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*Overview of the*  
**Fresno Area Collaborative Regional Initiative**

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*A joint venture of*  
**The Fresno Business Council**

**Central California Futures Institute at  
California State University, Fresno**

## **I. Introduction**

As many reports and experts have identified, the San Joaquin Valley is at a crossroads. The *“Economic Future of the San Joaquin Valley”* produced by the Great Valley Center perhaps summarizes it best by saying the Valley will continue to expand by population- and cost-driven economic growth, which results in a “‘vener of vitality,’ short-term boom-and-bust cycles, declining standards of living, and a ‘move-on’ syndrome among Valley businesses or choose an innovation-driven model of growth, which results in a rising standard of living, income mobility, resilience, and economic diversification.”

We believe a solid foundation of people willing to reevaluate and reinvent existing social, environmental, and economic systems exists in the Fresno/Madera area. The Fresno Area CRI is an organizational structure that provides those people, Fresno’s civic entrepreneurs, with a vehicle to capitalize on momentum, actualize change, and realize regional prosperity.

## **II. What is a Collaborative Regional Initiative?**

The California economy has experienced tremendous growth since the mid-1990s due largely to the fundamental shift in the state and national economies away from mass production and low cost to an information-based economy characterized by speed, adaptability, and the use of networks of people and technology. Because a “networked” or “knowledge-based” economy depends almost exclusively on skilled and resourceful people who have numerous choices about where they want to live, communities around the state and nation have begun to realize that quality of life matters more now than ever before.

To achieve quality of life and regional competitiveness, systemic and chronic problems must be resolved. A new model of leadership effective in dealing with root problems has emerged in numerous communities across the country.

The James Irvine Foundation has been at the leading edge of this new leadership model, now referred to as Collaborative Regional Initiatives (CRIs), and has provided substantial resources to the emerging collaboratives, as well as to the study and best practices of CRIs.

There are 19 organizations recognized by the Irvine Foundation as CRIs in California. Their broad goal is to promote economic vitality and improve the quality of life in their respective regions. CRI organizations normally form around one or more of the following issues: (1) economic prosperity, (2) social equity, and/or (3) environmental stewardship. These issues are commonly referred to as the “three Es” (economy, equity, environment).

CRIs are more similar to private organizations than to public or non-profit organizations. They focus on finding market-driven solutions to regional problems, and in many cases are composed largely of private-sector based organizations. Each CRI is supported by a collaborative organization, which serves as the recipient of Irvine grant funds and contains the necessary infrastructure to provide administrative, operational and communications assistance to the CRI as it organizes and implements its various activities.

The 19 existing CRIs in California are the Institute of the North Coast (Bayside), Sierra Business Council (Truckee), Sonoma County Vision (Santa Rosa), Valley Vision/RAP (Sacramento), Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Development (San Francisco), Tri-Valley Business Council (Livermore), Joint Venture Silicon Valley (San Jose), Santa Cruz Region Cluster Project (Aptos), Action Pajaro Valley (Watsonville), Santa Barbara Region Economic Community Project (Santa Barbara), Economic Alliance of the San Fernando Valley (Van Nuys), San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership of Commerce and Cities (Irwindale), Gateway Cities Partnership, Inc.(Paramount) Inland Empire Economic Partnership (San Bernardino), Metropolitan Forum Project (Los Angeles), South Bay Economic Partnership (Torrance), Orange County Business Council (Irvine), San Diego Dialogue (La Jolla), and San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation (San Diego).

### **III. The Fresno Area Collaborative Regional Initiative**

#### **A. What is the history of the Fresno Area Collaborative Regional Initiative?**

In Fall 2000, the Central California Futures Institute at Fresno State and the Fresno Business Council began to work together through a formal memorandum of understanding to implement the economic development and technology infrastructure reports published by the Great Valley Center's New Valley Connexions program ("*Economic Future of the San Joaquin Valley*" and "*Connected to Compete*"). The reports provide a vision for a prosperous and competitive San Joaquin Valley, one that relies on innovation within existing industries and technological infrastructure (both the hardware and the people prepared to utilize the technology) to advance the region and its residents beyond their chronically poor condition.

In December 2000, the Business Council and Futures Institute began convening the New Economy Task Force, which met regularly to (1) prioritize key issues that needed to be addressed to achieve the vision described in "Economic Future of the San Joaquin Valley," and (2) determine a "mastermind" strategy for addressing the priority issues. The members of the New Economy Task Force are Ken Newby, Alan Pierrot, John Welty, Tim Stearns, Ghassan AbulGhanam, Pat Wright, Paul Quiring, Dan Whitehurst, Keith Moyer, Deb Nankivell, Barbara Steck, and Ashley Swearingin.

By April 2001, the New Economy Task Force had developed the blueprint for developing the Fresno Area Collaborative Regional Initiative, its focus areas, organizational structure, funding strategies, and work plan. Since then, the New Economy Task Force has been engaged in gaining support from its host organizations, recruiting task force leaders and members, and pursuing funding to launch the Fresno Area Collaborative Regional Initiative.

#### **B. How is the Fresno Area Collaborative Regional Initiative organized?**

The Fresno Area CRI is a joint venture between the Fresno Business Council and the Central California Futures Institute at Fresno State. It is guided by the CRI board of directors, which consists of members of the New Economy Task Force (see list above), plus leaders of the CRI task forces and is funded through a grant from the James Irvine Foundation and contributions of staff time and resources from the Fresno Business Council and Futures Institute.

The CRI will launch task forces in five major, interconnected areas: (1) Land Use and Transportation, (2) Technology Infrastructure, (3) Workforce Preparation in the Knowledge Economy, (4) Creating an Innovative Climate, and (5) Human Services and Effectiveness in the Non-Profit Sector (*see Section III Fresno Area CRI Task Forces*). The Task Forces will consist of approximately 8 to 10 recruited task force members and one task force leader. The task force members and leaders will be selected based upon competency, leadership capacity as demonstrated in their profession and/or in the civic sector, commitment to stewardship, and standing with various constituencies. In addition, the values of “civic entrepreneurship” (*see Attachment One Task Force Job Descriptions*) will be used as a standard for task force participation.

It is very important that the task forces connect with and leverage the ideas and resources of the other task forces. Regular communication will be facilitated by (1) task force leaders’ participation on the CRI board, (2) staff participation in every task force meeting, (3) an intranet site for task forces, and (4) regular meetings (roughly bi-monthly) of all task force members and leaders.

### **C. How is the CRI different from past efforts to improve the economic conditions of the Fresno Area?**

Private, civic, and public leaders have put countless hours of investment into the Fresno Area over many decades. Each effort has moved the community forward, sometimes in small, incremental steps and other times in large leaps. The Fresno Area Collaborative Regional Initiative is one more organization of committed people working alongside many other organizations to improve the region. However, there are several items that make the CRI effort unique, such as:

- An integrated approach to addressing deep-rooted chronic and systemic problems, i.e. success in each task force will depend on progress being made in other, inter-related task forces and other community initiatives;
- The CRI task forces will consist of recruited volunteers so that task forces can be held accountable for accomplishing specific tasks within a given time frame;
- The outcomes of the task forces will be specific, attainable, implementation plans;
- The operating values of the CRI will include:
  - *Boundary Crossing and Collaboration* – Past political, social, and economic boundaries have sometimes prevented the community from solving some of its greatest challenges. CRI task force members must be willing to cross any boundary necessary to achieve desired outcomes.
  - *Commitment to Outcomes* – CRI task forces must be willing to take responsibility for tasks and achieving specified outcomes, as opposed to “delegating” responsibilities to other organizations.

- *Commitment to “Art of the Possible” Thinking* – The belief that anything is possible in the Fresno Area has guided the development of the CRI. Task forces will be asked to “envision success” in their respective areas and then backward map a strategy for achieving that vision.

**D. What is the timeline for the CRI activities?**

During May and June 2001, task force leaders and members will be recruited. Once the full team is assembled, the CRI will officially launch with a boot camp-like retreat (August). Following the retreat, the task forces will begin to meet and pursue their assessment, diagnosis, and recommendation activities according to the approximate schedule below:

***Month One:***

- Boot Camp retreat:
  - Overview of the CRI: How did we get here? Where are we going? Why?
  - Steward Leadership – Rich Kriegbaum
  - “Civic entrepreneur” training - Doug Henton and Nick Bollman
  - Status of the civic infrastructure in Fresno and how the CRI connects to other efforts
  - Training in small group “functionality” and dynamics – Tom Jones
  - Initial meeting times for individual task forces
- Convene task forces; begin to develop framework of issues related to initiative subject matter.

***Months Two - Five:***

- What does success look like in our initiative area?
- What are “best practices” in other regions?

***Months Six - Ten:***

- Diagnose where we are now relative to the vision.

***Months Eleven - Thirteen:***

- What are the priority challenges?
- Begin backward mapping strategies to achieve success.
- Due diligence on strategies.

***Months Fourteen - Fifteen:***

- Prepare final action plan, including priority lists and resources needed to implement the plan. The plan should include specific action steps task force members would be willing to champion and help implement themselves.
- “Shop” the plan; seek input; build consensus.

***Next Steps: Regroup and begin “Implementation Phase.”***

#### **IV. Fresno Area CRI Task Forces**

##### **A. Technology Infrastructure**

Without a first class telecommunications infrastructure, our community cannot succeed in the global economy. New and developing technology offers us an opportunity to level old barriers to prosperity—geography, language, time and educational attainment.

##### **B. Creating an Innovative Climate**

Creating an entrepreneurial environment is an important element of business attraction. More importantly, it is evidence of a community capable of working together to solve its own problems. Business, civic and social entrepreneurs are working toward sustainable, prosperous regions throughout the United States. Venture capital is the enabler of economic prosperity. Creating local venture capital funds is an essential building block for economic diversification.

##### **C. Workforce Preparation in the Knowledge Economy**

The rapidly changing workplace has brought the educational and business communities closer together. Teaching students and workers to take responsibility for life long learning is essential for personal empowerment and a prepared workforce. Coordinating and focusing curriculum at all levels to prepare students for the workplace and life in general is a complex challenge requiring all sectors to work together.

##### **D. Land Use and Transportation**

Land use is the blueprint for a community with ramifications for every sector. Transportation creates the internal web and the links with the outside world that largely determine the economic vitality of a community. Insuring that decisions regarding these issues are intentional and reflect the needs of the community as a whole is an ongoing task.

##### **E. Human Services and Effectiveness in the Nonprofit Sector**

Chronic poverty has led to a multitude of health, educational, social, and crime problems in the Fresno Area. The systems to address these needs require systemic and comprehensive repair. A national organization has a process that assesses human services and non-profit systems against best practices and recommends a pathway to close any gaps. Solutions in these areas would impact schools, workforce preparation, and criminal justice.

##### **F. Additional Task Force – External Communication**

Communication and education will require a comprehensive and ongoing strategy. In order to meet this challenge it is recommended that a communications task force chaired by Keith Moyer made up of professionals from the media, public relations and educational community put together a plan and implement it.

## *Attachment One: Job Description*

### **Fresno Area CRI Task Force Leaders and Members *Job Description***

#### **Overview**

The Fresno Business Council and the Central California Futures Institute at Fresno State are jointly launching the Fresno Area Collaborative Regional Initiative (CRI). The CRI's overall goal is to improve the economic condition, quality of life, and social well being of residents in the Fresno-Madera region. The strategy is to delve deeply into the root issues causing chronic and systemic problems in our region, emerge with outcome-focused action plans, implement the action plans over a three to five year period, and create a sustainable model for civic leadership. The tools are steward leadership, collaboration, and subject matter expertise. The task force participants are the most critical component for success. Careful thought and consideration have been put into the following characteristics and expectations.

#### **Characteristics of CRI Task Force Leaders and Members**

Adopted from Collaborative Economics' books *Grass Roots Leaders for the New Economy* and *Strategic Planning for Innovation-Led Development: A Guide*, CRI task force leaders are **civic entrepreneurs** and include the following characteristics:

- Motivated by broad, long-term interests;
- See opportunity for the Fresno-Clovis-Madera region to be competitive in the networked economy;
- Have an entrepreneurial personality (i.e. don't take "no" for an answer);
- Are "boundary crossers" and cross political, social, economic, and cultural boundaries to accomplish desired objectives;
- Embrace diverse opinions and audiences;
- Share responsibility and demand accountability for self and others;
- Are outcome-oriented; and
- Work in teams.

Task force members will also be recruited based on their demonstration of civic entrepreneur traits. In addition, they will be recruited based on their *substantive knowledge* of the task force subject matter.

#### **Expectations of CRI Task Force Leaders**

Spearheading a CRI task force will require substantial commitments of time, energy, and focus. Task force participants are encouraged to limit their involvement in other, non-profit organizations to ensure adequate commitment to the CRI. Specifically, task force leaders will be responsible for:

- Participating as a member of the CRI executive committee (will also require regular meetings);
- Convening and facilitating task force meetings as frequently as necessary (possibly weekly) to complete objectives in the specified time period;
- Being held accountable for the completion of the task force's work in the time and quality specified;

- Ensuring communication channels are strong between your task force, the others, and the CRI board;
- Participating in periodic meetings involving all CRI task forces and members (bi-monthly on average);
- Attending a weekend-long, launch retreat; and
- Working with the CRI board to recruit task force members.

### **Expectations of Task Force Members**

- Attending a weekend-long retreat;
- Participating in task force meetings as frequently as necessary (possibly weekly) to complete objectives in the specified time period;
- Participating in periodic meetings involving all CRI task forces and members (bi-monthly on average);
- Working with task force leader and Communications Task Force to ensure communication channels are strong between your task force and the others; and
- Being held accountable for the completion of the task force's work in the time and quality specified.