

Empowering Communities through Inclusive, Regional Economic Development



This analysis was prepared by CA FWD with assistance from Sankofa Consulting and support from The James Irvine Foundation.

The James Irvine Foundation

A special thank you to the many regional leaders from across public and non-profit sectors, including community-based organizations, education, economic development, community foundations, partners in our California Stewardship Network and others throughout California who provided their time, experience and knowledge to this project. We are grateful for their reflections and commitment to inclusive, regional economic development.

For more information, please contact annalisa@cafwd.org.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH INCLUSIVE, REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	4
SEIZING A HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY.....	6
CERF'S 13 ECONOMIC REGIONS.....	7
REGIONAL SNAPSHOTS.....	8
METHODOLOGY	9
KEY THEMES	10
Establishing meaningful multi-sector partnerships	11
Centering equity with community-based organizations.....	11
Securing sustainable and diverse funding sources.....	12
Using data to evaluate and improve efforts	13
CHALLENGES.....	14
Organizing at a regional scale.....	15
Strengthening community relationships and building trust among partners.....	16
Supporting the capacity of the backbone and the collective	17
PROMISING PRACTICES.....	18
Effectively delivering for regions and residents.....	18
Using communication as a powerful tool for collaboration.....	19
Success through inclusive partnerships.....	20
Creating a space for authentic and meaningful community engagement.....	21
Increasing ability to secure diverse funding sources	22
Leveraging the power of data	23
Building effective leadership.....	24
CERF IMAGINED AND REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES	25
VISION FOR SUCCESS	27
APPENDIX: INTERVIEWEES BY REGION AND EXISTING REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE	28



EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES THROUGH INCLUSIVE, REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

For most people the term “economic development” conjures up the fight between states or cities to attract corporate headquarters, manufacturing facilities or big box stores. Economic development practitioners know that it is much more and that retaining existing businesses and supporting small business and entrepreneurship are at least as essential in developing and maintaining thriving economies. Further, it is crucial to ensure that these strategies are pursued consistently for an entire economic region to leverage the area’s strengths and to align strategies around common goals rather than engage in a race to the bottom.

Economic developers have also increasingly understood that engaging the community fully in the development and implementation of these strategies is essential. It is a moral imperative since everyone should have a say in charting their home’s economic future. It also increases the likelihood of a better outcome through having broader buy-in to regional plans and ensuring that they are designed in ways that best leverage communities’ skills and resources.

Progress toward truly equitable economic development, though, has been halting and better models are still under development. One such model is the Community Economic Resilience Fund (CERF) created in California to help direct the state’s economic strategies toward racial, economic and geographic equity, environmental sustainability and economic opportunity. This program sprang out of disparate efforts across the state’s regions that highlight the benefits and pitfalls of these processes.



This report provides a framework for understanding the landscape of regional economic development ecosystems in California. It includes key field observations—including challenges and promising practices—to inform regional design, implementation and measurement of economic mobility strategies that are grounded in equity and environmental sustainability.

We hope this report prompts a renewed commitment to multi-sector collaboration on creating and implementing regional economic development strategies that truly deliver for residents, particularly around improving their quality of life and creating economic opportunities for historically marginalized communities.

“It’s important that there’s investment in developing the leadership of the community, so they can make the changes rather than us guessing in deciding what is good for them—we help their development, so they can be a part of the decision-making.”

—Maria Elena Manzo, Mujeres en Acción
(Regions Rise Together: Salinas)

Often, leaders in regional collaboratives do not have capacity, time or resources to research and prepare for the challenges of this work, including governance, community engagement and representation, communication, funding, data and partnership. We go into detail about this in the report, first sharing the key themes that emerged from our conversations with regional leaders, followed by the challenges that regions currently face.

Then, we suggest some promising practices, which are shared here at a high level and which represent key areas that are further explored in this report through the experiences, activities and promising practices shared by regional leaders, especially those in the California Stewardship Network.

We hope this report—a cross-section of on-the-ground learnings across the state—will suggest some promising practices that can be applied in different regions around their localized needs and opportunities.

Effectively delivering for regions and residents

- **Inter-personal and inter-organizational trust must be created and maintained via action;** regional collaboratives evolve over time and must constantly work hard to forge and achieve shared goals

Using communication as a powerful tool for collaboration

- Continuous and **intentional internal and external communications and education** are key to successful framing, understanding and developing strategies

Success through inclusive partnerships

- Regional economic development work meaningfully engages a diversity of voices to co-create, evaluate and leverage solutions for the betterment of residents and community members; **this work acknowledges the unequal resources that different groups have and intentionally invests in building capacity** for communities using an equity lens

Creating a space for authentic and meaningful community engagement

- Communities must **center their collaborative regional efforts around addressing long-standing disparities** and achieving an equitable economy

Increasing ability to secure diverse funding sources

- **Lasting change is made as a result of specific viable and targeted investments** that prioritize economic mobility opportunities for residents and that contribute to a more sustainable and diversified economy
- These investment plans must take a **long-term view** while being flexible and honoring local capacity

Leveraging the power of data

- Regional economic development strategies should be founded and driven by **data and evidence that reflect local needs, assets and the lived experiences of residents;** regions seek movement on shared outcomes, not outputs

Building effective leadership

- The work requires **deep commitments to listening, sharing challenges and experiences, learning and perspective-taking** for a shared vision; leaders in this space are willing to adapt and use their resources for the greater good

The imperative to be successful in this work, to continue to evolve economic development so that it truly centers and delivers for communities, may be the most critical in the state of California. Its soaring cost of living is responsible for the state holding the highest rate of real poverty in the nation and tremendous inequities across racial, economic and geographic communities. But these lessons are relevant to regions all across the United States and the globe as we all work together to create economies that are more equitable, more sustainable and that create opportunity for all.



SEIZING A HISTORIC OPPORTUNITY

Ensuring the California Dream for all requires that we pursue policies and practices that balance equity, environmental sustainability and economic growth and opportunity.

The \$600 million Community Economic Resilience Fund (CERF) is a historic opportunity to create new plans and strategies that diversify local economies and develop industries that create high-quality, broadly accessible jobs for all Californians. CERF is a culmination of efforts CA FWD has helped lead across the state to build more equitable economies for everyone—from the Regions Rise Together partnership with the Newsom Administration to the Regions Rise Grant Program (AB 106) authored by Assemblymember Rudy Salas.

Established in September 2021 by the State of California, [the CERF program](#) seeks to ensure that disadvantaged communities and communities of color who are most impacted by COVID-19 are fully included in decision-making processes around key issues impacting regional economic prosperity. Regions often have common and distinctive economic, social and environmental characteristics; smaller

geographies in particular have strong incentives to act regionally to secure resources and advance mutual priorities. Seizing the opportunity through inclusive, regions-up planning and improving the interconnectivity that makes us one state is vital.

Inclusive, regional economic development is the creation and execution of strategies that generate more high-paying and promising jobs that create social equity and environmental sustainability within areas that share economic connections.

This type of economic development prioritizes meaningful community engagement, including in the decision-making process, and promotes a multi-sector and collaborative approach.

The success of CERF in improving economic outcomes for all of California will only be achieved through multi-sector collaboration, collective goal-setting and clear accountability.

We must organize with each other, not against each other. Only by working together—across multiple sectors, single interests and ideologies—can we achieve the California Dream for all.



CERF'S 13 ECONOMIC REGIONS



The state is using 13 economic regions to structure its activities across a range of investments, including CERF. The state's methodology on the process for developing the initial draft map of regions can be found [here](#).

REGIONAL SNAPSHOTS

To better understand the diversity of the 13 CERF regions, as well as shared characteristics, we looked at the regions through six [California Dream Index](#) economic indicators.

The California Dream Index includes 10 indicators foundational for economic mobility. This sampling of data shows many of the critical assets and opportunities regions face as they embark on CERF.

CERF Regions	AFFORDABLE RENT (% of households paying less than 30% of their income on rent)	HOME OWNERSHIP (% of households who own their primary residence)	BROADBAND ACCESS (% of population with access to broadband)	EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION (% of 3-4-year-olds enrolled in preschool)	POST-SECONDARY ATTAINMENT (% of population who've graduated from community college or higher)	PROSPEROUS NEIGHBORHOODS (% of residents living in census tracts with less than 20% poverty)
Bay Area	49.93%	56.44%	90.30%	59.03%	54.88%	93.93%
Eastern Sierra	45.06%	72.63%	81.94%	39.68%	32.16%	91.58%
Orange County	42.00%	57.38%	90.70%	55.40%	48.31%	89.68%
Central Coast	41.48%	58.27%	87.31%	47.15%	41.73%	88.33%
Southern Border	42.05%	53.59%	89.50%	51.26%	45.60%	84.61%
Sacramento	44.05%	60.03%	87.76%	48.26%	42.22%	78.44%
Inland Empire	40.47%	63.26%	85.57%	37.58%	29.89%	77.00%
North State	42.34%	64.49%	81.41%	49.59%	34.92%	76.56%
Northern San Joaquin Valley	44.70%	56.28%	83.74%	43.21%	25.71%	76.19%
Los Angeles County	41.00%	45.81%	84.26%	54.50%	39.54%	75.92%
Redwood Coast	40.99%	60.18%	81.11%	49.68%	34.03%	63.12%
Kern County	43.00%	58.29%	79.72%	33.60%	23.99%	54.88%
Central San Joaquin Valley	42.30%	55.16%	79.49%	37.40%	26.75%	50.96%
National Average	44.00%	55.00%	87.00%	50.00%	42.00%	81.00%

* Source: California Dream Index 2019, cadreamindex.org



Top four regions	Middle five regions	Bottom four regions
------------------	---------------------	---------------------

METHODOLOGY

The primary goal of this project was to conduct a landscape analysis of regional economic development efforts across the 13 CERF regions to better understand the experiences of regional leaders, their collaboratives and their networks. CA FWD conducted a series of structured qualitative interviews with 32 regional leaders representing 30 organizations and eight inclusive regional economic development efforts across the state (see Appendix).

The interviews were guided by a set of [questions](#) that asked respondents about their experiences with economic development efforts and partners of the initiative. For the purposes of this report, interview respondents are referred to as “regional leaders.” The terms “regional effort(s)” or “regional collaborative(s)” are used when discussing regional economic development efforts across the state.

Though this project aimed to capture a diverse set of voices and experiences, we acknowledge there may be limitations associated with the selection of interview participants. This project relied heavily on respondents’ own experiences with regional networks and economic development efforts, and it does not reflect the experiences of other regional leaders or actors involved in these collaboratives.

Participants were recruited through the [California Stewardship Network](#) (CSN) and other affiliated organizations. Interviews were conducted primarily over Zoom, with the exception of seven in-person interviews conducted during a CSN convening in March 2022. Interview recordings were transcribed and analyzed using a coding method and NVivo qualitative coding software. The analysis and findings presented in this report are informed by the themes, patterns and overarching narratives that emerged from the interviews.



KEY THEMES

Regional leaders share inclusive economic development practices and achievements in their communities.

Over the last decade, there has been a movement toward regional economic development and growth centered in community and multi-sector collaboration. From Regions Rise Together strategy sessions to the Fresno DRIVE investment plan and others, a majority of these regional efforts focus on improving the lives of historically marginalized community members through equitable and sustainable economic growth strategies.

For many of the regional leaders interviewed, the past two years have felt particularly different. Overall, there have been more targeted efforts toward inclusion, yet there is clear acknowledgment that more work needs to be done to authentically and meaningfully engage the community. While some regions are further along on these efforts than others, there is a sense and growing commitment to continue creating the space for ongoing collaboration and partnership.





ESTABLISHING MEANINGFUL MULTI-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

Centered around high-paying and promising job creation that supports families and protects the environment, existing regional efforts emphasize the need for extensive and intentional collaboration among a variety of partner types.

Relationship-building and strategy alignment among community-based organizations, government, non-profit, industry, higher education and other partners are critical to the success of regional efforts.

Organizations engaged in these efforts recognize the need for close partnerships that bring a variety of voices to the table regularly and consistently to help address complex challenges facing residents who are trying to achieve a better quality of life.

Regional leaders indicated transportation, housing, childcare and broadband as barriers to full economic engagement that cannot be solved by any one entity. To help support, regional partners are committed to deep listening, centering equity, staying at the table, using resources for the common good and thinking regionally.

Several strategies may be needed to target barriers, refine systems and bring meaningful change to residents through an all-of-the-above framework—a framework that does not favor one approach but instead uses many.

REGIONAL EXAMPLE:

In the Imperial Valley region, regional leaders in San Diego County and Imperial County meet weekly to connect, understand differences and coordinate their work.



CENTERING EQUITY WITH COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Regional collaboratives that understand resident voice, input and design are paramount to inclusive economic development. Community-based organizations (CBOs) play a vital role in regional efforts by clarifying needs, informing strategy and implementing ground solutions. Intentionality around community impact and achieving common desired outcomes, not outputs, is a shared practice among regional efforts.

Developing neighborhood capacity, constant engagement and a holistic framework are all needed to make investments successful.

Groups emphasized using expanded networks, regular work updates and CBO governance to ensure solutions for economic opportunity are responsive to actual resident needs.

Building trust with the community is a key component built upon listening, creating space and celebrating wins. Regional leaders highlighted the importance of including diverse voices at the table that are valued and represented within leadership levels, as well as continuously bringing more community partners to the table and broadening engagement.

REGIONAL EXAMPLE:

The Regions Rise Together: Salinas collaborative pivoted and intentionally slowed the process of community input in order to have more community voices and to move from community input to stronger community engagement. Regions Rise Together: Salinas encourages leaders to receive equity training and learn about structural racism through local organizations.





SECURING SUSTAINABLE AND DIVERSE FUNDING SOURCES

Regional collaboratives recognize the need for varied, flexible and sustainable funding to carry economic development work forward. **Regional collaboratives understand funders are looking for diverse spaces that are coordinated, have specific asks and represent multiple entities.**

Collaboratives value opportunities that fund strategically and consider the regional economic impact of investment, in addition to resident opportunity.

They understand the importance of funding from a variety of sources, including private and public investments, with a clear narrative on needs and impact. Many groups elevate ongoing work, seeking to scale proven community-centered strategies. Regional collaboratives reflected on leveraging resources to enhance coordination and impact.

REGIONAL EXAMPLE:

Propel L.A., an inclusive, economic development collaborative in the Los Angeles area, focuses on developing broad-impact goals with substantial funding needs in order to help transform ecosystems.





USING DATA TO EVALUATE AND IMPROVE EFFORTS

While collaboratives have varying degrees of ability to evaluate data, they emphasized the importance of identifying areas of growth and improvement and grounding the work through listening to partners and looking at data. Regional collaboratives raised the need to translate data findings to terms reflective of community priorities, meaning and impact.

Some regional efforts look for tracking and evaluation partners to measure impact and help inform changing course, as needed. Others need industry and other subject matter expertise to help regions understand the economic development landscape, impacts and potential leverage points.

The collection of data—including educational attainment, health care, housing affordability, socioeconomic standing, school expulsion data, etc.—is key to evaluating economic prosperity.

Clear data is a learning tool to develop and evolve ideas and strategies over time. Data can serve as a communications tool; by releasing data and findings to the public through impactful storytelling, narrative and visuals, data can help people understand the relevance and impact.

Access to helpful data that reflect realities on the ground is a priority; regions seek out federal, state and local data to help paint a clear picture and capture customized data needed to develop specific strategies. Some regions use local institutions including the California State University and University of California systems to inform projects and strategy, as well as to provide information on economic activity via dashboards, reports and other collateral.

REGIONAL EXAMPLE:

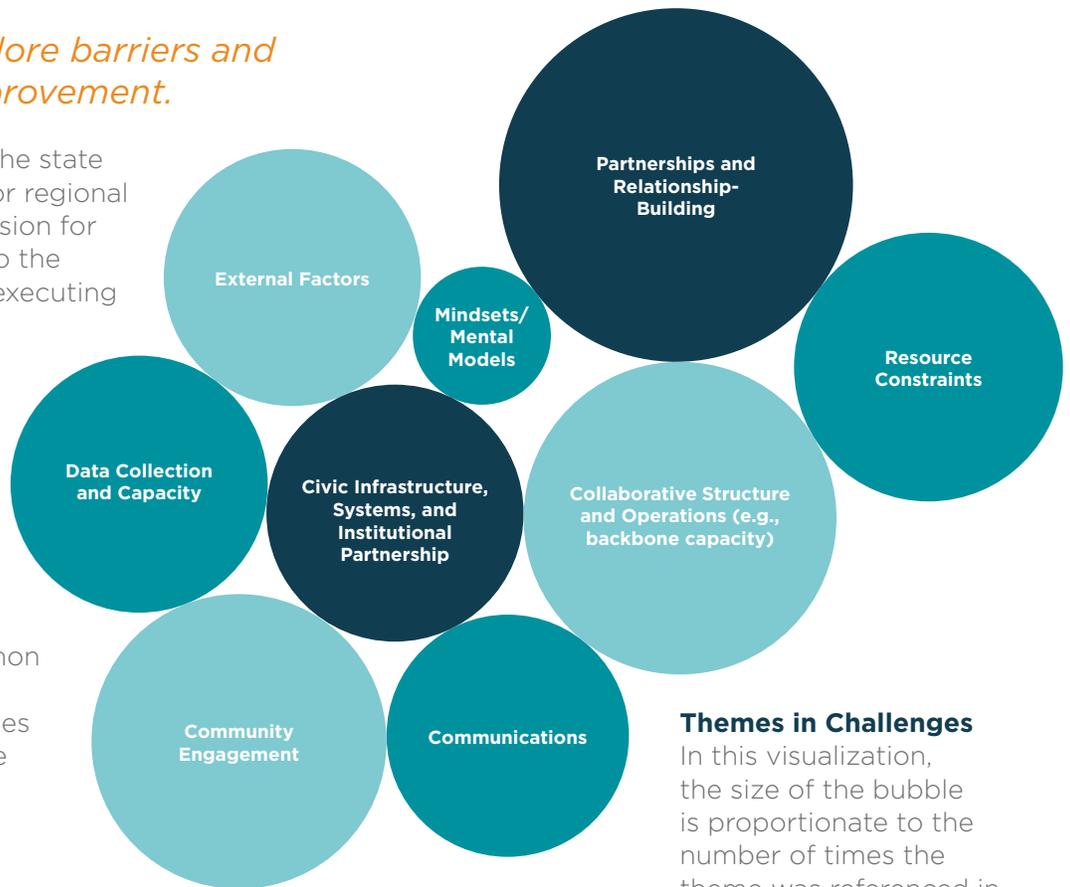
A Better Bakersfield and Boundless Kern (B3K Prosperity) in Kern County developed an evidence-based strategy built upon market assessment findings. The market assessment was developed over a six-month period using quantitative and qualitative analyses. It reflects needs around growth, prosperity and inclusion to inform strategy and governance. In particular, B3K Prosperity examines good jobs that pay reasonable wages, as well as promising jobs with a pathway to becoming good jobs. This portion of the analysis was broken down by industry sector and included a deep dive into tradeable clusters, a key foundation for developing inclusive, regional economic growth.



CHALLENGES

Regional leaders explore barriers and opportunities for improvement.

As regional leaders across the state work to organize and anchor regional partners around a shared vision for their regions, many spoke to the challenges of building and executing a regional agenda. These challenges range from relationship-building to operational capacity and resource constraints, as shown in the ‘Themes in Challenges’ visual here, which illustrates the most common challenges cited, organized by theme. This next section explores common challenges identified by regional leaders, and provides a lens for understanding the needs across the regional collaboratives.



Themes in Challenges
In this visualization, the size of the bubble is proportionate to the number of times the theme was referenced in interview data.

Summary of Challenges and Needs

CHALLENGES	NEEDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Civic Infrastructure, Systems, and Institutional Partnership ▪ Collaborative Structure and Operations (e.g., backbone capacity) ▪ Communications ▪ Community Engagement ▪ Partnerships and Relationship-Building ▪ Data Collection and Capacity ▪ External Factors ▪ Mindsets/Mental Models ▪ Resource Constraints 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CERF-Specific Needs (application, project management, facilitation, etc.) ▪ Community Engagement ▪ Localized Data and Overall Data Use ▪ Flexible Funding/Resources ▪ Capacity Development ▪ Strong Leadership ▪ Equity-Centered Processes and Practices ▪ Broadband Access ▪ Trust, Commitment from Partners

ORGANIZING AT A REGIONAL SCALE

Regional-scale collaboration requires strategic coordination and alignment. However, for many regional efforts, organizing at the scale of a region can pose unique challenges due to the geographic vastness and diversity within regions.

Concerns over prescriptive and arbitrary regional groupings were a common theme discussed by regional leaders. Many felt regional groupings further exacerbate inequities in the allocation of scarce resources. In the past, regional groupings have often led to conflict and tension between sub-regional collaboratives, further dividing a region into self-identifying sub-regions and localities. In some counties, regional leaders expressed rejecting regional groupings simply because they did not identify with them.

As the state designs program guidelines and incentives for regional collaboration, community and organizational leaders will need to shift mindsets and organizing models to adapt to a regional approach. **Existing regional collaboratives will need to work to address uneven capacities within their region and integrate voices that may not be aligned with—and in some cases in opposition to—the regional collaborative’s priorities.** Regional collaboratives will need to take this context into account and address concerns about equitable allocation of resources across regions in order to shift perspectives.

“The question remains whether this particular [CERF] effort of regional economic strategy and regional economic vision can really ever identify and resolve the unique challenges of very small, discrete communities. This is a remaining challenge that I think the state needs to clarify.”

—Bill Allen, Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation (Propel L.A.)



STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS AND BUILDING TRUST AMONG PARTNERS

Distrust by the community and partners can be detrimental to a regional collaborative's ability to work together and achieve shared outcomes for their region. Despite efforts, many regional collaboratives cited challenges related to a lack of trust and commitment from community and institutional partners. **In some regions, it has taken direct investment of time and resources in continuous engagement and communication to establish authentic connections and trust-based relationships in their communities.** By doing so, collaboratives have been more successful in moving partners from awareness and engagement to active participation and commitment.

“Whenever you’re doing regional economic planning—or any type of regional planning, not just economic—a bottom-up approach is going to be more successful than a top-down one. So, leveraging the capacity, the leadership, the trust, that exists within communities to be driving that work forward is, I believe, what is intended of the program.”

—Melissa James, REACH

For many regional collaboratives, the challenge is bringing to the table community-based leaders and organizations historically excluded and unrepresented in the decision-making and priorities of the regional collaborative.

Regional leaders agreed on the value of and need for intentional community listening and mending of broken trust in systems and institutional partners. Many CBOs expressed fatigue and frustration with the ways in which regional collaboratives have overlooked the value and assets community members can contribute. CBOs have called on anchor institutions, philanthropy and the government to make direct investments into community engagement strategies that go beyond “community-informed” and see community members as advocates, leaders and producers of outcomes for their communities.



“There’s long-term distrust in our systems and our institutions. I don’t think we’re unique in our region with that, and there’s probably some very well-founded distrust of both processes and initiatives, whether it’s through government channels or other institutions in the region. For people who felt excluded for years, it takes a lot of relationship- building to bring them to the table.”

—Evan Schmidt, Valley Vision
(The Prosperity Strategy)

SUPPORTING THE CAPACITY OF THE BACKBONE AND THE COLLECTIVE

As conveners and facilitators, the backbone organization is typically tasked with organizing the regional collaborative, creating a culture of change among partners, facilitating the development of the agenda and adapting to conditions in the ecosystem.

The backbone requires significant financial investment to manage partnerships and lead the ongoing work of the regional collaborative. **Overwhelmingly, regional leaders expressed the need for flexible resources to support the backbone's organizational capacity to facilitate regional collaboration and create an enabling environment for partners, stakeholders and community members to participate.**

For some backbone organizations, this means solving for issues of connectivity and access to broadband to ensure accessible and inclusive participation. In more rural contexts, this means advocating for better infrastructure to enable the implementation of on-the-ground strategies. Across the state, backbone organizations are similar in function, but they vary in capacity and needs.

"I think a part of it is we have to work with the partners and support their ability. The strategy that we do in this community and the resources that are given may look different than another community, and that's okay. That's how we get to equity. That's how we get to empowering communities to uplift their voices."

—Jessica Ku Kim, Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation (Propel L.A.)

Along with funding for the backbone, a majority of representatives from regional collaboratives across the state expressed the need for direct investment in capacity-building for partner organizations, as well as support of the backbone to align and coordinate building capacity across partners. Some regional technical assistance needs include establishing data systems, improving data use and comprehension, establishing shared metrics for the purposes of building a common understanding, as well as monitoring and evaluating impact.

In addition to data-related needs, regional leaders identified additional areas for support, including strategic planning, facilitation and implementation to ensure the longevity and sustainability of their efforts.

There is a clear desire among regional leaders to invest in the leadership of community members. The situational analysis indicates changes led by communities themselves are more sustainable in the long run. To do so, it is important to allocate supplemental funding to sustain the leadership development work that several regional collaboratives have already initiated. However, regional leaders note that in parallel to these capacity-building activities, it is crucial to ensure community members who dedicate their time to the different capacity-building activities are compensated.

Despite widespread recognition of regional collaboratives and the value they bring to their communities, many continue to struggle to raise funding for the infrastructure to support multi-year initiatives. Leaders of regional collaboratives understand large-scale collective impact initiatives require longer term processes and funding that matches the pace and needs of the work. Many regional leaders expressed frustration with funders' preference for short-term funding and short-term solutions. Recognizing the need for long-term funding, regional leaders called on funders to help enable multi-year strategies through more patient and flexible funding.

"As far as funders are concerned, it's always trying to get them to see and understand how they too need to come out of their silos to not fund just one issue and how all issues are interconnected. I think philanthropy needs to take a holistic approach to funding communities, and not just little tiny sections of the community."

—Tahra Goraya, Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (Regions Rise Together: Salinas)

PROMISING PRACTICES

Regional leaders share lessons learned and best practices for inclusive economic development.

In the face of complex economic and social challenges—exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic—many organizations, regional collaboratives and economic regions persevered and continued to achieve meaningful progress.

EFFECTIVELY DELIVERING FOR REGIONS AND RESIDENTS

Inclusive economic development efforts require structured resources, planning and management to effectively deliver for regions and residents. While some collaboratives have staff to manage the work, others do not. Beyond the logistical duties of project ideation, formation and implementation, regional leaders across California shared specific practices proven key to setting up a solid foundation. For example, regional efforts in Imperial Valley include an established gaps committee, which consistently identifies areas for continuous improvement.

“The gaps committee looks at what the gaps are—in the proposal, the items that we’re thinking about for the proposal, or the context of the proposal. And then what are the gaps in other groups, or individuals that we need to bring to the table? I think it’s been really helpful to coordinate the work and the effort that way.”

—Roque Barros, Imperial Valley Wellness Foundation (SD Inclusive Economy Project)

Promising practices in this area include:

- Hold open planning sessions with particular space for community voice
- Work to balance the many different perspectives that may represent narrow areas of interest; successful inclusive, regional economic development should focus on triple-bottom-line solutions that balance equity, environmental sustainability and economic growth
- Communicate to external stakeholders the benefit of the convener role as a one-stop shop for inclusive economic development
- Use the regional collaborative’s structure to provide consistency and move the work forward
- Create specific, tactical work items aligned with the shared vision.
- Organize and staff governance tables (committees, work groups, etc.)
- Generate a clear set of expectations around work goals, methods of communication and timing
- Build agility into the process to respond to new opportunities
- Ensure plans are rooted in data and community needs
- Identify new partners who need to be brought into the work on an ongoing basis
- Check in on comfort levels regarding power dynamics to ensure everyone is being heard



USING COMMUNICATION AS A POWERFUL TOOL FOR COLLABORATION

Continuous communication and education, formally and informally, are a standard for multi-sector collaboration. Communication goals include minimizing information gaps, honing key strategy and priority areas and communicating to and from the regional collaborative's network and external networks. This outreach spans to people within the collaborative, external networks, government officials, institutional leaders and elected officials.

Narrative framing is increasingly vital to the communication and education of the regional effort and its work. A key component is using language focused on the assets versus the deficits to showcase regions as opportunities for investment, not reasons for pity.

“You can write any grant narrative and focus on poverty—or the digital divide, or the lack of educational attainment, or environmental disparities—and every time, there’ll be a winning grant application because Fresno has some of the worst markers for each of those. But presenting the case for Fresno in a way where we’re actually focusing on development and transformation, you have to tell the story in a way where you’re presenting an opportunity and not a problem.”

—Kaya Herron, Fresno Metro Black Chamber of Commerce (Fresno DRIVE)

This framing is overarching and important in both internal communication and external communication, including grant applications. Developing clear messages that help people understand the complexity of the regional economic landscape, including industry sector opportunity and optimization toward good, high-paying and promising jobs, is helpful in communication efforts.

Additional promising practices in this area include:

- Provide clear, concise and consistent messaging on what the regional collaborative is and why it is important
- Highlight co-created goals and strategy using consistent language
- Create and uphold agreed-upon group and partner expectations and self-report organizational capacity from the beginning
- Develop shared language that defines trust, collaboration, practices and expectation for accountability
- Provide and share information in a diverse and timely manner
- Use online communication, meetings and other tools strategically
- Use visual storytelling (e.g., videos, graphs, infographics, etc.) to help residents imagine their potential and see opportunity within a given regional economy
- Provide room to reflect and revise the work as needed
- Support CBOs and convey how their contributions are being used
- Use the collaborative to educate, reeducate and expand upon the shared vision
- Communicate the longevity of the work and a shared ownership model
- Be honest about the racial exploitation, segregation and other impacts that have contributed to structural inequities and economic outcomes in communities
- Create a learning exchange to convene and share resources
- Hold public meetings



SUCCESS THROUGH INCLUSIVE PARTNERSHIPS

Regional collaboratives often emphasized the successes of multi-sector collaborative development. These successes are cohesive and built upon personal relationships fostered over intentional meetings designed to spark engagement and broaden the regional collaborative.

Several regional leaders mentioned keeping focus on the longevity of the work while providing consistent education on the needs, vision and goals of the collaborative. These could include difficult conversations on race, systems, efficacy, gaps and others and require a created space to discuss, ask questions and learn. These spaces build trust and generate a collaborative spirit in addition to nurturing interpersonal relationships, especially among sectors that may not typically engage with one another.

Successful partnership often starts with finding common ground, coordinating and achieving quick wins for the collaborative.

“I think sometimes the challenge can be understanding the goals, objectives, values, and the mission of each of the organizations and trying to identify where there is agreement or overlap. Start there, and try to identify some small or quick wins to build a little bit of trust.”

—John-Paul Lake, B3K Prosperity

Inland Economic Growth and Opportunity (IEGO) and B3K Prosperity have recently staffed collaboratives that provide day-to-day operational support to:

- Understand the goals, objectives and value of each organization to optimize involvement and input
- Leverage local leadership and institutions to support and facilitate sustainable operations
- Seek out and access collective networks
- Help partners identify their role and responsibility in the work
- Understand that for regional economic development to succeed, it may require incorporating several economic strategies
- Organize a practitioner network and a representative (community) network
- Encourage partners to stay at the table amidst disagreement
- Engage new stakeholders/partners with intentionality and rich context
- Leverage the resources of institutional partnerships to attract and secure funding
- “Bridge the gap” by representing organizations that may not have capacity to give input at a particular meeting or decision juncture
- Expand typical networks to include cross-county and subregional leaders
- Establish working relationships in a way that they generate the highest opportunity for collective impact



CREATING A SPACE FOR AUTHENTIC AND MEANINGFUL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Regional collaboratives across the state meaningfully engage with a variety of community residents and community-based partners. By building understanding together, new partners develop confidence in each others' commitment and ability to tackle challenges and deliver for residents.

“What is trust? When they broke it down and said ‘it’s credibility. Are you saying what you mean and meaning what you say? Are you reliable? Are you showing up? Are you vulnerable? Are you listening to feedback and hearing concerns that might be said in a way that feels supportive of people?’ I added, ‘Are you showing up for yourself, only your organization or your entity? Are you showing up for others? Are you communicating in a timely, responsible and reflective and respectable manner?’ And if any of those things are missing, then there’s a lack of trust.”

—Francine Rodd, First 5 Monterey County (Regions Rise Together: Salinas)

Promising practices in this area include:

- Emphasize and center diversity, equity and inclusion from the beginning, not brought into the work as an afterthought
- Compensate CBOs for their time and energy to do this work, including during the planning and implementation phases
- Provide CBOs the opportunity to engage at varying levels based on capacity and interest
- Find people already doing community engagement work; fund and train them based on their interest and capacity
- Keep the partners leading the work front and center; these partners should be those already in communities and able to ensure community voices are heard and resources are prioritized for communities
- Confirm work is effective in delivering outcomes for the community; seek feedback to ensure the work is additive, not subtractive

- Travel to partner locations to have meetings, especially in large regions, to make sure people are heard and create more opportunities for them to be engaged
- Identify frequently mentioned priorities and explore those together
- Adopt a sense of humility in understanding that systems are not working, which is why conversations are needed in order to not leave people behind; engage in deep listening and thinking
- Encourage the collaborative to participate in training by CBOs on structural racism and other education to help personalize and better understand stories and data on the structural impediments that keep people from upward mobility
- Talk to the community and workers, not only heads of business associations and chambers of commerce
- Discover real lived experiences with broadband to understand challenges around the community’s engagement with systems
- Broker opportunities for collaboration around industry sectors that are new to communities including tech, clean tech and the blue (ocean) economy
- Iterate planning and strategy based on community, funder, policymaker and other leaders’ feedback on an ongoing basis
- Facilitate difficult conversations around paving paths for residents who do not have a high school diploma or equivalent to take advantage of opportunities
- Leverage leadership and capacity already in community and within CBOs

“An important element to the success of that process was working with leaders in regions that have trust, that are seen as community-based leaders, and bringing a partnership together. Rather than having someone who is never in a certain community coming in and leading this work—that would not be as successful. Leveraging the leadership, the capacity that is already there, allows you to just quickly jump into it.”

—Melissa James of REACH, reflecting on the Build Back Better grant process.

INCREASING ABILITY TO SECURE DIVERSE FUNDING SOURCES

Regional leaders shared multiple instances of successful fundraising. Regions noted that funders appear to be more inclined to be a part of a large-scale, transformative program—even if it is a long-term engagement—when communicated as an effective story with clear and specific requests or asks.

A leader from The Prosperity Strategy in Sacramento shared that the City of Sacramento and University of California, Davis both have attracted private and public funding by leveraging an “all eyes on the prize” approach. They believe consistent fundraising requests by multiple players within regions proved to be a rewarding funding strategy and attributed their success, to some extent, to effective storytelling as a means to successful fundraising.

One diverse, cohesive and responsible regional collaborative as a go-to platform makes it easier for funders to engage in the work depending on interest. Some regions mentioned providing diversified funding options for funders to consider.

“For philanthropists who are looking to invest funds into a platform that’s diverse, cohesive, responsible and responsive to community needs and issues, and also new ideas, it’s a win-win. When I say diverse, I don’t only mean skin tone and gender—I’m talking diverse profession and ideology, diverse in a lot of ways.”

—Alex Avila, The Inland Empire Multicultural Collective (IEGO)

Others elevated the following promising practices and advice:

- Distinguish between operational funding and initiative funding
- Establish a clear and uncompromised mission
- Diversify funding sources to allow collaboratives to be entrepreneurial, flexible, adaptive and successful; this could include funding for broader operations allowing for flexible timelines and the ability to bring in essential expertise to the effort
- Focus on structured, sustainable funding in order to scale the work
- Leverage available data in funding applications from higher education institutions or other readily available state and local government data
- Be willing to vary the typical or usual players/groups and identify who and how they can help produce meaningful change
- Empower stakeholders already doing great work with more resources

LEVERAGING THE POWER OF DATA

Regional collaboratives understand the power and importance of data to understand and organize, communicate, advocate, implement and evaluate their inclusive economic development work. Collaboratives agreed monitoring and evaluation are key to success, but not all have the capacity and funding capabilities. In addition, they indicated that while there is potential to be persuaded by metrics or to narrowly focus on data, measuring data well makes a real difference. There is a demonstrated need for quality evaluation processes that are honest, reflective and hold leaders accountable through robust metrics. Seeking to understand economic impact via actual outcomes, not just outputs, is particularly important to secure additional funding.

“Having a granular understanding of what services people actually utilize, how many sessions they attended, and our satisfaction rates at the end of it helps us paint a clearer picture of the impact of that technical assistance, not just the sheer number of hours that were provided. That helps us better define our value and our attractiveness for funders, and hopefully, the efficacy of our model.”

—Kaya Herron, Fresno Metro Black Chamber of Commerce (Fresno DRIVE)

Other promising practices in this area include:

- Ensure a compelling regional story is told through data by understanding the region’s residents and telling their stories
- Work with consultants to develop a theory of change, which encompasses a shared analysis and strategy
- Seek data granularity around what services people use, the types of sessions attended, satisfaction rates, etc.
- Review, listen and understand the data to help identify growth and improvement areas
- Understand what impact is desired and be honest about the impact
- Consult with experts or firms for data education and develop an education and community outreach plan
- Support planning in the area of new technologies being used by industries
- Use data to understand how systems have failed communities in the past in order to help address the issues and inform plans moving forward
- Use various forms of data and information sharing and gathering models, including annual economic forecasts, regional public opinion polls, focus groups, etc. that can be disaggregated by population, socio-economic standing, race/ethnicity and other metrics
- Hold evidence-based briefings on impact with policymakers



BUILDING EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Regional leaders attributed progress on economic development programs to leadership and staffing models within the regional collaborative. Identifying people with collaboration, facilitation and convening skills; clearly defining governance roles to increase accountability; and a managerial core team to coordinate efforts can be pivotal to progress. This distributed leadership model of inclusive economic development empowers individuals to leverage their respective professional networks, experience and skills to build toward common goals.

“There is always room for improvement, and I think leadership in organizations need to be receptive to that. Not take it as an offensive, but mostly as constructive feedback to see how we can do more and better. So I think it’s just naming that, having that conversation, and course-correcting.”

—Tahra Goraya, Monterey Bay Economic Partnership
(Regions Rise Together: Salinas)



Regions described leaders as those who do not seek to advance their personal interests, are inclusive of differing voices, listen well and are receptive to change when new information is discovered.

Promising practices in this area include:

- Understand the needs, pressure points and landscape; set the groundwork of conditions to bring diverging interests to the table
- Develop an infrastructure to convene people across county lines
- Establish coherence around how people see themselves working together
- Establish open and ongoing two-way communication across county lines
- Encourage diverse sector leadership; collaborate with industries that have a strong commitment to climate, community and innovative approaches to solving community challenges
- Rely on staff and experts who live and work in the region to act as a guide and help identify the appropriate leadership
- Harness the capacity of the full region and advocate at the state and federal levels to bring additional investment and participation to the region
- Foster intentionality around how the collaborative will function and how the work will be advanced
- Establish bylaws or charters to help set the foundation on inclusive work and growth
- Define the roles of each organization and how the organizations will work together
- Develop a strong vision and establish a board with expertise and leadership that can be leaned upon
- Provide transparency around meeting schedules, votes, etc. and make a commitment that outside meetings occur with or are extended to all those in the regional collaborative to ensure everyone is a part of the conversation

CERF IMAGINED AND REGIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Existing regional economic development collaboratives are excited for the opportunity presented by CERF and its potential to catalyze deeper investment strategies. As regional leaders imagine the possibilities of CERF, they are hopeful for the following opportunities:

ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Leaders are hopeful CERF will improve the living standards and conditions for families throughout the state. It is key to explore ways to grow sectors and create diverse regional economic development strategies to ensure innovation and sustainability. Regions have a goal of achieving long-term regional economic health and see CERF as an opportunity to collectively curate data on regional economic development work, strategies, practices, etc.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Capacity can be an impediment to achieving the goals and implementing the work of inclusive, regional economic development. Funding in this space could include added capacity for implementation work, conversation, facilitation around visioning and an opportunity for experienced consultants to help regions make CERF successful for them.

COMMUNITY FOCUS

Successful processes will be those that lean into building trust and meaningful engagement with a broad community. Regional collaboratives provide clarity on how the process will be accountable to the community with clear expectations of outcomes, respecting regional variation and knowing that current work is at different stages.

Other community-focused CERF feedback included creating equitable spaces for smaller cities within regions to meaningfully contribute and participate, as well as leveraging the capacity, leadership and trust that exists within communities in order to drive the work forward.

COLLABORATION

Regional leaders discussed working together and leveraging needs across parts of the regions to make sure CBOs are empowered while being listened to in the CERF process. They identified an opportunity to think collectively about the assets each of the regions already has and continuously share successful examples across the state.

FUNDING

With regard to CERF funding, regions look forward to additional resources for outreach and engagement, as well as flexible funding, including funding to support collaboration.



REGIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Regions identified additional areas where they are hopeful about improvements CERF can help with, including closing the broadband access gap, equitable investment with neighborhood input and developing workforce, training and upskilling opportunities for residents.

Leaders specifically noted the following regional aspirations:

- **Central Coast:** Opportunity to be more strategic, collaborate and advocate for the region while uplifting important issues; network and facilitate manufacturing and international trade in Ventura and Central Coast
- **Fresno:** Opportunity to become an innovative solar and manufacturing leader while benefiting from an environmental change using technology
- **Imperial Valley:** Opportunity for strategy around biofuels and other energy projects
- **Inland Empire:** Showing the world that the region can be a leader in sustainable logistics and goods movement; leveraging innovation and development that benefits residents and future generations
- **Lake Tahoe:** Environmental innovation and health/wellness strategy
- **Los Angeles:** Impact change that can unify communities and be attractive to funding
- **Redwood Coast:** Development of the blue (ocean) and green (environmental) economies
- **Sacramento and Los Angeles:** Strategy around connecting residents to workforce opportunities and then to business opportunities
- **Southern Border:** Creation of a unified vision and plan



VISION FOR SUCCESS



Investing in the state’s regional economies and communities is a proven way to lift more Californians toward their dreams of a better tomorrow. Inclusive, regional economic development aims to create and execute strategies that generate more high-paying and promising jobs that create social equity and environmental sustainability in areas that share economic connections. For regions across California, this framework means all have the ability to develop personal and shared economic prosperity through opportunity—education, training and entrepreneurship—without barriers.

With CERF and other opportunities in mind, regions envision stewardship and capacity-building for future generations, leveraging good and promising work, addressing systemic challenges, considering innovative approaches and working collaboratively.

Thank you to all who have contributed to this report, including regional leaders across the state and The James Irvine Foundation. This report and work is not possible without your daily commitments to helping regions rise.

APPENDIX: INTERVIEWEES BY REGION AND EXISTING REGIONAL COLLABORATIVE

CENTRAL COAST

JACKIE CRUZ

Hartnell College
Foundation (Regions
Rise Together: Salinas)

TAHRA GORAYA

Monterey Bay Economic
Partnership (Regions
Rise Together: Salinas)

MELISSA JAMES

REACH

MARIA ELENA MANZO

Mujeres en Acción (Regions
Rise Together: Salinas)

TIM MCMANUS

Industrial Areas
Foundation (Regions
Rise Together: Salinas)

KATE ROBERTS

Formerly with
Monterey Bay Economic
Partnership (Regions
Rise Together: Salinas)

FRANCINE RODD

First 5 Monterey
County (Regions Rise
Together: Salinas)

BRUCE STENSLIE

Economic Development
Collaborative

REGIONS RISE TOGETHER: SALINAS

(Salinas Valley)

Regions Rise Together: Salinas is an inclusive economic development initiative that seeks to achieve inclusivity and prosperity for ALL residents in the Salinas Valley, synchronize and leverage existing efforts, enable and empower communities through the co-creation of investment plans and ultimately demonstrate that our region is investment ready and investment-worthy.

CENTRAL SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY

ELLIOTT BALCH

Central Valley Community
Foundation (Fresno DRIVE)

MICHELE CANTWELL- COPHER

Fresno County
Superintendent of Schools
(Fresno DRIVE)

KAYA HERRON

Fresno Metro Black
Chamber of Commerce
(Fresno DRIVE)

DEBORAH NANKIVELL

Fresno Business Council
(Fresno DRIVE)

DR. TANIA PACHECO- WERNER

Central Valley Health Policy
Institute (Fresno DRIVE)

FRESNO D.R.I.V.E.

(Fresno/Central Valley)

The Fresno D.R.I.V.E. Initiative (Developing the Region's Inclusive and Vibrant Economy) is a 10-year Community Investment Plan drafted with input from a 300-person steering committee representing over 150 organizations in the Greater Fresno Region.

KERN COUNTY

JOHN-PAUL LAKE

B3K Prosperity

TRACO MATTHEWS

Community Action
Partnership of Kern
(B3K Prosperity)

NICK ORTIZ

Greater Bakersfield
Chamber of Commerce
(B3K Prosperity)

KRISTEN WATSON

California State
University, Bakersfield
(B3K Prosperity)

BETTER BAKERSFIELD AND BOUNDLESS KERN (B3K PROSPERITY) B3K

(Bakersfield/Kern County)

B3K Prosperity is a public-private collaborative effort to develop a roadmap and investment plan for economic growth and inclusion in Kern County. B3K's goal is to see 100,000 more quality jobs in the region by 2031, so that fewer families struggle to make ends meet and everyone in the Bakersfield-Kern region has the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

BILL ALLEN

Los Angeles Economic
Development Corporation
(Propel L.A.)

STEPHEN CHEUNG

Los Angeles Economic
Development Corporation
(Propel L.A.)

JESSICA KU KIM

Los Angeles Economic
Development Corporation
(Propel L.A.)

PROPEL L.A.

(LA County Economic
Development) (Los Angeles)

The Countywide Strategic Plan for Economic Development [in Los Angeles County] is an ambitious plan—and for good reason. An unprecedented economic transition is underway, and we all need to row together to navigate the changing tide.



INLAND EMPIRE

ALEX AVILA

The Inland Empire Multicultural Collective (IEGO)

PAUL GRANILLO

Inland Empire Economic Partnership (IEGO)

JACKIE MELENDEZ

Executive Director, Inland Economic Growth and Opportunity (IEGO)

KAREN SUAREZ

Uplift San Bernardino, Making Hope Happen Foundation (IEGO)

INLAND ECONOMIC GROWTH & OPPORTUNITY (IEGO)

(Inland Empire)

IEGO, a regional cross-sector, bi-county collaborative, is a network of businesses, institutions and stakeholders, committed to growing middle-class jobs and pursuing inclusive economic development to improve the quality of life for all Riverside and San Bernardino County residents.

REDWOOD COAST

KATHY MOXON

Redwood Coast Rural Action

SACRAMENTO

HEIDI HILL DRUM

Tahoe Prosperity Center (Envision Tahoe)

PAT FONG KUSHIDA

California Asian Pacific Chamber of Commerce (The Prosperity Strategy)

EVAN SCHMIDT

Valley Vision (The Prosperity Strategy)

GABBY TREJO

Sacramento ACT (The Prosperity Strategy)

ENVISION TAHOE

(Tahoe Basin)

The work of Envision Tahoe has been guided by an impressive all-volunteer group of 30 private, public and community leaders carefully selected from all over the Tahoe-Truckee Region for their diverse representation and viewpoints. Each person has agreed to work with their colleagues to inform, propel and be champions for this change effort, which seeks to develop strategies and tactical action plans to diversify Tahoe's economic base, backed by the latest data and evidence.

OUR PATH FORWARD: THE PROSPERITY STRATEGY

(Sacramento)

Our Path Forward: The Prosperity Strategy is a strategic framework and action plan for the six-county Sacramento Region that prioritizes our core economic initiatives and will result in a more prosperous, equitable and resilient region.

SOUTHERN BORDER

ROQUE BARROS

Imperial Valley Wellness Foundation (SD Inclusive Economy Project)

TIM KELLEY

Imperial Valley Economic Development Corporation

STATEWIDE

KÄREN WOODRUFF

Wells Fargo

