community. The original South County Coalition for Prevention of Substance Abuse was deemed too narrow and deficit-oriented for a healthy community focus. Shortly after that meeting, Redwood City 2000 (later changed to Redwood City 2020) was born.

Redwood City 2020 partners say that their early work with policymakers generated a critical mass of authoritative support for youth development. On three occasions, Redwood City 2020 brought together members of the County Board of Supervisors, the two School District Boards, and the City Council. These joint meetings brought visibility and credibility to Redwood City 2020, creating a context in which the partners could promote a youth development agenda and make education a major priority.

Mobilizing community support

The new collaborative required community leaders to change their thinking and their accustomed ways of conducting community business. Importantly, it also required the broader community to buy into the collaborative. In October 1996, the group convened a town hall meeting at Cañada College. The event, planned by Redwood City 2020's Community Action Team and attended by hundreds of Redwood City residents, was likened by organizers to a community barn-raising – recalling a time in the country's history when communities turned to themselves, not government, to solve problems. As one Redwood City 2020 founder said, describing the contemporary community culture: "When something is wrong, turn to your government. First blame them, and then tell them to fix it – with no responsibility or accountability by citizens."

The town hall session began with an open youth forum. Youth from all Redwood City neighborhoods talked about their needs and concerns. It ended with a participant-developed blueprint “for what we can do [for youth] together as a community – not the school district, not city government, but the community.” City Manager Ed Everett regarded that gathering, which received broad and positive coverage in the local media, as key to generating support for the collaborative and its focus on youth: “It was pouring the foundation before we built upon it...it gave us enormous credibility...the city council listens to that many people coming out and saying something.” Everett believed that the kinds of community connections made at the initial town hall meeting and developed subsequently distinguish Redwood City from other communities. “There are lots of cities that are well run and well managed,” he said, “but people don’t feel connected...[the country has] lost community.”

With input from the community, the Community Action Team developed a broad vision for a healthy community. This vision emphasized building civic capacity and leadership, using school sites as community centers, revitalizing downtown, and forming school-business partnerships. Toward this end, the Redwood City 2020 partners focused on developing Family Resource Centers at four school sites and offered support for collaborations working on teen pregnancy prevention, violence prevention, and early childhood education.

Mission and operating principles

Today, the mission of Redwood City 2020 is to forge meaningful partnerships “to support the success of all youth and families and to engage and strengthen the community.”⁴ Within this broad domain, Redwood City 2020 has stayed true to the operating principles outlined in its original charter: leveraging resources, sustaining and adapting successful programs, and coordinating cross-system interventions that are informed by data – all in service of youth and their families and driven by an orientation of community building and empowerment.⁵

⁴ See <http://www.ci.redwood-city.ca.us/manager/initiatives/rwc2020.html>

⁵ Redwood City 2020, *Governance Structure FY 06-07*.

Funding

Redwood City 2020 is a unique, hybrid entity with links to the public and nonprofit sectors and a projected budget of approximately \$4.5 million for the fiscal year 2007-08.⁶ The collaborative engages multiple policy boards that are involved with the community’s children, youth, and families. Sterling Speirn, during his tenure as President of the Peninsula Community Foundation (now Silicon Valley Community Foundation), underscored this distinctive and important feature of 2020: “when funders go looking for collaboratives with all key players on board, Redwood City is just off the charts. In other communities, either the city or the schools are missing in action.” Redwood City 2020 receives an annual contribution of \$25,000 from each of its partner organizations: the City of Redwood City, Sequoia Union High School District, Redwood City School District, San Mateo County, The John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, Sequoia Healthcare District and Kaiser Permanente. These contributions provide general operating support for Redwood City 2020. The collaborative receives funds from others as well, including a corporate donor, federal/state agencies and a number of private foundations. These funds are channeled into the citywide initiatives that are managed or supported by the collaborative.

Under the current funding structure, the collaborative cannot serve as its own fiscal agent. At one point, the partners briefly debated the pros and cons of adopting a more formal institutional form such as 501 (c)(3) status, an arrangement that would allow the collaborative to post direct charges for its administrative supports to grant budgets. However, at the time, partners opposed adopting a form that would place them in direct competition with the local nonprofits that Redwood City 2020 supports. In fact, they pointed to several advantages of the existing form. First, the freestanding nature of Redwood City 2020 reinforces (and is reinforced by) its emphasis on collaboration; the City serves as its fiscal agent and Redwood City 2020 is housed by the school district. This arrangement contributes to the perception that Redwood City 2020 is not the apparatus of one particular entity but a shared endeavor that all the partners own jointly. Also, because it exists as a result of inter-agency agreements, there is a

⁶ Redwood City 2020, *Budget FY 2007-08*.

sense that Redwood City 2020 has to continually prove itself. It does not, like many public institutions, have the luxury of being “taken for granted” and has a strong incentive to demonstrate effectiveness.

Staffing and governance

Redwood City 2020 operates with a lean staff. There is a full-time Executive Director whose salary is paid through a contractual arrangement with the city. In November of 2001, the original Director of the Redwood City Family Resource Centers (a Redwood City School District employee) took on a dual role as the Associate Director for Redwood City 2020 in order to integrate the administrations of Redwood City 2020 and the Redwood City Family Resource Centers. After community schools were introduced, the Redwood City School District changed the title *Director of Family Resource Centers* to *Director of School-Community Partnerships*. Starting in the 2007-08 school year, this individual will report solely to the Superintendent of the Redwood City School District. In 2003, a part-time Administrative Assistant was brought on board. This position currently supports the Executive Director and the Director of School Community Partnerships.

There are two layers of governance within Redwood City 2020: a *Cabinet* that meets monthly and provides more hands-on oversight and direction; and a *Coordinating Council* that meets once quarterly and acts on the recommendations of the Cabinet. One senior staff person from each of the public agencies sits on the Cabinet, which meets every other month. This body is responsible for hiring and guiding the Executive Director, overseeing the annual budget and developing standards for approval by the Coordinating Council, problem-solving, identifying opportunities for collaboration and integration, and building personal relationships.⁷ One partner dubbed members of this body as the “resource controllers” [because] as we are moving ahead we are able to bring resources from all of our different organizations and figure out how to maximize resources and not duplicate efforts.”

Cabinet members plus elected representatives from their policy boards (or their equivalents) make up the Coordinating Council. This group meets quarterly and

it is the decision making body for Redwood City 2020. Its members monitor Redwood City 2020 activities, identify and advocate around policy issues to improve the lives of youth and families, oversee system changes and improvements that support the wellbeing of youth and families, and develop recommendations about resource allocation to take back to their own governing bodies.

Collaborating for community youth development

“Children and families are receiving services they didn’t receive before. There’s a renewed spirit in youth development... spin-offs in terms of new relationships, connections people didn’t see before....”

Ron Crates, Former Superintendent
Redwood City School District

Redwood City 2020 takes a broad view of community building. Partners characterize the collaborative in various ways: “an umbrella that allows organizations to do their projects,” “a forum that helps people integrate their different ideas,” “a community change agent.” The collaborative plays dual roles in service of its youth development agenda. At one level, Redwood City 2020 established itself as an incubator and technical assistance provider for critical programs or initiatives. However, the collaborative also operates in a much broader sphere – it generates and protects community resources for youth in ways that engender more effective public investment in youth development. Over time, these efforts have enhanced Redwood City’s capacity to support youth development financially, politically, and substantively and have helped others act with greater effect than they could alone. “They’re dropping their silos,” said City Manager Everett about partner collaboration. The following are examples of Redwood City 2020’s impact on program and resource development.

Founding critical programs and initiatives

After-School Learning Centers: Redwood City 2020 helped to establish after-school programming at eight public schools. The City Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department, an early partner of the collaborative, invested heavily in this effort as the original fiscal agent and program provider for all eight

⁷ Redwood City 2020, *Governance Structure FY 06-07*.

programs. This arrangement has evolved over time. The most significant shifts involved the transfer of fiscal responsibility to the Redwood City School District and the addition of *Citizen Schools* and *Knowledge Learning Centers* as program providers. The after-school programs now bring academic, enrichment, and recreational activities to nine school sites, serving over 900 students a day. By working closely with the Parks and Recreation Department, Redwood City 2020 fostered the local collaboration and ownership that was needed to establish these programs and a growing list of partners continues to steward the overall effort.

Sequoia Teen Resource Center & Teen Wellness

Center: The Sequoia Teen Resource Center emerged as a way to reconfigure and sustain existing supports at Sequoia High School, flagship school of the Sequoia Union High School District. Sequoia, is attended by many Redwood City youth. Although individual staff members at the school had reached out to community-based organizations, these efforts were not orchestrated in any systematic fashion and were threatened by potential budget cuts. With strong support from the district and school leaders, Redwood City 2020 introduced a service delivery model based on its work with the Family Resource Centers. The collaborative enlisted Youth and Family Enrichment Services, a nonprofit partner, to help develop and staff the Teen Resource Center at Sequoia High School. Redwood City 2020 also helped to facilitate the conversations that brought the Teen Wellness Center to the Sequoia High School campus. The Wellness Center operates as a clinic of San Mateo Medical Center and offers health care services to Redwood City youth who are 12-21 years of age.

Community schools: Redwood City 2020 supported the creation of Family Resource Centers on four school campuses beginning in the mid-1990s. In 2003, collaborative staff and partners launched a multi-year initiative to develop a community school – featuring a comprehensive and coordinated network of services, supports, and opportunities for students and their families – at each of the four sites. Redwood City 2020 set the stage for this transition by focusing the attention of school administrators and other key policymakers on youth development and education and garnering their support for the larger initiative.

The Associate Director of Redwood City 2020 – who is also the Director of School-Community Partnerships for the Redwood City School District – supervised the Community School Coordinators, coaching them as they created community school work plans, solved problems, and developed relationships with local partners. Over time, this site-specific technical assistance helped to build the momentum for change at each site. With consistent support from the collaborative staff and partners, Community School Coordinators embraced the critical task of deepening their relationships with school administrators – the first step toward creating school cultures that truly reflect the community school approach.

System level interventions: Redwood City 2020 has a strong track record of success in establishing key programs for youth. The collaborative has also demonstrated its capacity to manage system-level interventions. For example, in 2006 the San Mateo County Human Services Agency chose the collaborative to implement *Differential Response* (an element of its Child Welfare Redesign program) throughout the city. The collaborative also received funding from First Five San Mateo for *School Readiness* and *Preschool for All* initiatives to expand services, support and quality education to children ages 0-5 years and their families. These types of grant agreements, which primarily engage the collaborative in convening and coordination, show that it is valued and respected as a vehicle for local action.

Generating and protecting resources

Pooled resources: Redwood City 2020 has enhanced resources for youth development in at least three ways. First, the funding partners have pooled resources by supporting special projects and making regular financial contributions to sustain the collaborative and meet specific needs beyond the capacity of any one of them. For example, the City and the School District have crafted agreements for playgrounds at seventeen sites. These sports fields benefit the entire community as they can be used outside school hours by the Parks, Recreation, and Community Services Department. Shared resources, partners believe, have promoted a larger sense of accountability to one another and responsibility to the broader community good. Shared

resources are more than fiscal, and at times also include access to technical resources, networks, and other professional contacts. These opportunities have especially benefited nonprofits in the community that serve youth but are not part of the formal collaborative structure. For example, the former Executive Director of Youth and Family and Enrichment Services, said that Redwood City 2020 has connected his agency to new partners and enabled them to “take our youth development expertise to places where we wouldn’t have had entrée to without 2020.” For this and other nonprofit leaders, the collaborative has made their jobs easier because it enhanced access and supports with grants, pooled resources, and opportunities to convene.

Joint budgeting: A second way that Redwood City has enhanced resources for youth development is through joint budgeting. During the last two budget cycles, three of the public managers participated in joint budgeting, consulting with each other and assessing the collective impact of their decisions. In addition to making annual contributions and funding special projects, Redwood City 2020 partners have together weathered the tough times precipitated by economic crisis. For instance, during a time of economic crisis, the City closed some of its day care centers both to save city money and to redirect families to the YMCA, which desperately needed the revenue. The city manager stressed the importance of Redwood City 2020’s explicit priority for youth development as budget cuts were made, explaining “We stayed fairly connected...it was probably only four or five phone calls but they were very important to me. I knew what they were doing in their budget [and] they knew what I was doing. No one was surprised.” This approach to allocating public funds resulted in a steady flow of resources for youth development and education programs despite a major economic downturn. The partners were willing and able to budget together because of their track record of collaboration through Redwood City 2020. As one partner said, “Once you ‘get’ collaboration then you don’t make decisions in the silo.” This mindset was also evident among policymakers who attached a great deal of value to the matched funds from other Redwood City 2020 partners. The potential loss of these funds played a major role in convincing policymakers to continue investing in Redwood City 2020. Furthermore, the partners’ commitment continued even in the midst of an

economic downturn, continuing their annual contributions even during financial crisis.

Outside resources: Finally, Redwood City 2020 has successfully leveraged outside resources to support youth development work in Redwood City, playing the roles of catalyst, convener, and coordinator to develop new resources for youth in the community. For example, after learning of a federal grant that required a rural counterpart, Redwood City 2020 invited the South Coast Collaborative to jointly apply for these funds. The resulting urban/rural partnership benefited both groups. The Executive Director also helped weave together multiple funding streams for the Teen Resource and Wellness Center on the Sequoia High School campus. When funding for a universal preschool pilot program in San Mateo County appeared on the horizon, Redwood City 2020 responded by facilitating discussions among its partners. This discussion focused on the potential relevance of universal preschools to the community’s agenda, local readiness to move in this direction, and the concrete next steps for submitting an application. Through Redwood City 2020, the San Mateo County Human Services Agency and the Redwood City School District developed a collaborative application to the California Endowment for “express-lane eligibility” for health insurance. With it, children who apply for Free and Reduced Price Lunch will automatically be able to use that as application for MediCal benefits. Redwood City was funded as one of four communities in the state to pilot this effort.

Foundation staff members familiar with Redwood City 2020 agree that it is especially attractive to funders interested in community youth development partly because the network of partners are already making joint investments. The collaborative infrastructure of Redwood City 2020 was also appealing to the John W. Gardner Center at Stanford University, Sequoia Healthcare District, San Mateo County Health Department, and Kaiser Permanente who came on board as funding partners. Potential investors appreciate that Redwood City 2020 partners are “boundary spanners” who value their ability to bring people to the table around specific issues. Redwood City 2020 removes the need for investors to create new collaborations and eliminates the inefficiency of forging relationships on a “case by case” basis. Working with the collaborative also

dissolved barriers for “outsiders.” The Executive Director reflected that “if Stanford had wanted to come in and work with all of these disparate groups [around issues of community youth development], it would have taken a lot longer and it would have been an outside idea coming in. We most definitely provided a vehicle...”

* * *

As its work has evolved, Redwood City 2020 has benefited from a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. Over time, successful collaboration has bred a continuous cycle of goodwill, as partners increasingly value their work together and witness the increasing coherence around resources for children and youth. Since its founding over a decade ago, Redwood City 2020 can count impressive accomplishments. The collaborative has contributed new resources to children and youth in Redwood City, especially those who are most needy. Redwood City 2020 has established a climate for risk-taking within the collaborative and by extension in the community; Redwood City 2020 has created a culture that encourages innovative thinking. Its tightly networked partnership makes Redwood City attractive to funders. The collaborative has leveraged existing resources and generated new ones to support youth. Its accomplishments allow the community to be proactive in creating policies that help children and youth, which also create conditions favorable for competitive funding receipt.

Partners generally believe that Redwood City 2020 has become part of the community’s way of approaching all policies that affect youth. For example, when Sequoia Union High School District sought a new superintendent in 2003, its board would not, as one partner put it, “vote for anyone who had values or a belief system that would mess with collaboration.”

Youth are now expected participants in many of the community conversations that affect them. For example, young people participated in community dialogues with adults as part of the city’s *Community Builders* sessions, an effort intended to develop a shared goals and commitment to Redwood City among its diverse residents. In September 2007, the City of Redwood City and Redwood City 2020 will host another youth-adult

gathering on the Sequoia High School campus. This event will bring youth and adults together to discuss their unique and complementary roles as community members.

The collaborative itself appears to have solid footing in Redwood City. Maureen Borland, former Director of the San Mateo County Human Services Agency, reflected that, if the collaborative disbanded, “There would be a huge hole. People wouldn’t know how to deal with this community. Plus, we have blended money and staff to such a degree I don’t know how we’d ever pull it apart.” City Council member Barbara Pierce said that if “institutionalized” means “worth fighting for,” then Redwood City 2020 is institutionalized among agency heads and policymakers.

What made Redwood City 2020 an effective collaborative?

How and why did Redwood City 2020 succeed where so many other communities have failed? It effectively established relationships and collaboration for significant community change. Almost everyone touched by Redwood City 2020 agrees that the collaborative has been a success and concurs with San Mateo County Supervisor Rose Jacobs Gibson’s assessment that the collaborative and the environment it creates for addressing community youth development issues is “a model for others.”

Participants and observers emphasize several explanations for the collaborative’s accomplishments. Not surprisingly, most start their list with “the people.”

Trusted relationships

Redwood City 2020 was advantaged from the start by a set of strong, long-term relationships that existed among the individuals who would be key players in conceiving and developing the collaborative. In a city where the important policy boards (City Council, School Boards, and Board of Supervisors) were geographically proximate and elected officials knew each other, managers were already working outside their own agency or group, blurring jurisdictional boundaries. As a result, their work was unimpaired by the distrust, self-protective posture and norms of independent action that frustrate efforts to establish meaningful collaborative

networks in other communities. Redwood City 2020 tapped into the individual experiences and expertise of public managers who were already attuned to the benefits of engaging with others as a way to achieve results.

Although a history of cooperation in Redwood City laid the groundwork for collaboration, the initial partners took concrete steps to build on this legacy. By proactively engaging in the process of clarifying a common mission and goals, they created a shared identity, and brought their unique and diverse resources to bear on community issues. Redwood City 2020 emerged as a space where partners could focus on some common interests that were larger and more compelling than their own individual spheres of work. One member highlighted the essential role of mutual trust and accountability within the group when he said “we’re careful politically not to give any partner negative exposure – we operate with conditions of mutual respect, openness...and a results orientation.” The significant interpersonal trust among collaborators led to high levels of mutual influence on outcomes, motivation to implement decisions, and closeness as a collaborative team.

Personalities, commitment to community and youth

The personalities of key leaders – elected, appointed, and community-based – helped to create and sustain Redwood City 2020. One partner commented that the collaborative was based in the “unique chemistry of longstanding players who are classic boundary spanners” and their “willingness to put egos aside – to say ‘yes, I created this, but we can do it better.’” A collaborative observer made a similar point, commenting on the willingness of individuals involved to think about doing things differently rather than defending existing practices. Considering the people involved in Redwood City 2020 at the outset, many observers and participants believe that the “stars were aligned” as the collaborative was imagined and developed. These personalities and relationships enabled partners to exercise what John W. Gardner termed “non-jurisdictional power” - leadership based in

ideas and shared understandings rather than position or organizational role.⁸

Redwood City 2020 appealed to the original partners on a deeper, more personal, level. When asked why they agreed to become part of this work in the first place, several partners emphasized the alignment between what Redwood City 2020 was trying to do and their own personal vision for the community and its youth. These founders thought of themselves as stewards of the resources and opportunities available to young people in Redwood City and focused on building community will to provide more and better resources for youth.

Leadership

Partners and observers cite leadership stability as another important factor in the collaborative’s development and impact. The initial core leadership – Borland, Crates and Everett – continued in their roles for many years. Beth Ross was at the helm for almost a decade, leaving the position in the fall of 2004. The mutual accountability, personal commitments and common goals associated with this steady guidance provided vital glue for the collaborative and legitimacy in the broader community. Partners also unanimously credit the original Executive Director’s special brand of facilitative leadership and personal skills as a factor essential to Redwood City 2020’s success. They highlight her ability to bring people to the table, her willingness to listen, her sense of fairness, and her desire to forge a true collaboration rather than “just create another agency,” as she put it.

Community buy-in

The town hall meeting was, as one partner put it, a “cornerstone” of the initial planning process that grew out of Redwood City 2020. The blueprint that community members developed there still provides direction for the collaborative and the gathering served as an influential birth announcement. Participants excited by the idea went back to their neighborhoods and organizations as advocates. A community activist

⁸ Douglas Henton, John Melville & Kimberly Walesh. *Grassroots leaders for a new economy*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997) 73.

said that the occasion “sold me, hook line and sinker” on the collaborative and its agenda.

Local press provided several positive accounts of what had taken place on that October day in 1995. The resulting community support enabled both appointed and elected officials to move the collaborative’s agenda. For example, after the Town Hall meeting, the City Council made youth development a policy priority. The County Board of Supervisors also made children and youth issued a countywide focus. According to Barbara Pierce, Mayor of Redwood City, “it really opened to the door for additional collaborations and partnerships.”

Broad, long-term vision

Redwood City 2020’s particular vision about community youth development played a strategic role in its success. Leaders followed early advice to adopt a broad objective—healthy communities— that could engage a range of stakeholders rather than a narrow project focus— substance abuse prevention—that would be of limited interest and likely a limited time frame. Partners furthermore were explicit from the beginning that the collaborative was about community change to benefit youth, not quick fixes, and that they were in it for the long haul. This express investment by appointed community leaders, and subsequent championing by elected civic leaders, reinforced partners’ efforts to foster change in community culture and will to support youth.

Sustaining the collaborative

Redwood City 2020 set out to effect positive change in the resources and opportunities available to the community’s young people. Leaders also hoped, through the collaborative, to make Redwood City “a lighthouse,” as one partner put it – a model of how an economically and ethnically diverse community can function, live and work together in a productive way. After more than a decade, Redwood City 2020 counts significant successes but also confronts significant challenges to its long-term health and continued contribution to community youth development.

Observers and analysts of community change highlight four stages in community building: initiation,

mobilization, collective action and sustaining change.⁹ Initiation involves designing an initiative, exploring alternatives, convening leaders and leveraging opportunities. Mobilization entails communicating the vision, inspiring enthusiasm and recruiting supporters. Collaborative action follows, resulting in tangible results, new relationships and coalitions, and in the best case, changed culture.

Redwood City 2020 has moved successfully through the first three stages. Its challenge now lies in accomplishing the fourth stage of community building and change, sustaining the organization and the change it has promoted, while also deepening and extending its accomplishments and reach. Sustaining Redwood City 2020’s capacity and role necessarily presents the practical and difficult tasks of securing the funds needed to maintain the organization. Acquiring operational support is an ongoing struggle. But the more critical challenges to the collaborative in its next 10 years involve renewing itself.

Managing Leadership Transition

What happens when leaders move on? Redwood City 2020 has benefited from leadership of unusual tenure, but this situation has begun to change. In the fall of 2004, Beth Ross left the collaborative after ten years as its Executive Director. The following year, Maureen Borland retired from the San Mateo County Human Services Agency and Ron Crates resigned as Superintendent for the Redwood City School District. Ed Everett, City Manager, will retire in the fall of 2007. Each successor brings a unique history and a different perspective to the table. Moreover, new leaders – representing Sequoia Union High School District, the San Mateo County Health Department, Sequoia Healthcare District, and Kaiser Permanente – have also joined the collaborative within the last several years. Developing concrete plans to manage leadership transition figures critically in the collaborative’s future. The individuals involved in the creation and initial years of Redwood 2020 defined the collaborative and played a vital role in its accomplishments; it is essential to

⁹ Alliance for Regional Stewardship. *Regional stewardship: A commitment to place. Monograph #1.* (Palo Alto, CA: Author, October 2000).

consider how leaders who follow can build on these successes and guide the collaborative in its second decade.

Reengaging the community and restarting the change process

Organizations evolve and contexts change. Redwood City 2020 has come to a point in its development where it needs to reengage community in its mission – to restart the change process.¹⁰ As Redwood City 2020 has grown, its administrative and collaborative work has taken precedence over engaging community members in meaningful roles. Several of the initial founders expressed the need to expand the circle, re-energize the community and reinforce. City Manager Ed Everett reflected the views of his colleagues when he said: “We haven’t been doing it to our detriment...it’s time to build another platform base and start to work up. It’s time to do another community visioning process, engage the community in defining the community’s needs and focus on how to meet them.” Supervisor Gibson stressed changed circumstances: “It’s a different time and place than when they started.” Shortly before her retirement, Maureen Borland highlighted the need to “pull more people to the table, get more people engaged, and lay out key issues to work on in the next few years.” She and others believed that reengagement and renewal necessarily would involve educating the community about Redwood City 2020 and how it operates. “We need to spread the word about what a collaboration is and what it means to work as a collaborative, how you make decisions differently, relate differently, use resources differently.” Creating new political and financial support for the collaborative, partners agree, requires this level of understanding of its unique structure and value to a wide constituency.

Partners also stress the need for more ethnic diversity at all levels of the collaborative. Former Superintendent Ron Crates observed that the collaborative has “never achieved the diversity representative of the broader community – our challenge is to how to do that in an

authentic way, so their participation is beneficial to them. We have done a good job recruiting a diverse staff, but still need to do more in terms of the community.” Restarting the change process requires Redwood City 2020 to show how all will be served by a common purpose and collaborative organization.

The community needs to be better informed about Redwood City 2020 – what it is, what it stands for, why it matters. A second Town Meeting can build awareness about the contribution of Redwood City 2020, reopen channels for dialogue and learning, and expand responsibility for the well-being of the community’s youth and families. Sustaining Redwood City 2020 returns the collaborative to the tasks that define first stages of community building – initiating change and mobilizing support. More than a decade after its inception, another “community barn raising” seems ideally suited to deepening the collaborative’s work, encouraging hearts, and recapturing the energy generated by its initial grassroots movement to envision the future.

We would like to acknowledge all of the individuals who contributed their time and insights to this research. Our analysis draws on interview data collected during the summers of 2003 and 2004. The list of interviewees included community members as well as former or current staff from the following agencies:

*City of Redwood City
Peninsula Community Foundation (now Silicon Valley Community Foundation)
Peninsula Conflict Resolution Center
Peninsula Partnership for Children, Youth and Families
Redwood City 2020
Redwood City School District
Redwood City Parks, Recreation and Community Services
San Mateo County Board of Supervisors
San Mateo County Human Services Agency
Sequoia Union High School District
Taft Elementary School
Youth and Family Enrichment Services*

¹⁰ Alliance for Regional Stewardship. *The Practice of Regional Stewardship: Developing Leaders for Regional Action. Monograph #5* (Palo Alto, CA: Author, March 2002).