

## Empowering Communities

Regional, inclusive economic development aims to elevate the economic competitiveness of a region. Catalyzing a regional, inclusive economic development effort requires **strategic coordination, capacity assessments, partnership development, authentic engagement, diversified and sustainable funding and robust research and data**. With information gathered from interviews with regional leaders, including those in our California Stewardship Network (CSN), this guide is intended to support regions in their inclusive economic development efforts by sharing promising practices that regions can start using today.

## Seizing a Historic Opportunity

The \$600 million Community Economic Resilience Fund (CERF) presents regions the opportunity to create new plans and strategies that diversify local economies and develop industries that create high-quality, broadly accessible jobs for all Californians. **Now is the time for localized, multi-sector organizing around what regional economic development could deliver for communities throughout our state, particularly those most socioeconomically vulnerable and historically marginalized.**

## Advice from Regional Leaders

The promising practices detailed on the following pages—which were shared during our interviews with regional leaders and CSN partners throughout the state—provide insight and advice for implementing regional, inclusive economic development, with the **goal of delivering effectively for regions and residents while centering their collaborative efforts around addressing long-standing disparities and achieving an equitable economy**. If you are interested in learning more from our interviews about what has worked well in inclusive, regional economic development efforts, you can read the full report, “Empowering Communities through Inclusive, Regional Economic Development” [here](#).

## Promising Practices

### Use Communication as a Powerful Collaboration Tool

Continuous and intentional internal and external communications and education are key to successfully framing, understanding and developing strategies. Regional leaders recommend the following:

- Use the collaborative to **educate, reeducate and expand upon the shared vision**
- Develop shared language that defines trust, collaboration, practices and expectations for accountability
- **Celebrate even the smallest win of the collaborative to demonstrate progress** and momentum to internal and external audiences

## Taking a Regional Approach

A regional approach to inclusive economic development means:

- Economic development strategies are created and implemented through the region’s collective identification of priorities
- This multi-jurisdiction and multi-sector approach prioritizes meaningful community engagement in decision-making processes around priority setting and strategy implementation
- Ultimately, these strategies focus on the triple-bottom-line of:

**EQUITY  
ENVIRONMENT  
ECONOMY**



## Advice for Regional Leaders

Acknowledge and address historic trust issues among stakeholders and communities and the legacy of systemic inequality, while maintaining a commitment toward reconciliation and collective prosperity.

### Develop Successful Inclusive Partnerships

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.

- Establish working relationships in a way that generates the highest opportunity for collective impact and expands typical networks to include cross-county and subregional leaders
- Generate a clear set of expectations around work goals, methods of communication and timing

### Create Meaningful Community Engagement and Partnership

Regional economic development work meaningfully engages a diversity of voices to co-create, implement, evaluate and leverage solutions for the betterment of residents and community members; this work acknowledges the unequal distribution of resources among various stakeholder groups and intentionally invests in building capacity within these communities to correct the imbalance.

- Meet stakeholder groups where they are: facilitate the participation of stakeholder groups (i.e. community based organizations, residents, etc.) at varying levels based on their capacity and interest
- Keep the partners leading the work front and center; these partners are the trusted messengers already in communities and able to ensure community voices are heard and resources are prioritized for those populations
- Provide adequate resourcing of capacity-building and engagement; funding needs to be provided at sufficient levels to enable stakeholder groups to build their capacity to meaningfully engage themselves and others. Mechanisms, such as, but not limited to, regranting models can equip organizations with the resources to conduct the outreach, build the buy-in and secure the ongoing participation of targeted populations; expecting entities to conduct this important work without funding and by absorbing the costs is not realistic or ethical
- Community stakeholder groups and their constituents' participation should go beyond receiving information and providing input and toward involvement in the collective decision-making process and governance structure of the regional effort—this moves the work from engaging the community to empowering it

### Increase 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.

- Diversify funding sources to allow collaboratives to be entrepreneurial, flexible, adaptive and successful—this requires commitments from both the public and private sectors
- Federal, state and local governments must align their expenditures with the priorities of regional collaboratives; at the same time, public investments should be leveraged with funding from philanthropic, corporate and other private sources to create flexible capital stacks for implementation of regional strategies



## Leverage the Power of Data

Regional economic development strategies should be informed by data—both quantitative and qualitative—that reflect local needs, assets and the lived experiences of residents within the region; regions seek movement on shared outcomes, not outputs.

- Ensure a compelling regional story is told through data by understanding the region's residents and telling their stories, as well as the vision those who live within the region want to see implemented
- Decide collectively as regional partners what priorities warrant measurement, at what intervals and using what sources
- 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; leverage available data in funding applications from higher education institutions or other readily available state and local government data

## Build Effective Civic Leadership

The work requires deep commitments to healing, listening, sharing challenges and experiences and creating a shared vision for capitalizing on opportunities; leaders in this space need to go beyond their own agendas and practice a civic stewardship framework that shepherds resources toward a greater good.

- Meet regional partners where they are; define and leverage the capabilities of each organization and how each partner's role will coordinate with others contributions
- Harness the capacity of the full region and advocate at the state and federal levels to bring additional investment and participation to the region
- Work to balance the many different perspectives that may represent narrow areas of interest

## Technical Assistance and Community of Practice

CA FWD has the expertise to catalyze, convene and empower regions as they apply to CERF and other opportunities. We are ready to help you achieve the following:

- Imagine and design a customized regional economic planning process that ensures diverse voices are at the table
- Move data-based policy solutions forward to drive sustained impact and systemic change
- Leverage policy expertise to provide counsel on how efforts can best align with statewide strategies and be taken to scale while helping organizations build capacity to do the work



Watch the video to learn more

CA FWD can provide technical assistance, including facilitation, strategic planning and development, stakeholder convening, research and data, statewide policy alignment, proposal writing and educational sessions.

CA FWD can work with philanthropy to build capacity in both community-based organizations and other under-resourced groups interested in engaging in inclusive economic development processes.

CA FWD offers an open-membership Community of Practice to facilitate inter-regional information sharing.

## Advice for Regional Leaders

Get uncomfortable to get comfortable: consider standing up a space for intentional discussion of racial inequities with expert facilitation; the collaborative's governance structure can also include functions to account for racial equity.

## READY TO GET STARTED?

Contact Ismael (Ish) Herrera, Director of Regional Stewardship, at [ish@cafwd.org](mailto:ish@cafwd.org) to start the conversation