

# OC Jobs First Collaborative

October 11, 2024

## **Taryn Palumbo**

I want to give a quick shout-out to Maria. She presented yesterday at our OCG Summit about Catalyst, and she did an amazing job. There was a lot of interest from nonprofits, and people are really excited about it. We received great feedback about the initiative and strong community engagement.

## **Kathy Boyd**

Thank you! You'll receive a flyer soon, but we're planning another regional event. We're inviting this collaborative, the OC Workforce Development Board, and others in the county to learn about ongoing K-16 grant projects. There are many organizations involved, and it might be useful to build on existing work for future funding. The event will be an evening at Orange Coast College and open to the public.

## **Maria Linares**

I want to quickly highlight that Annie reached out to me and asked if I could share an event with the collaborative. I haven't sent it via email yet, so I'll mention it here. Cal State Fullerton's Office of Government and Community Relations is inviting the collaborative and others in the community to their 3rd Annual Energy and Sustainability Summit. It's a great event happening on Monday, October 21, from 10 AM to 12:30 PM, with an EV Expo from 9 AM to 1 PM in Parking Lot R.

## **Ish Herrera**

This is a chance for us to share insights from this week's California Economic Summit. It was great seeing many of you. A few key takeaways: Governor Newsom emphasized regional economic development and state investments in K-16, climate collaboratives, and workforce programs for California's resilience. There were excellent breakout sessions on topics like manufacturing and broadband, and it was great to see many of you connecting with peers. Orange County also had a strong presence during the investor exchange, where we showcased projects and connected with potential investors.

## **Kathy Boyd**

I learned a lot about industries like transportation and grid electrification. My key takeaway was the need to align sustainable practices with education and workforce development while breaking down silos. A speaker's story about human-made map lines resonated, highlighting how we often create unnecessary divisions in our work. Moving forward, especially in Orange County, I hope we can erase those lines and collaborate more, as we're all working toward the same goal, creating more opportunities for our communities.

## **Toni Symonds**

Attending summits is always a highlight, offering the chance to engage with diverse stakeholders. This year, I found the discussions on Community Benefit Agreements and practical case studies especially valuable. Though initially skeptical of the Aggie Square panel due to its controversy, I appreciated the honest discussion about community benefits and challenges. Looking ahead, more transparency on the governor's California Jobs First meetings would be helpful, as they shape the state plan. Additionally, reviewing how the four state plans align with Orange County's work could ensure better coordination.

**Jesse Ben-Ron**

Two key highlights I'd like to add: First, the Director of the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development, along with the Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development, emphasized their commitment to ensuring the sustainability of this program beyond the next two years. It's reassuring to know that at the highest levels, there's intentional planning to maintain this effort. Second, regarding the investor exchange, as we start thinking about projects, it's important to remember that not all funding will be grants. Investors are looking for returns, so when we consider proposals, we need to think about building strong projects that can leverage various funding sources, not just grants. Sustainability and revenue generation will be key in securing long-term success.

**Linda DiMario**

Just a reminder to the collaborative that what you've described, Ish, is one of the core specialties of Octane OC and the Octane Nonprofit Accelerator. We have a rigorous methodology that we use with both commercial companies and nonprofits to help them better position themselves for serious investment. We can definitely assist with that as well.

**Jesse Ben-Ron**

I want to take this opportunity to reset and discuss what's ahead, including any improvements to the meeting process and logistics. Now is a great time to consider how we can proceed effectively. One thing to note: the state is asking for an investment playbook, using a model from San Bernardino as a reference. They'd like a draft by early January 2025, with a final version by June 2025. This playbook will help outline priority projects, allowing the state to allocate funding more accurately and give us a tool to engage with investors. We'll have more guidance soon, but this will be an important step as we move forward.

**Jesse Ben-Ron**

The investment playbook is hyperlinked, and I have another slide to walk through the website and give an overview. While it's being modeled as guidance, it's not definitive, and I'm waiting for more clarity from the state. Right now, this approach doesn't fully make sense to me. Since it's a draft, I expect significant changes between January and June. I want to keep you informed about what we're working toward, but after discussions with other regions, it's unclear why this is necessary at this stage. It also seems like it could slow down project submissions.

**Ana Urzua**

Jesse you're saying we're shifting into Catalyst, and that the state already has our regional plans on their website. I also wanted to check about our opportunity to provide any final feedback. I believe you mentioned we would review it one more time. Could you clarify that?

**Jesse Ben-Ron**

Yes, that will be an agenda item for the next meeting. As I mentioned, it's a living document, so we welcome your feedback, and the collaborative can decide whether to incorporate it. Similar to the process for Regional Plan Part One, we'll gather input, make updates, and show it to you before finalizing. Once adopted, we'll update it on our website and notify the state. While I can't guarantee the state will update their site, we'll let them know the region made changes and request they update it.

**Ish Herrera**

There's a question in the chat related to Anna's comments. Luis has shared a suggestion about

possibly using a Google form to gather information on potential projects that might be eligible or aligned with this funding.

**Jesse Ben-Ron**

Yes, that's already underway. We plan to send it out early next week so the collaborative can review projects before the December meeting, ensuring we have the right framework. The link is included in the slides. The state will release \$45 million in implementation funding starting January, requiring projects to be implementation-ready, unlike Catalyst, which focuses on pre-development. This body must approve regional projects for state consideration. We'll include a survey to categorize projects as implementation or Catalyst, helping with organization. Sector investment coordinators will assist with outreach, recommendations, and grant writing by December. We'll track progress for both funding types and provide input on state RFPs. Long term, we aim to build ecosystems around priority industries and address regional plan strategies, including housing.

**Toni Symonds**

I have a suggestion: we should consider creating a FAQ section on the website that not only defines key terms but also addresses common questions, like the role of the sector investment coordinators. I think these slides are great, and this is something that will come up often, so having a central place where we can share what we already know, while acknowledging there are still unknowns would be helpful. Additionally, although the state isn't framing it this way, I think we should consider sorting all

project submissions when they come in, whether they're Catalyst-ready or closer to implementation. If a project is further along, we shouldn't lose it, let's create a separate bucket and make sure we're capturing everything. This could also be useful in our outreach and advertising efforts.

**Jesse Ben-Ron**

In the survey, we'll include a question to help sort the projects afterward, so we're not excluding anyone, whether they're Catalyst or not. When we send out the blast, we'll describe both implementation and Catalyst in the same communication to avoid confusion. Rather than sending separate announcements for each funding source, we'll ask everyone to submit their projects, and we'll sort them afterward.

**Linda DiMario**

I completely agree with you, Jesse. The "government-speak" and terminology we've been using throughout this process can be difficult to grasp, even for those of us familiar with it. It's essential that we find a way to make this more accessible.

**Jesse Ben-Ron**

These are important decisions, but much of the heavy lifting is done. Moving forward, we won't need to meet as frequently. We'll start with bimonthly meetings and shift to quarterly, depending on state timelines. I'd like feedback on the meeting setup, Friday mornings at 8:30 AM seem to work, but should we adjust the length or timing to make them more effective?

**Ish Herrera**

I see one suggestion that 9 AM might be easier for school drop-offs, and several people have mentioned preferring 60-minute meetings instead of 90, as Kate suggested.

**Jesse Ben-Ron**

As we move forward with project proposals, here are examples of pre-development activities eligible for funding, like needs assessments, recruitment strategies, curriculum development, business plans for digital platforms, or revolving loan funds. Remember, these funds must be additive, not replace existing dollars. A key question is whether the scoring criteria should be similar for both Catalyst and implementation projects or differ. We'll gather feedback through a survey. The state's draft rubric focuses on job quality, capacity, and budget, so we'll need to decide how closely to align with it to stay competitive. Any questions or thoughts?

**Ish Herrera**

And the question in the chat, "Does the state provided guidance on whether the regions will have a limited number of projects for implementation?" So to Maria's point, that is to be determined.

**Jesse Ben-Ron**

The state's draft guidance from February suggested thresholds for projects, but the current scoring rubric shows a low score in a category won't disqualify a project, though it may lower its chances. As a region, we might set a higher bar since major gaps would likely affect a project's overall score. Previous guidelines included mandatory elements and bonus points for exceeding expectations. I'm working to prepare us ahead of final guidelines to avoid a last-minute scramble.

**Toni Symonds**

The American Indian Chamber reviewed the tribal rubric and found that equity wasn't ranked by need, as all applicants serve disinvested communities. In state meetings, it was noted that narrowing focus should avoid competition over who is most underserved. Jesse's model makes sense for now. As Iosefa mentioned, equity should apply regionally, but the state is likely targeting funding at specific populations.

**Jesse Ben-Ron**

To clarify, the SFP focuses on tribal communities, so equity refers to "assured benefits to disinvested communities" in that context. For broader projects, it applies to income-defined disinvested communities, with maps available for reference. This prediction will guide us until January. Catalyst funding gives regions more control over priorities and scoring. Should our rubric align with the state's or reflect regional goals? I'll send a survey, but here are some points to consider: Should workforce goals target 100 or 1,000 apprenticeships? Should small business outcomes prioritize new startups or growth? Luis asked if a \$90K income threshold is too high. Should equity, climate, or job quality weigh more heavily? Tony mentioned budget cuts could shrink funding, so we need to balance alignment with state priorities and our own.

**Ana Urzua**

On outcomes, especially worker ownership and business development, it's important to focus on quality of life improvements, such as higher wages, workplace safety, and decision-making power, rather than just counting new businesses. For the rubric, a single application process could simplify things for applicants, while scoring could differ for Catalyst and implementation projects. Catalyst projects need support to become implementation-ready, while implementation projects should already deliver on their plans.

**Jesse Ben-Ron**

I think you raise a great point, and honestly, there isn't a clear-cut answer here. The collaborative will ultimately decide what's best, but both sides of the argument are valid.

**Iosefa Alofaituli**

Ana made a good point that raised a question for me, would it be beneficial for us to stick with the traditional metrics of entrepreneurship, like business start rates, survival rates, revenue growth, and job retention/creation? That's what our industry usually measures. But to Anna's point, is there room to expand how we define impact, or would that work against us since the state typically evaluates entrepreneurship with those traditional metrics? I know it's a tough question, but I wanted to lift it up based on Anna's comment about balancing status quo with innovation and looking more deeply at impact.

**Kathy Boyd**

I just wanted to mention that I see value in your plan to put out a preliminary look at these projects. Using technology like AI can really help us narrow down themes from the voices in our region and align them with the state. That's something I do with large initiatives, and I'm excited about applying that approach here. Once we gather the initial data on project ideas, we can use it to guide our thinking on the rubric, whether Catalyst and implementation should align or differ. The data will give us a clearer picture and help us make more informed decisions.

**Linda DiMario**

Just to confirm, this is California Jobs First, correct? The understanding is that this initiative is about creating responsible, sustainable jobs that improve quality of life, especially for disinvested communities. The projects we submit need to align with both our regional targets and California Jobs First priorities, equity, climate, sustainability, job quality to score well. Am I understanding that right? Yes, so equity isn't optional; it's part of the equation for competitive project submissions. When we talk about the rubric, the outcomes we want should reflect the creation of quality jobs that meet these key factors and improve quality of life.

**Jesse Ben-Ron**

Yes, I was the last in-person speaker, and I apologize if I misinterpreted the discussion. It sounded like there was a desire for more tangible numbers, like how many apprenticeships or jobs this funding would create. But if I misunderstood and the preference is more qualitative or value-based outcomes, as Linda suggested, I'm happy to revisit that. We can certainly focus less on numbers if that's the consensus. Let me know if I got that wrong.

**Linda DiMario**

I don't think you misinterpreted it at all. What I'm saying is that I'm still hearing mixed messages. Anna suggested a more qualitative approach, but I believe we need both qualitative and quantitative elements. We can't make these assessments in a vacuum, it's difficult to say, for example, that a project must create 1,000 jobs without seeing what's submitted. The submissions will give us a clearer picture. If one project creates five jobs and another creates 50, while both meet the rubric and align with

state priorities, we'll need that information to make informed decisions. So, until we see the submissions, it's hard to set specific expectations.

**Jesse Ben-Ron**

On the outcomes side, if we set ambitious goals but the sum of all the projects doesn't reach those targets, we can't claim those outcomes. So, you're saying we need to see the collective impact of job creation, business creation, climate mitigation, etc., before setting expectations. I wanted to hear everyone's thought process as we move toward deciding what we value, prioritize, and include. The state has its own criteria, but we need to decide if that's the approach we want to take, both for implementation and Catalyst.

**Ana Urzua**

It would help if the rubric doesn't set strict requirements, like a specific number of jobs for eligibility, but instead rewards projects that can clearly describe their impact. For example, higher scores could go to those that demonstrate measurable outcomes on things like equity and quality of life. It's more about scoring based on the ability to meet these important criteria, rather than setting rigid targets upfront.

**Jesse Ben-Ron**

For Catalyst, a key question is: how many rounds of funding should we have over the two years? Should we fund a variety of projects at different stages or focus on a few and fund them to implementation readiness? If we have many quality projects, can we spread the funding to move them forward incrementally? Do we need a maximum or minimum funding amount based on the eight strategies? For example, with \$9 million, do we allocate \$1 million per strategy, or do some need more? Costs can vary widely between activities, like redevelopment versus strategic planning, so we need to factor that in. In Orange County, \$9 million could go quickly, given the number of stakeholders, and projects must be completed in two years. Should we fully fund a few or spread the funding? We can make selections soon to have an immediate impact.

**Linda DiMario**

Yes, I'm definitely focused on achieving the greatest impact for the greatest good. Instead of funding 60 small projects, it might make more sense to focus on six that have the potential for long-term, sustainable impact.

**Toni Symonds**

We could form or task groups to develop scenario projects to address key questions, such as prioritizing impact versus the number of grants. Linda's point about small and large projects needing different technical assistance is crucial. Exploring trade-offs through scenarios could clarify priorities and guide decision-making, especially with many strong ideas likely to emerge.

**Linda DiMario**

I see what you're saying, Tony, but it doesn't have to be either/or. Small projects could potentially fit into larger ones that are submitted. For example, with the kinds of projects I'm considering for Octane, I'm listing potential collaborators and organizations to include, but not everyone may think that way when submitting. It could be up to us to identify where a smaller project aligns well with something bigger, like a submission from OCDE, for example.

### **Toni Symonds**

If we wanted to take that approach, we could design the program to include a preliminary letter of intent, submitted by a certain deadline. A group skilled at project organization could then sort the applications into different categories. The key is to organize it clearly and transparently so that no group with a great project misses the opportunity to collaborate because they weren't aware of it.

### **Garry Brown**

I understand Linda's point about maximizing impact. In my experience on allocation committees, a percentage split between large and small projects often works well. For example, projects under \$100-200K could get a smaller portion of the funding, ensuring smaller projects aren't excluded. If we only focus on big projects, smaller ones may not apply. Also, the environmental infrastructure examples you showed in category two involve hundreds of millions.

### **Jesse Ben-Ron**

I'll communicate that point to the state, it's important for them to recognize this too. It may be a holdover from when they had more funding. Garry, you're right, these projects can vary greatly in size and cost, and this group will need to consider that when setting parameters. Thanks for the comment. Now, let's quickly go over the investment playbook. It's more of a website than a PDF, and the state will provide more guidance. If you haven't checked it out, San Bernardino has six categories, which align closely with the eight we've mentioned. You can click on a category, like entrepreneurship, to see ready-to-go projects, exploratory ones, their dollar amounts, and objectives.

### **Maria Linares**

We're gathering ideas for projects seeking funding. We ask for the applicant's name, a brief description, and a project summary (max 1,000 characters), with the option to submit more details in a Word doc. Next, we ask where the project will benefit in Orange County, its location (if applicable), and the project stage (implementation-ready or pre-development). We also ask for the project category (e.g., innovation, workforce development), with hyperlinks to industry details for guidance. Respondents can specify "Other" if needed, and select components like career pathways, apprenticeships, or climate resilience. We include links for navigating details like Justice 40 disadvantaged census tracts and ask if the project benefits at least 40% of residents in those areas. We also ask about membership in the Jobs First collaborative, funding requests, and technical assistance needed. Projects should align with state goals, create assets for disinvested communities, and promote quality jobs with benefits. We ask about equitable job access, support for workers, local hire provisions, and funding models like worker-owned cooperatives. Projects should leverage other funding, including federal funds, and include community input.