San Joaquin Valley Regional Economic Forum
OVERVIEW

The Office of Community and Economic Development at Fresno State (OCED) held the San Joaquin Valley Regional Economic Forum (Forum) on April 26, 2013. The event was locally organized through collaboration with Fresno Business Council and Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, in connection with California Forward, a statewide entity that is seeking to revive California’s economy through increased efficiencies at the state and local levels, and California Stewardship Network. The event was filmed and broadcast by Valley PBS; recordings of the 6-hour Forum can be viewed on the website for the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley: http://sjvpartnership.org/about-us/san-joaquin-valley-regional-economic-forum/.

More than 250 stakeholders representing higher education, state and local government, business, workforce/economic development, and community based organizations heard presentations on regional progress and economic opportunities in the San Joaquin Valley and participated in a priority-setting exercise. Building from the inaugural event held in 2012 which focused heavily on the Ag Value Chain, this year’s forum reviewed progress made in the region over the past year, and established the priorities for implementation in the coming year. Forum speakers made presentations focused on stewardship, the Regional Industry Clusters Initiative, local issues, and economic development paradigms. The theme of the event was “Creating a great place for business and people.”

Rather than simply take a traditional look at economic development as smokestack chasers, the event challenged attendees to view economic development through a triple bottom line—economic, environmental and equity impacts. This approach was promoted through highlighting the need for greater stewardship by both public and private sector leaders. “Doing the right thing” for the Valley requires a commitment to human development as well as economic development. The presentation by Doug Noll, a Fresno attorney, explored the connectivity of both, and how success cannot occur in one without the other.

To promote an innovative economic/workforce development collaborative, Mike Dozier, OCED executive director, explained how and why Fresno State in partnership with numerous individuals and agencies throughout the Valley established the Regional Industry Clusters Initiative (RICI). RICI is an aggressive, proactive program created and administered by Fresno State for a collaboration of economic/workforce development providers, such as higher education, workforce agencies, government, and professional organizations, with the intent of engaging the private sector to address the needs for greater success in the Valley. An 8-county, 27,000 square mile network is under way with a great deal of momentum.
Local issues were addressed in a moderated panel of four San Joaquin Valley mayors of cities with varying populations, providing insight as to how the stewardship approach to economic development is working in their cities and what opportunities lay ahead for greater connectivity and collaboration.

Participating mayors included Paul Linder of Taft (population 9,464), Ashley Swearengin of Fresno (population 501,362), Garrad Marsh of Modesto (population 202,751), and Luis Molina of Patterson (population 20,578).

During lunch, attendees were asked to consider and rate action priorities for the region and the state of California. The top two selected regional priority items by category are included below.

*Infrastructure Top Priorities:*
  - Maintain/improve regional corridors
  - Utilize telehealth/telemedicine to improve health care access in rural communities

*Water Top Priorities:*
  - Maximize the efficiency of current and future water supply systems in the Valley
  - Need for a comprehensive water project to achieve the co-equal goals of delta sustainability and water reliability

*Innovation Top Priorities:*
  - Find efficiencies in water and energy uses
  - Identify and fill the voids in the regional Ag value chain

*Workforce*
  - Develop a reliable supply of Ag production workers
  - Enhance middle skills training
**Regulations**

- Rationalize and streamline regulation
- Encourage sustainable growth

**Capital**

- Create better connections for venture capital, angel, and philanthropic investors
- Improve/increase business mentoring and technical assistance

**Other**

- Global connectivity: align and coordinate export-promotion efforts statewide
- Working landscapes: promote the health of ecosystems as well as the livelihoods that are based on natural resources such as agriculture, forestry, fisheries, tourism and mining

**NEXT STEPS & LONG-TERM IMPACT**

Through the work of OCED and its partners, and specifically the Forum, the San Joaquin Valley is able to determine regional priorities for moving issues forward, as a whole, and assigning champions to each of the action items so that each can be addressed throughout the year. By convening key regional stakeholders in this manner, the Forum serves as an annual check-in to evaluate and re-rank regional priorities to drive local and statewide improvement efforts.

The recommendations from the Forum will be elevated to the 2013 California Economic Summit to be held Nov. 7-8, 2013, in Los Angeles. At the statewide event, the regional bodies convene to identify statewide priorities which will be carried forward into the coming year. The Valley is well represented at this State Summit by Fresno State and the partners that participated in the Forum.

OCED is responsible for working with champions for each of the priorities and the subsequent implementation steps throughout the year, thus making its role critical to the success of Forum activities. The San Joaquin Valley is one of two regions (out of 16) in the State of California which has a network of regional collaborators, led by OCED, that has addressed as action items the priorities set from the 2012 Forum. The San Joaquin Valley Regional Broadband Consortium and the Regional Industry Clusters Initiative were formed in response to Priority Implementation action items from the 2012 Forum.

OCED/Fresno State is able to count on multiple partners throughout the Valley for grants, work plans, advocacy, and idea exchanges as a direct result of the outreach process established by OCED. Because of this objective Valley role, OCED/Fresno State is the perfect coordinator for this regional activity.

Tag: Regional collaboration, Economic Forum