

May 1, 2007

**TO:** Cassandra Jennings, Assistant City Manager, City of Sacramento

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**RE:** Sacramento city-wide youth director position

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**Background:**

In February 2007, the Mayor's Commission set forth in the Sacramento Agenda for Youth recommendations to establish a position dedicated to improving the lives of youth in the city and responsible for increasing innovation, increasing the effectiveness of current programs and leveraging current and future opportunities towards this end.

Given the Forum for Youth Investment's extensive experience learning from and supporting state and local leaders dedicated to similar goals and roles, the Assistant City Manager requested that we help the city explore options for the creation of such a position. To flesh out this knowledge base with concrete examples, we interviewed leaders of city-wide youth structures within 5 cities: Nashville, Kansas City, Grand Rapids, Minneapolis and Savannah. We intentionally sought a range of examples in terms of structure, authority and function, and attempted to focus on cities similar in size to Sacramento.

As a result, we interviewed leadership connected to a range of examples:

- **The former Executive Director of a Mayor's Office for Children and Youth, reporting directly to the mayor in a city with a strong mayoral structure (Nashville).** The county and city are combined jurisdictions and the mayor reviews and approves the overall school budget. The position champions the mayor's child and youth agenda and staffs the mayor at all related meetings/events. The position does not report to a separate standing body and derives its authority as a direct representative of the mayor.
- **The Youth Advocacy Manager for the Office for Youth Advocacy, which sits within the city manager's office (Kansas City).** While light on the coordination and policy alignment role, this office distributes a dedicated funding stream that is .025% of the city's construction budget and 20% of parking fee revenues. The office is tasked with developing and sponsoring initiatives for youth in partnership with youth-serving organizations, city departments, the business community and community service organizations.
- **The Administrator of an Office for Children, Youth and Families which is a joint partnership of the city commission and board of education (Grand Rapids).** This office sits inside the city offices but ostensibly reports both to the mayor and the school superintendent. The office focuses on issues related to children and youth within the city. The liaison committee includes representatives from both entities, as well as city departments and the city manager's office.
- **The Executive Director of a Youth Coordinating Board established by a joint powers agreement between city and county departments (Minneapolis).** This structure was set up by a joint powers agreement between the City, the public school board, the parks and recreation board, the public library board and the county board of commissioners. The board focuses on cross-jurisdictional collaboration and city alignment on child and youth issues.
- **The Executive Director of a county collaborative (Youth Futures Authority) established by state legislation at the request of the mayor and other local leaders (Savannah).** This county collaborative is comprised of city, county, and state representatives, the board of education, health and

human service agencies, nonprofit organizations, the business community and youth and families and is tasked with reviewing policy and promoting collaborative action on child and youth issues.

Not surprisingly, with such a range of informants, there were a range of approaches discussed for achieving the objectives of increasing innovation, effectiveness and leverage. Respondents frankly discussed pros and cons to how their respective offices were established and evolved as well as to what extent substantial changes have been brought about as a result of these offices being in place.

We should emphasize from the outset that, although these offices have varying levels of staffing, they all pointed out that the core leveraging and alignment functions were really the work of a very small team: a strategic leader with 1 or 2 key support staff (sometimes administrative, sometimes focused on data or operations). In addition, while they vary in terms of where they are housed, in each case the mayor or city manager was instrumental in bringing about the creation of the entity.

What follows are insights based on our general knowledge of these kinds of leveraging and coordinating bodies as well as the 5 specific interviews. We organized the interviews around the Forum’s “Core Assumptions about Change” graphic (see Figure 1), which has been derived from both the research on community change and from years of working with state and local leaders dedicated to changing the odds for children and youth. Our question to what extent these individuals/entities as **Big Picture Change Makers and Structures** were intentional in **Engaging Key Stakeholders** either within city departments and/or out in the community to bring about **Shared Accountability** for changing the odds.

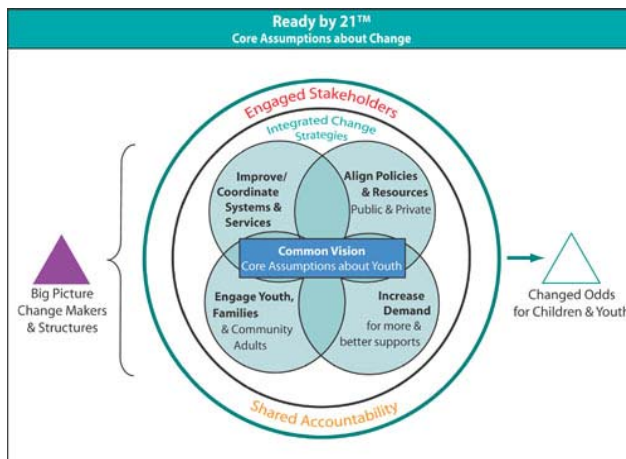


Figure 1

As you will see in the first section below – Authority and Agenda – where these positions are housed, how they are structured and how formal the relationship is to key stakeholders, has direct implications for how their authority is established and how agendas get set and carried out. These basic questions of structure, stakeholders and accountability also have implications for how strategic work is realized. We used the four strategy areas – **Improving & Coordinating Systems and Services, Aligning Policies and Resources, Increasing Demand, and Engaging Youth and Families** – to probe more deeply into the questions around innovation, effectiveness and leverage. In section two below, we discuss their abilities to leverage, promote effectiveness, and innovate and have added a fourth category discussed by all – engagement. We close with a discussion of the Position Requirements and Accountability – what are attributes of the ideal candidate and how do such positions demonstrate accountability against a plan of action?

## **AUTHORITY & AGENDA**

As noted, there is a range of ways in which the positions are structured. Who they report to and whether they connect to a collaborative or coordinating body significantly shapes the scope of the work in terms of breadth, depth and sustainability.

- **Positions/structures with joint authority** were necessarily more focused on collective decision-making and the related processes that allowed this to happen, the results seemed to be more about **long-term alignment, silo-busting and long-term changes** in policies and collaboration. Minneapolis, for example, pointed to alignment on both a large scale (coordinated “summer”

	Short Term Initiatives & Events	Long Term Alignment
Joint Authority		<b>X</b>
Singular Authority	<b>X</b>	

initiative) and small scale (record-sharing between the county and school regarding kindergarten readiness).

- **Positions/structures with singular authority** – Interviewees in positions with singular authority stressed **the ability to move quickly and champion the specific initiatives of the mayor or city manager** (especially in Nashville where the position was seen as very close to the mayor and combined with a portfolio that included education). In the other “single-authority” example, Kansas City, the examples provided tended to be more around events (e.g., youth employment fair).

While there were different power bases from which the directors derived their authority, all credited their ability to move the work due in large part to their **direct reporting relationship**, either to the mayor/city manager or to their version of a leadership board.

## **STRATEGIC FUNCTIONS & VALUE ADDED**

The combination of authority and agenda-setting relates to the type of functions each position/entity is positioned to undertake. While each position could talk about ways they promoted innovation, effectiveness and leverage, these efforts vary greatly in terms of depth, breadth and potential for long-term impact.

### ***LEVERAGING – Alignment and Resources***

All interviewees see the leveraging of existing resources and opportunities as a primary function of their position. However, their examples of “leveraging” varied greatly and seemed directly connected to how they interpret their role in relationship to their authority base.

Not surprisingly, the positions with a strong leadership board or partnership (Savannah Youth Futures Authority, Minneapolis Coordinating Board, Grand Rapids Office of Children, Youth and Families) see their leveraging work primarily in terms of alignment and coordination. This can sometimes be in identifying resources (e.g., Minneapolis identifying pots of funds to support a transportation initiative) but is most often described as alignment of agendas and action plans (e.g., Minneapolis’ summer programs initiative, Savannah’s immunization outreach efforts).

The “single authority” positions had much less to report on the alignment front. The Nashville Mayor’s Office for Children and Youth discussed a relatively light example of developing a common application form for youth leadership engagement opportunities. However, Nashville stressed the ability to get community and departmental stakeholders to a meeting on any topic given the high visibility the position has in connection with the mayor. Leveraging was discussed more in terms of moving the mayor’s agenda than in aligning existing resources. In Kansas City, the other “single-authority” example, alignment efforts are also minimal in that they are deferred to another community entity (a local community foundation) that has assumed the lead on convening and collaboration efforts. Leveraging for Kansas City comes through its grant-making role.

### ***EFFECTIVENESS – Standards, Shared Accountability & Demand***

With the cities that we talked to, a focus on effectiveness took two sometimes interconnected modes – promotion of program standards and promotion of general awareness and accountability for youth outcomes and quality programming.

The strongest “watchdog” function can be found in Savannah, where the state legislation that established the office specifically mandated that a key role of the Youth Futures Authority would be to review the quantity and quality of programs and services for children and youth. As an independent entity, the Youth Futures Authority has learned over the years not just to brandish the stick of accountability, but also to work with its partners to develop strategies to present to the community in conjunction with data around child indicators and outcomes. Nashville and Grand Rapids also discussed their roles in helping to establish standards, for pre-K and after-school, respectively. While Nashville did this under the purview of the mayor’s office, Grand Rapids emphasized their role in advocating for standards at the state level.

For many that we spoke with, promoting a sense of shared accountability among key providers and departments is linked to promoting increased demand for accountability among young people and the general public. In the high-profile event mode of the Nashville Mayor's office, this takes the form of an annual youth/community summit which combines a forum for community input with an opportunity to get input on the mayor's major initiatives (such as child and adolescent health.) In Savannah and Minneapolis, the work focuses more on effective use of data – whether through annual report cards on youth outcomes and community supports (Savannah) or on engaging youth in mapping the availability and quality of youth-friendly places throughout their neighborhoods (Minneapolis.)

### ***INNOVATION – Incubation and Implementation vs. Brokering Connections***

While the directors saw all of their functions having a degree of innovation and added value and could point to things that are in place that would not have happened otherwise, innovation was referred to most often when it came to identifying and filling gaps in programming. The way to fill these gaps, however, varied. They range from sponsoring targeted events (e.g., Kansas City's youth employment fair is a major annual event) to managing partnered programs (e.g., Grand Rapid's city/school employee reading program) to brokering major initiatives (e.g., Savannah's workforce readiness initiative that is led by the chamber and the school district). In these cases, the relative scale and sustainability of the endeavor seems directly related to the mode in which the office functions – at the behest of an individual office or as a jointly agreed upon agenda.

The one cautionary tale that we heard repeatedly was the negative byproducts of getting into direct provision of programs. Minneapolis and Savannah noted that a desire for innovation and incubation led to the long-term housing of programs that became seen as direct competitors with youth-serving programs already in the community. As this hampered their ability to play the more cross-cutting alignment and leveraging roles, they both went through serious downsizings in terms of staff and budget, spinning off or retiring major programmatic areas. (*Note: While Savannah restructured from 54 to 11 staff, it continues to oversee a community resource center. However, it sees this operation as quite distinct from its primary role of coordinator and watchdog.*)

### ***ENGAGEMENT – Youth opportunities vs. youth input and decision-making***

A fourth role that nearly all of the offices discussed was that of engagement – particularly of young people and, in most cases, those who work directly with young people. The work with young people also took many forms, from providing work opportunities for young people (e.g., student internships Grand Rapids' city offices) to youth commissioners connected to each city department (a combination of work and leadership opportunities for the young people in Nashville and Kansas City) to youth in positions of decision-making and policy advocacy (e.g., Nashville Mayor's Youth Council, Grand Rapids Mayor's Youth Council). Within the youth councils, approaches range from youth periodically advising on pieces of the city council's or mayor's agenda to young people independently identifying issues that they think should be addressed and amassing the supporting data and constituency to discuss these issues with the city/county leadership. As they discussed these opportunities, some directors referenced them as more opportunities for youth to develop their leadership skills (e.g., Nashville) while others emphasized the importance of a youth council as a direct and instrumental way to move a policy agenda by having young people at the vanguard of the effort (e.g., Grand Rapids).

## **POSITION REQUIREMENTS & ACCOUNTABILITY**

### ***TITLE***

As shown on page 1, there was a considerable variation in the position titles of those interviewed. What all had in common, however, was a reference to either the structure (director/manager/administrator **of** the office for..., director **of** the coordinating board, collaborative) or/and a reference to the strategy/purpose (e.g. advocacy). This variation underscores the importance of ensuring that the title of the position reflects the expectations for impact.

### ***CANDIDATE QUALIFICATIONS***

Given the range of ways contexts and structures for these positions, the interviewees were extremely consistent in their discussion of requirements for the ideal candidate. They emphasized:

- **Relationship-building.** The ability to cultivate relationships was mentioned by all interviewees as the most important requirement of the position. Not surprisingly, the relationship-building requirements took different forms depending on the structure of the position – navigating and brokering relationships among departments, drawing on long-standing relationships with key players close to the mayor and/or city manager, and reaching out and building relationships with key community collaboratives.
- **Knowledge of Youth Issues.** Interviewees repeatedly said that some level of background and awareness of youth issues was important in order to give the position credibility in the community. Most interviewees further emphasized the importance of understanding these issues from an assets-based lens focused on promoting the positive development of young people even while addressing specific problems they may have.
- **Political Savvy and Local Knowledge.** An awareness of the local political context was noted as a key requirement for the position. Knowledge of local players and key leaders within the city/county was also seen as important; being already known and respected by these leaders was seen as a plus. Most interviewees noted that it would be hard to do this job as “an outsider.”
- **Experience in Strategic Planning and Policy Alignment.** For those positions focused on leveraging and alignment, interviewees emphasized that previous high-level experience in strategic planning and policy alignment was essential. They noted that while it is challenging even when you do have the experience to lead a group and a community through delivering on an overall action plan, it would be nearly impossible to do so without a strong foundation in strategic planning and action.

### ***REPORTING LINES***

**A close connection to the power base is important.**

A key point made by interviewees was that a close connection to the power base of the office (e.g., mayor, city manager or collaborative board) was essential in order for the position to have the authority and credibility necessary to foster alignment and cooperation among community structures. Without direct access to that power base, interviewees agreed that the person within the position would have a more difficult time getting “buy in” from other city structures and community collaboratives.

### ***ACCOUNTABILITY***

Accountability mechanisms for the positions and structures varied across cities. Several cities publish some form of an annual report on their work (Savannah’s Public Status Report, Nashville’s Mayor’s Office for Children and Youth Annual Report) and disseminate it among the community. Those from single-authority structures stated that they report directly to the mayor or city manager and their office’s progress is reviewed regularly against targeted goals and work plans. Interviewees from joint-authority structures also noted that their standing meetings (often monthly) with the leadership body serve as a way to review the progress being made across joint action plans. In Savannah, public reports (on youth outcomes and on progress made) as well as annual meetings serve both to generate public will around this work and to hold the major players accountable for progress towards the plan. In Grand Rapids, an annual strategic plan must be approved by the Office of Children, Youth and Families’ Liaison Committee (comprised of

the Mayor, the Board of Education President and their appointees). Reports on accomplishments and outcomes are made at monthly Liaison Committee meetings as well as in an overall report against that plan at the close of the year.

**Key Points to Consider – Authority, Agenda & Leveraging:**

*Note: While these are in separate sections above, the “leverage” issue so strongly connects to how authority is established and who set the agenda that we are combining the questions here.*

1. What types of leveraging are seen as critical? Alignment, coordination and “silo-busting” across city/(county?) structures and jurisdictions? Mobilizing around targeted, real-time-response initiatives? Moving the agenda of a mayor or city manager? All of the above?
2. Given the focus, what are the trade-offs between a position that derives its authority and agenda from an individual leader versus a leadership body?
3. If the position is charged with aligning and leveraging joint efforts – short-term or long-term – what mechanisms will be in place to allow for this to happen? Will a standing body with representatives from different structures be put in place to support the work of the position? If not, what authority will it have to ensure “buy in” with other community structures? On these questions, specifically:
  - Will the position rely on individual relationships with key leaders, department heads, providers? If so, what mechanisms will it use to align and secure joint agreement on actions?
  - Will it connect to and/or support specific task forces? If so, how will these be formed? What will its relationship be to the task forces?
  - Will it connect to a standing decision-making body? If so, who will this body include? Top-level leaders (e.g., the city manager, the mayor, the school superintendent, the school board chair), department heads?
  - Will it connect to working and advisory groups? Including department “work horses” (as described by one interviewee), community members and service providers, young people themselves? A combination of the above? Will any of these stakeholders also serve on the lead decision-making group?

**Key Points to Consider – Effectiveness:**

1. Will this position/structure regularly report on the status of child and youth outcomes?
2. Will this position play an independent “watchdog” function? Will it help to set quality standards and regularly report on overall performance of city/community efforts?
3. How will this position work to increase shared accountability and community demand? By connecting to key stakeholders? Through an intentional communications strategy?

**Key Points to Consider – Innovation:**

1. How will this position/structure balance its innovation role – by filling gaps in programming or focusing on alignment and coordination of specific initiatives?
2. If it incubates programs, how will the issue of increased competition with other community providers be addressed? How will the spin-off of the program be managed and on what timetables?

**Key Points to Consider – Engagement:**

1. Will this position/structure focus on youth engagement? What will its role be in creating or supporting local youth councils or city-wide leadership structures?
2. To what extent will youth be engaged in the work– will they be given exposure to city departments and the civic process? Will they be involved in decision-making and advocacy? Will they be involved in collecting data on issues related to children, youth and families in order to foster community demand and shared accountability? Will they be involved in convening feedback from their peers?

**Key Points to Consider – Position Structure & Accountability:**

1. Given all of the above, what are the attributes of the ideal candidate? Which ones are more important than others?
2. To ensure a strong power base for this position, what will the reporting lines be?
3. What will the ongoing accountability mechanisms be for this position? How will the agenda and work plan of the position (and related coordinating body if there is one) be established? What will be the regular reporting and communications mechanisms?
4. What title for the position (and the standing body or office, if created) will best reflect its functions and purpose?