OC Jobs First Collaborative

March 28, 2025

Ish Herrera
I want to take a moment to wish Teresa all the best as she transitions to a new opportunity. We're grateful for everything she's contributed and have truly appreciated having her in this space. As a quick reminder, at the last collaborative meeting, you all supported splitting the Catalyst funding into two parts: Job-creating projects and Community-enhancing projects. The job-creating projects focus on priority sectors: tourism and outdoor recreation, med tech, and high-tech hardware with $2.1 million allocated. These aim to grow good-paying, sustainable jobs in OC, aligned with the state's economic and climate goals. Now, for the community-enhancing projects which support housing, healthcare, child care, and climate adaptation in historically disinvested communities, you'll vote on which of these projects get funded, making this a truly collaborative and democratic process. We received 21 proposals requesting over $5 million in total, but only $900,000 is available in this phase. The submissions include 9 proposals from business or economic development organizations, 8 from community-based nonprofits, 3 from workforce or education groups, and 1 from a local government agency. There will be a second round of funding, so projects not selected in this round will have another opportunity to apply. Today's action item is to vote for your top three projects. Your first-choice project will receive 5 points, second choice 3 points, and third choice 1 point. Votes will be tallied, and projects funded in ranked order until the full $900,000 is awarded. Important: Do not vote for any project you or your organization is involved in. If you do, your entire ballot will be invalid. The poll opens today and closes Tuesday, April 1 at 5 PM. If needed, a second round will run April 2–4. With that, let's open the floor, any questions about the process or the poll?

Ish Herrera
The poll you'll engage with in the next few days is for the community-enhancing portion of the funding. We'll also briefly go over the projects selected for job-creating funding. Last week, you should've received the community-enhancing applications, which the poll will focus on. As a reminder, please refrain from advocating for your own project during the discussion. Instead, speak to the merits of other projects to avoid bias and help maintain a fair, conflict-free process.

Iosefa Alofaituli
Just to clarify the projects that we have access to prior to this meeting, were for the job creating projects, right?

Jesse Ben-Ron
No, community enhancing were shared with you last week.

Ish Herrera
The ones you'll be playing a direct role in selecting awardees for, are the community enhancing projects. We will also talk about the job creating projects.

Kevin Li

Did anybody take a look at project 13, which is the Tustin Heritage one? It says the project will serve households between 30% AMI, to 80% AMI, that's a big range. How are they judging that?

Jesse Ben-Ron
Kevin, that's really for you to decide whether, in their explanation, whether that's satisfactory or not as you judge that project. If there are no questions about the proposals in front of you or anything you'd like to elevate, we can use the next few minutes to address any process-related questions.

Dyana Pena
Was healthcare one of the priority sectors? I'm noticing a lot of healthcare-related applications, and I thought those would be eligible for job creation funding if they fall under that priority industry.

Jesse Ben-Ron
Healthcare was included as a priority sector in both areas. On the job creation side, it was more focused on healthcare businesses and workforce development, not necessarily treatment or access to care, although culturally appropriate care was part of the broader conversation. We also told applicants to reach out if they were unsure about which track to apply under. In the end, if they chose to apply under Community Enhancement, we honored that. As we've mentioned before, we didn't want to take applications off the table unless they were clearly ineligible for job creation.

Iosefa Alofaituli
I haven't reviewed the proposals yet. I'm wondering, if anyone has tips for going through this process. When I open the folders, I do see a summary, which seems to give the most concise overview, but you have to click into each of the folders to get to that summary.

Jesse Ben-Ron
We can batch all the summaries into one folder for all of you, Maria will do that after this call.

Iosefa Alofaituli
Jesse, would you say the summaries are the most helpful if we can't review everything?

Jesse Ben-Ron
Yes, that's why we made them. They give a quick overview and include budget info, which is important.

Peter Senkbeil
As I'm reviewing proposals, I've noticed some budgets are over $900,000. If one of those gets a top vote, it could take the entire award amount. Others are much smaller, in the $50,000–$100,000 range. I'm thinking about whether to prioritize one large project or several smaller ones.

Dyana Pena
I've been trying to align proposals with the priorities in the scoring criteria. Even if a project doesn't hit every category, I look for ones that set up strong systems for future growth, especially around sustainability. For example, project #27 is mostly focused on housing resilience, but it also creates a

community land trust and a process for community involvement in land acquisition. That could really support land preservation and related efforts. It seemed like a strong investment at $91,500.

April Barnes

Dyana, just a heads-up, the total request for that project is over $200,000. The $91,500 is just a portion of it. Jesse, is that something we can address, if we want to support only a portion of a proposal?

Jesse Ben-Ron

The full amount is whatever they listed in the budget template, that's the official request. I'd have to pull up the file to confirm the exact number, but that's where it's listed. If the project gets selected, we'll fund as many eligible pre-development expenses as possible. Some proposals request $250K, but when we review the work plan, not all of it qualifies. During contracting, they might end up receiving, say, $125K instead.

Maria Linares

I dropped a note in the chat to let everyone know the proposals are organized by the three categories: Concept, Accelerate, and Last Mile. As Jesse mentioned, consider whether the activities are truly pre-development when scoring. I shared this at Tuesday's in-person meeting as well, when scoring, you can use your own spreadsheet to track project impact and equity. We won't collect those, but it may help you stay organized. Make sure to reference the NOFO pages listed in the chat, and review the top-line strategies, not just the titles, but the actual action items you all voted on in previous meetings. For example, if a proposal mentions green innovation or technology, check if they've clearly answered the relevant questions and whether their answers are thorough.

Jesse Ben-Ron

You all said you didn't want to be bound by these categories, but we organized the folders this way to help you avoid jumping between very different funding levels while reviewing. You can choose to fund only Concept proposals, none at all, or a mix. But grouping them by category helps you compare proposals more easily within similar funding ranges.

Jasmine Pachnanda

I haven't reviewed the proposals yet, but for the ones in the Last Mile category: since they request higher amounts, is it fair to assume some costs may not be eligible due to the pre-development requirement?

Jesse Ben-Ron

Last Mile is meant to take projects right up to implementation, but if someone misinterpreted that and included implementation costs, then yes, some of the funding might not be eligible.

Maria Linares

I will now provide a quick overview of the poll process. Enter your full name and organization (or indicate if you're a community resident). You'll see a list of projects, rank up to three. Your top choice goes first (5 points), second (3 points), third (1 point). Important: You cannot vote for a project you're

affiliated with, your ballot will be invalidated if you do. The poll closes at 5 PM PST on Tuesday, April 1. If you have any questions, please reach out over the weekend.

Ish Herrera

I'd like to invite someone to make a motion to approve the release of the poll, and then someone else to second it. Do we have a motion?

Dyana Pena

So moved.

Theresa Schickling

I'll second.

Ish Herrera

Thank you, Dyana and Theresa. It looks like the motion carries unanimously. That means the poll is now approved for release. Let's move on to the other portion of the Catalyst funding I mentioned earlier, the job-creating project awardees. This category complements the community enhancement projects you'll be engaging with over the next few days. It's exciting to see both funding streams available, it really reflects the values of this collaborative and the fairness of your efforts over the past two years. This pot of funding aligns closely with the state's Economic Blueprint, released earlier this year, which emphasizes developing regional industry clusters, Orange County included. Importantly, the state also wants regions to consider environmental impact and economic equity when building out these clusters. You'll see those values reflected in the selected projects. As a reminder, Maria shared all of the job-creating funding applications with you on Monday for transparency and accountability. Today, we'll go over the projects that were selected.

Jesse Ben-Ron

To give you a high-level overview: this funding stream totals $6 million. We received more applications than what you'll see in the folder, but only projects aligned with the target industries were eligible for scoring. So while the actual number of proposals was higher, only a subset met the criteria and were scored. That's why you'll see fewer job-creating projects than community enhancement ones. Here's a quick breakdown of the selected projects: 5 from businesses or business associations focused on business formation. Three from CBOs (Community-Based Organizations) including economic development orgs like CIELO. Seven from workforce and education-related orgs. Four from local government. We understand some of you are still reviewing the community enhancement projects. Please let us know by end of day Tuesday if you have any suggestions or feedback on these selected projects, we want to notify awardees and move forward with contracting. These project selections were made by four OCBC staff members, including myself. We individually scored each project, then came together to discuss and select the most impactful ones. Let's go over a few highlights: The Weatherization Training Center by Community Action Partnership OC trains disinvested residents as healthy home technicians through green tech apprenticeships. The program supports workforce development with salaries starting at $60K and potential to reach $80K. It aligns well with the initiative's focus on equity, environmental impact, and good-paying jobs. The Construction Pre-Apprenticeship Program serves South Orange County and targets both high school and adult learners. Focused on the

community-prioritized construction industry, it aims to train 600 individuals over three years. It was the only project exclusively focused on South OC, helping fulfill the goal of geographic diversity. The Workforce Reentry Program supports justice-involved individuals entering the food, retail, and entrepreneurship sectors. It emphasizes small business development and economic mobility, with secured capital funding and a relatively small implementation request. Its focus on equity and economic development made it a strong contender. We'll go over the rest of the selected projects in more detail shortly. Again, your feedback is welcome by Tuesday. While the poll will determine community enhancement funding, these job-creating projects were selected by OCBC based on the criteria and values discussed throughout this process. One of the selected projects involves multiple cities working together to create a business and community development district in Little Saigon. The goal is to enhance urban design, improve streetscapes, and drive tourism, foot traffic, and business activity in the area. This subregional collaboration stands out because it unites several cities and focuses on a culturally rich, disinvested area with a large Vietnamese population, something unique to Orange County and even nationally. It exemplifies true economic development by supporting business growth, not just workforce training. Another project focuses on advanced manufacturing in partnership with Cal State Fullerton, targeting small and mid-sized manufacturers, which are often overlooked but critical for good-paying jobs. The funding request is relatively small (around $50,000), but the potential return on investment is significant. Although countywide in impact, it's based in North Orange County, a priority for geographic balance. Fullerton College also proposed a project focused on precision manufacturing and drone technology. This is the only selected project involving a community college. It aims to train 150 individuals, with 50% coming from disinvested communities. Starting salaries for graduates range from $60,000 to $80,000, reinforcing its alignment with the initiative's definition of a good-paying job. Another standout is the childcare business incubator from CIELO. Building on previous success, where 36 participants became licensed childcare providers, opening over 400 new slots, they aim to scale the model countywide. The incubator fosters economic development by supporting business ownership and expands access to childcare, which in turn enables more parents to rejoin the workforce. Unlike other childcare proposals focused on single cities, CIELO's approach serves disinvested communities across the county, from Santa Ana to Buena Park to Fullerton. Looking ahead, we plan to fund these pre-development activities up to the maximum amount, prioritizing alignment with key sectors. The next round of funding—$6 million total—will likely be released as one full round rather than split into two, to give projects more time before the September 2026 spending deadline. All applicants, regardless of outcome in this round, will be eligible to reapply.

Ish Herrera
I'd like to open the floor for any feedback, comments, or questions.

Kevin Li
Yeah, I had a question. The ones you just mentioned, Jesse, were those selected internally, or was there a vote on them at some point?

Jesse Ben-Ron
No, those were selected through a process led by OCBC. We made the decisions internally, with notice and some consultation with the collaborative, but it wasn't through an open poll. These are the selections OCBC is presenting for your confirmation.

Jasmine Pachnanda

These are really strong selections, very representative. You and your team did a great job of capturing the essence of the conversations we've had and what will benefit Orange County at a high level. One question I had and I'm not sure if you can answer this, but I was curious: were there any common themes among the applications that didn't meet the criteria? For example, from what I've seen, it looked like there were a few focused on individual mentorship or entrepreneurship incubation. Were there trends in the types of proposals that didn't quite make the cut, not because they weren't good projects, but maybe because of how the programs were structured?

Jesse Ben-Ron

Some proposals were ineligible from the start because they didn't align with the priority sectors. Others were very close, just a few points away from being selected. Key factors included industry focus, geographic diversity, and number of people impacted. While there wasn't a single theme among those not selected, we did see strong proposals that simply couldn't be funded due to limited resources. The most competitive proposals clearly outlined their target industry and impact, those stood out the most.

Ish Herrera

Thanks, Jasmine, and I'm also seeing a few affirmations in the chat echoing your sentiments about the strong selection. Just a reminder: if anyone has additional feedback for Jesse, Maria, or the OCBC team on the summary or merits of these projects, please reach out by the end of the day on Tuesday, April 1. You can send an email or give them a call to share your thoughts.

Iosefa Alofaituli

Some of you may have seen the Orange County Needs Report that came out from the Samueli Foundation. I think it's worth sharing with folks in philanthropy who may not always see things the same way. They did a great job deepening their understanding of the issues by engaging with leaders like many of you in this room. I'll go ahead and post the link in the chat for anyone who hasn't seen it yet.

Maria Linares

just reach out please, if you have questions, I'm always accessible and available.

Jesse Ben-Ron

We've been doing this work for about two years now, we developed some really strong regional plans. But like with anything, I think people get more energized when the work starts happening directly in the community, on the ground. This marks our first step in getting funding out there, not just for job creation, but also for projects that really enhance the community and make a tangible impact.

Ish Herrera

The distribution of resources out into the field is a big achievement. Be proud of the work you've contributed to over the last two-plus years. If you have any concerns about a potential conflict of interest, don't hesitate to reach out. Reach out to Maria or Jesse to clarify before submitting your responses. Remember, don't vote for any project that you or your organization are involved in, or your ballot becomes invalid. We will see you at our next collaborative meeting on Friday, May 30 at 9 a.m.