



Valley CERF

Building a Community-Led,
Climate-Forward Economy

Drafting the Central San Joaquin 'Valley CERF' Plan

The Next Six Months: Regional Strategy Team
and Investment Plan Sprint

BACKGROUND

In 2023, the Central San Joaquin 'Valley CERF' coalition launched an intensive, community-driven process to identify regional goals and economic opportunities in alignment with the State of California's 'Jobs First' objectives. Efforts to date include creating a governance structure to foster equitable participation across the four-county (Fresno, Madera, Tulare, Kings Counties) region; establishing four 'Local Tables' comprised of over 120 residents representing seven major stakeholder groups to identify and lift local interests; holding monthly meetings of Local Tables; completing local and regional SWOT analyses; holding two 'regional congresses' with all Local Table participants; commissioning twelve grassroots organizations to engage community members; working with research partners to complete and publish a data-rich Baseline Report of existing regional conditions; completing a report of promising economic frameworks and industries; and surveying local CBOs and civic organizations for projects that align with the California Jobs First objectives.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY-LED, CLIMATE-FORWARD ECONOMY

Of particular note from the last year of work is the alignment between local voices that are prioritizing "climate solutions as economic development" with the State's broader climate targets and priorities. This broader San Joaquin Valley is already leading the clean energy transition – the region has the largest utility scale wind (Tehachapi pass in Kern County) and solar (Rexford Project in Tulare County) projects, and over 3 GW of the state's 20 GW of utility scale solar are in the Valley.¹

The San Joaquin Valley represents just 8% of the state's population and 15% of its land mass, yet the region will be expected to produce more than 25% of the state's renewable energy by 2040. Just as the San Joaquin Valley has long played an outsized role in providing high-quality, low-cost food and traditional energy to the rest of the state, so will the region prove to be essential for achieving the state's clean energy and emission reduction targets statewide.

This presents an unprecedented opportunity for the San Joaquin Valley – but just because an industry is producing sustainable products does not automatically mean it will provide significant and sustained benefits to local workers and communities. California's energy transition requires a regional approach to infrastructure and investment planning to ensure real benefits accrue to the region's local communities and residents. Without such an approach, individual projects, jurisdictions, and interest groups will easily be pitted against one another; investment in the region will be under-sized and fail to deliver the results needed for local communities and the State; and our natural resources will be 'harvested' and exported from the region and used to deliver low-cost, clean energy for regions across the Western U.S. with little to no benefits for local communities.

¹ <https://www.ppic.org/publication/solar-energy-and-groundwater-in-the-san-joaquin-valley/>

INDUSTRY CLUSTERS, ESSENTIAL INFRASTRUCTURE & COMMUNITY INVESTMENTS

To respond to this unprecedented opportunity, the Valley CERF Coalition is setting out to build a “Community-Led, Climate-Forward Economy” that catalyzes inclusive, regional economic development. Input on the Valley CERF framework is still being solicited through community canvassing and focus groups, which will continue to be synthesized and provided to the Local and Regional Tables over the next several months as the Regional Plan Part 2 and specific investment proposals are being developed. However, the following themes have already emerged from the Coalition’s first year of engagement, research, and discovery.

Industry Clusters

Building a climate-forward economy requires integration of innovative and regenerative practices across existing and emerging industry clusters, including **Responsible Food and Ag Systems**, **Circular Manufacturing**, and **Climate Solutions**, and ensuring that economic development benefits our Valley residents and businesses.

Essential Infrastructure

In addition to the infrastructure needed to support Responsible Food and Ag Systems, Circular Manufacturing, and Climate Solutions industry clusters, **“One Water”** investments are needed to holistically and sustainably manage finite water resources for long-term resilience and reliability to meet community and ecosystem needs. **Broadband** infrastructure deployment and digital literacy across the region will also require critical infrastructure investments.

Community Investments

Lastly, strategic planning is needed in the following “community investment” areas: **Education and Skill Building; Small Business and Microenterprise** for the climate economy; and **Community Health**. These community investment areas empower a thriving workforce and business ecosystem – key inputs for successful climate-forward economic development. The community investments also represent key outputs, identified by our Valley residents, as desired outcomes of economic growth.

REGIONAL STRATEGY TEAM (RST) AND THE ‘SPRING SPRINT’

The Valley CERF Coalition has less than six months to translate these investment themes into a directionally correct, draft investment plan by our August 30th deadline. Our plan will need to outline our vision for the region, the existing assets to leverage and new investments needed to achieve the vision, and – to the extent they are known in specificity – investable projects that align to the vision.

To move as quickly, expertly, and comprehensively as possible, the Regional Convener (CVCF) is recommending that the Valley CERF coalition assemble a “Regional Strategy Team” that supports the Regional Table and local stakeholders in developing the draft regional plan. The Regional Strategy Team will provide the support needed to complete an ‘investment plan sprint’ (approximately 8 weeks sometime between March and May 2024) to support the level of engagement and detail work needed to complete the draft regional plan by June. The RST should be comprised of local and out-of-market technical experts who can quickly landscape aligned work that is already under way in the region; infuse the planning process with technical and business planning expertise needed to achieve the regional vision; and provide staffing bandwidth to support multiple stakeholders participating in the Spring Sprint within each of the interdependent investment plan areas summarized below.

RST WORKGROUPS: POTENTIAL PARTNERS AND PARTICIPANTS

Industry Clusters

Climate Solutions

This work group will develop a plan identifying the portfolio of climate solution strategies needed to bolster our economy, maintain working lands, and support State climate goals. The Climate Solutions investment plan may include strategies for the following components: clean energy generation, storage, transmission and distribution; carbon capture, removal, and storage; transportation infrastructure and fleet transition; nature-based solutions for natural and working lands; and community benefits plans and policy frameworks.

Potential Participants and Technical Research Partners: Relevant local, State and Federal government; chambers of commerce; economic development corporations; local and national climate task forces/collaboratives; resource conservation districts; environmental justice organizations; organized labor; tribal partners; workforce investment boards; university and community college partners; public health partners; consultants, researchers, and subject matter experts.

Responsible Food & Agriculture Systems

This work group will expand on the regional vision and plan for integrating environmentally responsible practices across our food system, including production, processing, distribution, wholesale and retail, hospitality, and food waste and recovery. They will identify promising strategies for regenerative, sustainable, waste-reducing practices; strong local and ethical supply chains, value chains, and markets; accessible and affordable health-promoting products; and fair wages and working conditions.

Potential Participants and Technical Research Partners: The F3 Coalition; university and community college partners; farmworker organizations; local farm and ag-related businesses and CBOs; relevant local, State and Federal government; chambers of commerce; economic development corporations; resource conservation districts; environmental justice organizations; organized labor; tribal partners; workforce investment boards; public health partners; consultants, researchers, and subject matter experts.

Circular Manufacturing

This work group will develop a regional plan to support circular manufacturing. They will identify existing manufacturing capacity and gaps (infrastructure, workforce, transmission, etc) given climate economy plans; identify strategies/projects to use renewable and recoverable inputs, design products for re-use, recover excess and manufacturing byproducts, and reduce waste.

Potential Participants and Technical Research Partners: manufacturing alliances; existing manufacturers and related businesses; chambers of commerce; workforce investment boards; organized labor; worker safety; economic development corporations; resource conservation districts; environmental justice organizations; tribal partners; public health partners; consultants, researchers, and subject matter experts.

Essential Infrastructure

One Water

Using existing plans and data, this workgroup will identify and prioritize One-Water projects; support a proactive, watershed-scale approach that plans for drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, groundwater, and surface water. The investment plan will promote an industry cluster including public and private actors that provide planning and administration, land use and siting, engineering and design, materials and supply chain, building and construction, operations and maintenance, and monitoring and testing.

Potential Participants and Technical Research Partners: regional water collaboratives; university and community college partners; local farmers and ag-related businesses and CBOs; relevant local, State and Federal government; water agencies; chambers of commerce; resource conservation districts; safe drinking water and community advocates; environmental justice organizations; organized labor; tribal partners; workforce investment boards; public health partners; consultants, researchers, and subject matter experts.

Broadband

This workgroup will develop a plan to support broadband and connectivity for all Valley residents. The plan will inventory existing efforts and develop business plans for promising broadband initiatives.

Potential Participants and Technical Research Partners: regional broadband coalitions, consortiums and alliances; university, community college, and school district partners; relevant local, State and Federal government; chambers of commerce; resource conservation districts; environmental justice organizations; organized labor; tribal partners; public health partners; consultants, researchers, and subject matter experts.

Community Investments

Small Business & Microenterprise

Building on existing plans, this workgroup will identify the supports needed for small businesses to engage in the climate economy; will prioritize strategies to support small businesses across the clean energy, circular manufacturing and one-water industry supply chains; and identify funding streams.

Potential Participants and Technical Research Partners: local chambers of commerce and other organizations supporting small businesses; CDFIs and other financial institutions; university and community college partners; farmworker organizations, local farmers and ag-related businesses and CBOs; relevant local, State and Federal government; economic development corporations; organized labor; building trades; tribal partners; workforce investment boards; consultants, researchers, and subject matter experts.

Education & Skill Building

This workgroup will create a plan to blanket the Valley with high-quality, affordable, and accessible education with on-ramps for English language learners, undocumented residents, adult learners, and rural/underserved communities; create specific plans related to supporting the infrastructure investments needed to support the climate-economy workforce.

Potential Participants and Technical Research Partners: university, community college, and school district partners; cradle to career coalition; education-related CBOs; relevant local, State and Federal government; workforce investment boards; chambers of commerce; economic development corporations; organized labor; tribal partners; consultants, researchers, and subject matter experts.

Community Health

Using existing regional health and health equity data, develop a regional plan that identifies policy changes, infrastructure development, and promotes community wellness by targeting the Region's most pressing health equity issues for supporting a healthy workforce as it transitions to a new climate economy.

Potential Participants and Technical Research Partners: public health collaboratives; health-related CBOs; health policy organizations; university and community college partners; farmworker organizations; relevant local, State and Federal government; environmental justice organizations; tribal partners; workforce investment boards; consultants, researchers, and subject matter experts.