

Aligning Systems with Communities to Advance Equity through Shared Measurement:

SA2020

Lead organization:	SA2020, an independent nonprofit
Lead system:	Nonprofit
Partner systems:	160 multisector partners, including corporations, foundations, government agencies, educational institutions, member trade organizations, and nonprofit partners
Location:	San Antonio, Texas
Population:	Urban: 64% Hispanic or Latino, 25% White, 6% African American
Year founded:	2010
Measurement:	62 community indicators for 11 initiatives

How did the initiative start?

In 2010, Mayor Julián Castro launched a communitywide visioning process to identify priorities for making San Antonio residents the healthiest in the nation, with access to quality education and economic opportunity, by 2020. A steering committee comprising 25 members and 6,000 San Antonians generated a list of goals spanning 11 community results to achieve this vision. These goals encompassed the arts and culture, civic engagement, community safety, downtown development, economic competitiveness, education, environmental sustainability, family well-being, health and fitness, neighborhoods, and transportation. Established as an independent nonprofit, SA2020 works across systems and engages community members to achieve this shared vision.

SA2020's board of directors governs the nonprofit's mission to drive progress toward achieving initiative goals. The board consists of representatives from various systems, including lawyers, business professionals, and community organizers. Each community result has partners from different systems who work together to achieve the shared goals of SA2020.

How does the initiative use shared measurement?

The SA2020 initiative uses measurement to track progress across 11 community results. After the original visioning process, the SA2020 team initially worked with a data partner at the University of Texas at San Antonio's Institute for Demographic and Socioeconomic Research to collect potential baseline measures for each community result. A group of 25 to 30 content experts discussed the baseline measures to track annually for each of the 11 community results. SA2020 shared the final measures with community members for their input and approval before implementing them. For example, an increase in downtown employment and a reduction in downtown crime rates were among the final measures selected for the downtown development community result.

During the measure selection process, partners aligned efforts around the shared vision to select 62 measures for the 11 community results. Selection criteria included the availability of measures annually or at least every other year, as well as the reliability, validity, and utility of the measures. In some instances, partner organizations wanted to track measures specific to their own organizations. To resolve this challenge, the SA2020 team worked with partners to agree on measures to track progress toward community results rather than selecting measures relevant only to individual organizations.

The success of the initiative depends first on a results-driven focus and, second, on a data-informed mindset. SA2020 focuses on achieving the goals established by the community; data are secondary and are used to inform progress toward these goals. Molly Cox, president and CEO of SA2020, explained, *“In the beginning, there was a real desire to have the very perfect measure. What we’ve now seen after doing this work for some time is that the data are so secondary to the result we are trying to seek.”* Citing transportation as an example, Ms. Cox said that the community had established as a priority the increased use of alternative transit. In response, San Antonio’s public transportation system, VIA Metropolitan Transit (VIA), offered to measure onboardings to show the frequency with which people used public transit. Over time, VIA efficiency improved, and passengers had to get on and off the bus less often to get to the same destination. As a result, onboardings declined, thus making them a less reliable measure of public transit, even though people had begun to ride buses more frequently in response to the improved efficiency of the transit system. Thus, the SA2020 team switched to measuring American Community Survey to track single-car usage to measure the number of people riding solo in their cars. By switching to a different measure, SA2020 was able to better track its goals and to assess progress in the use of alternative transit.

SA2020 can identify its successes and challenges by monitoring the selected measures as well as programmatic efforts, such as the delivery of certain services. The SA2020 dashboard tracks and reports progress annually for the 62 measures across the 11 community results. Findings indicate that although many of the measures show progress, roughly 25% of them do not. Using dashboard data and partnerships with more than 170 multisector organizations, the SA2020 team determines how to shift priorities to achieve the community results. *“We try to utilize the information, the data itself, and work with our partners to say, ‘Here’s where we are seeing things not moving the way they should be moving. And that we need a more concerted effort,’”* said Ms. Cox.

How do systems work together?

By identifying partnerships instead of one lead for each community result, SA2020 was able to make progress toward achieving its shared vision. Initially, the SA2020 team selected lead partners for each of the 11 community results. This proved to be problematic because the lead partner felt responsible for achieving the community result. Quickly, SA2020 realized that no single organization could be held solely accountable; multiple systems had to align their efforts to achieve the desired community results. Therefore, SA2020 reconsidered the idea of lead partners and instead created partnerships among organizations from different systems to ensure a continuum of services for community members. The partners who were selected worked intentionally to deliver programmatic services and allocate resources to achieve the community vision. According to Ms. Cox, *“We had been looking at multisector programming and resource allocation from a bird’s-eye view. We obviously get down to sort of the microspaces of each*

of the programs but also see from a higher level, if these two organizations partnered in an intentional way, it would allow for a continuum of care for an individual you're both technically serving."

For example, SA2020 engaged multiple systems, including county and city health institutions, hospitals, nonprofits, and funders, to enroll more people in Affordable Care Act (ACA) health plan coverage. The city was able to increase the number of people enrolled in ACA even though the state had not expanded Medicaid services. *"So the fact that San Antonio was able to increase access to healthcare. . . shows what happens when [multiple] systems come together to [achieve] the same goal, the same exact goal, and work together to achieve it,"* said Ms. Cox.

How does the initiative address equity?

The SA2020 initiative elevates awareness of the historical and systemic root causes of inequities, such as racial segregation, that affect community health. Communities on the east and west sides of San Antonio are primarily Black and Latino neighborhoods, and those in the northwest are mainly White. The life expectancy rate for people living on the east and west sides of San Antonio is 19 years less than the rate for those living in the northwest. SA2020 reports data disaggregated by race, gender, and locale for the 62 measures to tell a more complete story of its progress. Data are used to identify targeted, race-conscious opportunities for focused programs, policies, and interventions.

Breaking down data by race enabled the city to prioritize the investment of resources during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, workforce development organizations saw that unemployment claims were coming from the north side of town, where neighborhoods are primarily White. Overlaying data on poverty, unemployment, and digital access revealed that 75% of unemployment claims were filed online. Because digital access was less widely available in the western and eastern sides of the city, community members in these neighborhoods had filed fewer unemployment claims, even though unemployment and poverty rates were high in these areas. These data enabled policymakers to recognize that the sole focus on measuring unemployment claims meant that the bigger picture was not captured.

How does the initiative engage community members?

The SA2020 initiative engaged community members through a transparent process to help define the shared vision of the initiative. The visioning process resulted in the selection of 11 community results, each of which outlined multiple goals to be reached by 2020. According to Ms. Cox, *"The best part of the San Antonio community vision is that it leads with the community agenda. The community has basically told you what it wants to see. Align towards that."*

The SA2020 team reports progress on its 11 initiatives to the public each year. By tracking progress toward community results, SA2020 can shift priorities and resources to address gaps in achieving these results. According to Ms. Cox, *"We sort of, for lack of a better word, have a mandate from the community to shift the way we are functioning so we can achieve what the community said they wanted."* In the course of achieving the community vision, many policy changes occurred over the decade. For example, CPS Energy, San Antonio's public utility service, created programs to meet the community goal of reducing energy use. Similarly, programs aimed at reducing water use have ensured that the city is using the same amounts of water even though its population has grown exponentially.

Currently, SA2020 is gathering community input on a shared vision for the next decade. Throughout the year, the SA2020 team, in partnership with more than 60 ambassadors, is asking residents about changes they would like to see made to the shared vision of the initiative. Ambassadors are community members representing different organizations; they are responsible for obtaining input from people across the city. Ms. Cox said that they are asking the community, *“Are these the results 10 years later that we still are seeking to achieve? Do we need to strengthen the language of these results? Are these the right indicators to continue tracking, or do we need something different?”* For example, the SA2020 team noted that existing indicators under the civic engagement community result were not ideal. Therefore, SA2020 plans to measure civic engagement in a more robust way, which may require changing the process by which progress for this community result is tracked.



Spotlight on Using Shared Measurement: COVID-19 Pandemic Response

SA2020 used existing partnerships to respond to San Antonians’ needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. At the beginning of the pandemic, the team had a series of conversations with its partners and launched a dashboard for tracking the immediate funding needs of nonprofits. SA2020 also launched a COVID-19 dashboard, which includes (a) a health dashboard that tracks COVID-19 testing, cases, and deaths; (b) an economic dashboard that shows the economic impact of the pandemic; and (c) COVID-19 city council district maps that shows community indicators broken down by each city council district.

Although the data that make up SA2020 dashboards and reports are available publicly, many readers found the information difficult to understand and use. In response, SA2020 created a multisector targeted intervention guide for diverse audiences showing how the community data can be used to make targeted interventions through COVID-19 pandemic relief and recovery. Many partners, including local workforce development organizations, local transit systems, financial institutions, and policymakers, are using dashboard data to disburse funding to meet community needs.

SA2020 found that documenting the rapid multisector shifts in policy, resource allocation, and programming was also an important factor in responding to the crisis. At the start of the pandemic, SA2020 launched the “We>Me” website, which tracked policy and programmatic budget changes implemented by local government agencies, including relief from utility shut-offs for community members unable to pay their electricity or water bills. Kiran Kaur Bains, director of Community Impact at SA2020, explained, *“Thinking about the future, we also knew that as we start to move into recovery and relief after this crisis, it will be important to point back to these changes to elevate them as strategies that we should be working towards post-crisis or outside of a global pandemic because they move us to the community vision.”*

One challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic response is that solutions to systemic problems are siloed and largely address results that can be achieved easily. Ms. Cox observed, *“If we are just talking about the two biggest things we are tackling as a community right now, police reform and COVID-19, which both affect Black communities disproportionately, because we are not talking about these issues in systems, we’ve turned them into individual challenges. If solutions incorporate systems thinking, we can create continuums of care for the community.”*

Lessons learned

- SA2020 found that engaging community members transparently is essential to defining and achieving its vision. When asked what was critical for the success of SA2020, Ms. Cox replied, “Community buy-in. Period. Full stop.”
- SA2020 found that trust and relationship building are essential for successful cross-system partnerships. Ms. Bains reflected, “I would say that part of our intentionality with partnering with institutions and holding them accountable and utilizing the community vision requires deep trust, both with the community at large and the institutions that are sharing their data with us.”
- The success of the initiative depends first on a results-driven approach and, second, on a data-informed approach. SA2020 focuses on achieving the established community results; data are secondary and are used to inform progress.
- SA2020 found that converting complex data into accessible and usable information for storytelling is essential to engaging communities. Ms. Cox explained, “By making data usable, we are having conversations around racial equity and disparate outcomes for members of our community who have been predominantly left out of . . . program development, and community engagement in ways that people want to listen.” SA2020 suggests that data and measurement should be used only as one tool in a toolbox; otherwise, programs, service delivery, and resource allocation could be harmed. Ms. Cox stated, “We’ve seen how data can be manipulated to fit a narrative or further one’s agenda. That’s become incredibly evident to us within the last couple of months during the pandemic. It is therefore essential to ask questions about the information that we are putting out there.” Having standards by which to collect and share data transparently, and by which to update data with integrity and responsibility, also can inform better decision making.

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