



Equity.
Innovation.
Sustainability.

3700 Sixth Street,
Suite 200
Riverside CA 92501
909.268.2967

January 28, 2022

Samuel Assefa
Director
Governor's Office of Planning and Research
1400 Tenth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dee Dee Myers
Senior Advisor and Director
Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development
1325 J Street, Suite 1800
Sacramento, CA 95814

Natalie Palugyai
Secretary of the California Labor & Workforce Development Agency
California Labor & Workforce Development Agency
800 Capital Mall, Suite 5000 (MIC-55)
Sacramento, CA 95814

SUBJECT: DRAFT COMMUNITY ECONOMIC RESILIENCE FUND (CERF) PLANNING PHASE GUIDELINES

Dear Director Assefa, Director Myers and Secretary Palugyai:

On behalf of the leaders and impacted communities throughout the Inland Empire region of Southern California, we write in response to the public comment period offered for the Draft Community Economic Resilience Fund (CERF) Planning Phase Guidelines.

The Inland Empire is one of the fastest-growing population and economic centers in the great State of California and the United States. The region is comprised of two counties and 52 incorporated cities spanning 27,000 square miles and is home to over 4.5 million people. If the Inland Empire were a state, it would exceed the population of 25 U.S. states. The Inland Empire is diverse where Latinos make-up 54% of the San Bernardino County population and 51% of the Riverside County population. African Americans comprise 8% in San Bernardino County and 6% in Riverside County (compared to 5.7% state-wide). Within the Inland Empire 22 cities have a majority Latino population.

Inland Economic Growth & Opportunity (IEGO), is a regional cross-sector, bi-county 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. IEGO's work focuses on building industry clusters in Sustainable Logistics, Cybersecurity, Advanced Manufacturing and Green Technology. Our success draws from the spirit of collaboration and the shared values of equity, innovation and sustainability.



IEGO has been operating for the last five years to build this network, to include diverse partners in a shared conversation about regional economic development, and develop innovative strategies and raise resources. In 2020, IEGO submitted a Build Back Better application and, while unsuccessful, the effort generated strong alignment and a belief in the inclusive economic process that IEGO has been supporting. As a mature collaborative, IEGO is in a position to take an IE-wide view that connects subregions around the clusters named above and more, as well as connecting critical equity dimensions of economic development, from broadband to childcare and housing. Working flexibly and nimbly with a deep understanding of how a networked approach can grow and remain resilient, IEGO looks forward to supporting an application from the Inland Empire.

The Inland Empire region welcomes investment through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to support regional economic recovery from COVID-19. In the spirit of our mission of collaboration and inclusive regional growth, IEGO respectfully submits the following comments and requests regarding the guidelines:

- Recognize that traditional economic and workforce development strategies are necessary, but insufficient to remedy the historic and systemic inequities that existed before, yet were exacerbated by the pandemic. The State should, therefore, encourage innovative and inclusive approaches that engage and stimulate new voices and strategies in the CERF process while recognizing the fundamental role of business and economic development in moving towards inclusion and equity. This includes a regional analysis on the impacts of the pandemic on vulnerable populations, including, but not limited to, black, indigenous, people of color, women and youth.
- Emphasize a triple bottom line approach to economic development outcomes within the CERF program. A triple bottom line approach would show the State's commitment to positive outcomes in regards to social, environmental and economic impacts of projects, programs and policies created under the CERF program.
- Prioritize the need for equity and inclusion in the CERF process and focus on place-based conditions that impact economic mobility like access to housing, transportation, childcare, equitable planning decisions and public health.
- Find ways to better recognize and prioritize existing inclusive regional economic development efforts already underway in California versus encouraging "new, inclusive regional planning tables" in regions where tables exist. This language should be reflective of the fact that regions are at different stages of inclusive planning. Starting new tables for the sake of the CERF program has the potential to undermine existing efforts and cause disruption within regions. However, program funds should be spent to plug-in new partners and deepen engagement with existing partners.
- Clarify and itemize mandatory elements of the "recovery and transition plans" to minimize confusion with future compliance, but allow flexibility for regions to customize these plans as appropriate.





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- Allow for maximum flexibility for the \$5M in planning dollars to allow for regional capacity building and include critical coordination infrastructure such as staff support.
- Provide clarity on the possibility of “early implementation grants” for regions with prior inclusive planning processes.
- Address the uneven distribution of planning dollars across the 13 regions and provide more details on how a more equitable distribution of dollars might be achieved based on population size, geographic spread and/or need with the established regions.
- Ensure the state’s role in supporting communication and building the field of practice across regions and sub-regions, presuming that new levels of communication will be required and that the State is in an excellent position to share information with partners and ensure connectivity and learning.
- Take the time needed to properly roll out and support the CERF program to maximize the short and long-term impacts on regions. Specifically, consider slowing this process down in order to maximize inclusion in the process, given the ongoing impact of COVID-19.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations. The Inland Empire region looks forward to the release of the final program Guidelines and working with the State on CERF.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jackie Melendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

Jackie Melendez
Executive Director
Inland Economic Growth & Opportunity

