

Partnering with State Government to Transform a Region

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Abstract

An engaged metropolitan university can play a critical role in transforming its region by using its resources for the solution of problems and the improvement of the citizens' lives and livelihoods. California State University, Fresno has impacted its region through university-led collaborations and partnerships such as the Fresno Regional Jobs Initiative and California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley. This article will examine the university's role as a regional change agent through its initiatives.

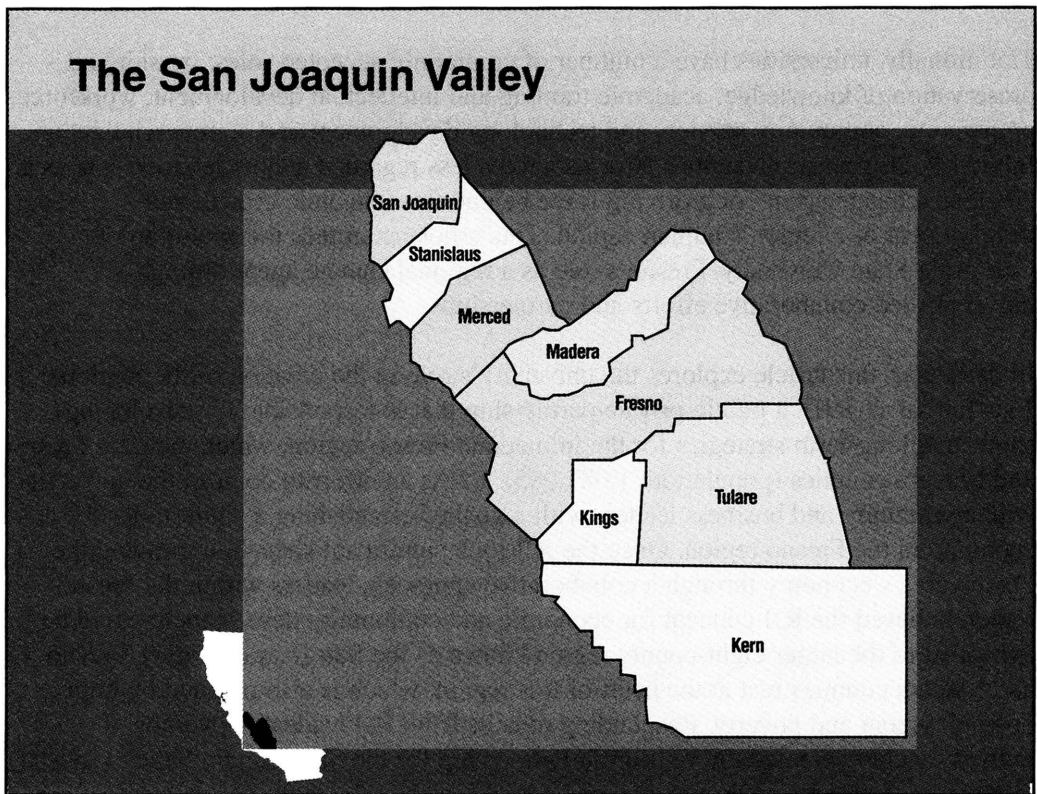
Traditionally, universities have a number of commonly accepted roles: pursuit and preservation of knowledge, academic training and intellectual development, workforce preparation, community service, and technology development and commercialization. In the last 20 years, universities have adopted a less regarded and understood role as a “regional change agent” or a driving force behind the economic growth and development of a region’s human capital. This article examines the evolution of California State University, Fresno’s role as a regional change agent through university-led collaborative efforts and partnerships.

In particular, this article explores the university’s role in the creation of the Regional Jobs Initiative (RJI), a public-private partnership that is responsible for developing short- and long-term strategies for the immediate Fresno region, which includes Fresno and Madera counties (population: 1,081,985). RJI is an effort to connect the university with community and business leaders with a goal of establishing a “built to last” economy in the Fresno region. Once the RJI took significant steps in improving the Fresno area’s economy through a collaborative approach, leaders within the Fresno region believed the RJI concept for economic and community development could be expanded to the larger eight-county region known as the San Joaquin Valley. Fresno and Madera counties rest at the heart of this region, which is also plagued by high unemployment and poverty. Responding to calls from RJI leaders, Governor Schwarzenegger created the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley (CPSJV) to address economic, environmental and social issues in the eight-county area.

This article outlines the history of both the RJI and the CPSJV and the pivotal role that the California State University, Fresno plays in both organizations. As an engaged university, California State University, Fresno adheres to the traditional goals of a university by providing a quality education to the region’s workforce, but it also has extended its reach through these organizations to improve community and economic development throughout the San Joaquin Valley region.

The Fresno and San Joaquin Valley Regions

California State University, Fresno is located in the heart of California in an area that is driven by dramatic economic, cultural, and demographic changes. Fresno and the surrounding eight-county region, known locally as the San Joaquin Valley, is home to a very diverse and dynamic population. With a population of 3.8 million, the San Joaquin Valley has a population greater than twenty-three states, and the Valley's land area of 27,280 square miles is greater than that of ten states. Over the last eight years (2000-2008), the region has experienced an extraordinary population increase. Since 2000, the region has grown by more than 530,000, and its continued growth rate is expected to be 65 percent higher than the state average by 2020. The region is forecast to have more than seven million residents by 2040. This explosion in growth and expansion is widely known in the state and nationally as the "New California," because the region offers a new frontier of development and opportunity.



California's San Joaquin Valley—comprised of eight counties with sixty-two cities—has a long history of contributions to the success of California, particularly in the area of agriculture. For example, if the eight counties of the San Joaquin Valley became their own state, they would be the number one agricultural state in the country, an annual \$20 billion powerhouse that may also prove to be the renewable fuel driver of California's energy economy (CPSJV 2006, 28). The region is undergoing rapid transformation as the population continues to grow and the demographics of the region continue to change. Once a largely rural region, the eight counties of the Valley, linked

by the main north-south transportation corridor Highway 99, are now home to large metropolitan areas such as Fresno (population: 486,171), Bakersfield (population: 328,692), and Stockton (population: 289,927) and growing cities and towns of every size (twenty-six of the Valley’s sixty-two cities have populations of less than 15,000).

Despite the agricultural wealth experienced by the San Joaquin Valley, the region suffers from double-digit or near double-digit unemployment in each of its eight counties and persistent problems with poverty and social separation (Table 1).

Table 1: San Joaquin Valley County-by-County Unemployment Rates – Annual Averages for 2004 and 2007

County	2004 Average	2007 Average
Fresno	10.5	8.6
Kern	9.9	8.3
Kings	11.0	8.7
Madera	9.2	7.6
Merced	11.0	10.1
San Joaquin	8.8	8.2
Stanislaus	9.2	8.8
Tulare	11.6	9.3
California	6.2	5.4

Source: California Employment Development Department

The Valley’s problems were clearly illustrated in the 2005 report produced by the Congressional Research Service that said, “By a wide range of indicators, the San Joaquin Valley is one of the most economically depressed regions in the country” (California’s San Joaquin Valley: A region in transition 2005). These findings were reiterated by a 2006 report from the Brookings Institution that found—based upon studying data from the recent 2000 census data—that the City of Fresno has more concentrated pockets of poverty than any other large city in the country (Berube and Katz 2005).

Although the San Joaquin Valley is recognized worldwide for its agricultural strength and is one of the fastest growing regions in the nation, it is also one of the most challenged in comparison to the rest of the state:

- The region suffers from persistent problems of poverty, environmental degradation, and social separation.
- Average per capita incomes of \$24,906 are 32.2 percent lower than the state average of \$36,020.
- College attendance is consistently 50 percent below the state average.
- Violent crime is 24 percent higher than the state average.
- Access to health care is 31 percent lower.
- The region’s air quality is considered the second worst in the nation.

- The region has one of the lowest federal “direct expenditure” rates in the nation and is 30 percent lower than the national average. According to the Congressional Research Service report, the San Joaquin Valley receives direct per capita expenditures of \$4,472, compared with \$5,878 for the state of California and \$6,650 for the United States (CPSJV 2006, 13).

Given the disparity of the San Joaquin Valley to the overall state of California, leaders in the region and within the California State University, Fresno recognized the need to invest in the economic and community development of the region. California State University, Fresno, recognized long ago that the university must play a key role in the economic development of the Fresno region and, more recently, the eight-county San Joaquin Valley. The university made a determined and purposeful decision that its role had to be a leadership one, where the university would link its knowledge to the innovation and entrepreneurship in the local economy and bring together disparate elements in the community around a shared vision. The vision of the university as a regional change agent is discussed next.

California State University, Fresno as a Regional Change Agent

In 1993, the University established a vision to become a premier interactive institution and set out to link its resources to the community. That effort was originally led by creation of the Central California Futures Institute (an economic reporting organization). The Institute’s primary purpose was to encourage a sense of regional community through a few key goals: (1) research on regional issues significantly impacting the San Joaquin Valley’s growth and prosperity, (2) comprehensive data collection, and (3) the formulation of strategies that enable local governments to effectively address the identified regional issues. The Futures Institute also represented the university’s first significant step in identifying the San Joaquin Valley as a region and promoting regional collaboration.

With the advent of the Futures Institute, the University embarked on a long-term strategy that emphasized engaging the University in addressing the “new economy” through action-oriented community partnerships. The focus of the “new economy” is not on creating a set of new industries; instead, it is about assisting existing industries to compete in fundamentally different ways.

In 1996, the University and the Fresno Business Council (FBC), an organization founded by a group of Fresno business leaders to address critical issues facing the community, established the Central Valley Business Incubator with the goal of fostering economic development through entrepreneurship and job creation. Since its inception, the Incubator has worked with more than 3,400 entrepreneurs from the San Joaquin Valley, who combined have obtained more than \$14.5 million in capital and created more than 2,000 new jobs in the region.

Within five years, the University continued its evolutionary goal as a “regional change agent” by partnering with the Fresno Business Council on another key collaborative for the Fresno region. In 2000, a seminal report, “The Economic Future of the San Joaquin Valley,” offered the Valley two choices—stay on a low-cost path and maintain the status quo or shift to an added value economy and increase the prosperity and quality of life for everyone (Collaborative Economics 2000). Using the recommendations in the report, California State University, Fresno joined with the Fresno Business Council to create the Fresno Area Collaborative Regional Initiative (CRI). This effort included five initiatives that were determined as the Fresno region’s best opportunities for community transformation. The initiatives included: (1) ensuring a state-of-the-art technology infrastructure, (2) increasing the number of knowledge workers, (3) improving the quality of life through land use and transportation decisions, (4) achieving high quality performance in our human services and education systems, and (5) the creation of an innovative culture.

One of the most critical achievements of the University’s partnership with Fresno Business Council was the creation of a set of guiding principles for civic behavior. In 2001, business, education, civic and grassroots leaders adopted ten community values for the Fresno region. These community values are:

- ***Stewardship.*** We will lead and follow as stewards of our region, caring responsibly for our community assets. We will work together to achieve the greatest, long-term benefit for the community as a whole.
- ***Boundary Crossing and Collaboration.*** We are willing to cross political, social, ethnic, and economic boundaries to partner with others to achieve community outcomes. We will lead beyond the walls to create an inclusive, cohesive community through partnership and collaboration.
- ***Commitment to Outcomes.*** We are willing to take responsibility for tasks and achieving specified outcomes. We are committed to staying involved until the tasks are completed.
- ***“Art of the Possible” Thinking.*** We believe that anything is possible in the Fresno Region. We will envision success without limitations and then backward map a specific, attainable strategy for achieving that vision.
- ***Fact-based Decision-making.*** To the greatest extent possible, we will base decisions and action plans on objective data, thereby avoiding distortion of issues by personal feelings or agendas. At the same time, we seek to get to the heart of the matter and recognize that facts without context can be misleading.
- ***Truth Telling.*** We value the empowerment of everyone involved, along with all community stakeholders, to honestly and forthrightly share all knowledge, experiences and insights relative to the work at hand. We take responsibility for ensuring our truth is current, not historical. We all share the responsibility for maintaining the truth telling standard.
- ***Power Parity.*** We respect all persons and recognize that there are diverse viewpoints. Positional power will not determine a strategy or preferred outcome—merit will. Viewpoints from diverse constituencies will be proactively sought to ensure the best possible outcomes for the community.

- ***Commitment to Resolving Conflict.*** Conflict is inevitable and is sometimes required in order to achieve the best outcomes possible. Healthy conflict involves valuing every individual regardless of his or her stance on a specific issue and an unwavering commitment to working through the conflict in a positive manner despite its severity.
- ***Asset-based Approach.*** We are focused on using a strengths-based, asset-oriented approach to people and issues. We believe that positive change occurs when we appreciate value and invest in what is best in our people and community.
- ***Conflict of Interest.*** We agree to disclose any personal or professional conflict of interest that may affect our objectivity before engaging in work that will impact the community. We seek to avoid even the appearance of impropriety (Fresno Business Council 2001).

Despite the progress made toward realizing the Collaborative Regional Initiative's goals, university, business, and community leaders recognized the need for a more broad-based job creation strategy. Building from the network of the CRI, the Regional Jobs Initiative was launched in 2004 to develop short- and long-term comprehensive strategies aimed at creating 25,000 to 30,000 net new jobs within five years (2004 to 2008) at an average salary of \$29,500 (Regional Jobs Initiative 2005, 1-2). The ultimate objective of the RJI is to generate long-term, sustainable economic development in the Fresno region by diversifying the industrial and economic base of the area to combat chronic, double-digit unemployment.

The RJI resulted from the merger of two civic efforts to improve the overall conditions in the Fresno Region. One effort was led by Fresno Mayor Alan Autry's Council of Economic Advisors, who published a report in January 2003, "Meeting the Challenge." The report outlined a series of recommendations and strategies to help the City of Fresno advance despite the declining fiscal situation in Sacramento, the state's capitol. One of the recommendations for sustaining the long-term health of the City was to "break the back of chronic, double-digit unemployment once and for all." The other civic effort was the Collaborative Regional Initiative.

The Regional Jobs Initiative's five-year plan (2004-2008) contained forty specific initiatives aimed at establishing a "built to last" economy in the Fresno region—one that could better withstand natural economic downturns and take advantage of seasons of economic expansion. RJI initiatives included improving and increasing vocational education, launching new research and development programs tied to local industries, and advocating for regional infrastructure improvements.

The RJI is based on the idea that regional economies are made up of a series of related industries, or clusters, that benefit one another. The RJI task forces are charged with identifying the existing and emerging industry clusters in which the region has a competitive advantage. Seven industry clusters were identified as having strong potential for growth and diversification of the Fresno area's economy:

- advanced manufacturing
- construction
- health care

- information processing
- logistics and distribution
- tourism
- water technology

As of 2005, three more clusters, or “employment opportunity areas,” were added: food processing, innovative energy, and software (Regional Jobs Initiative 2005, 2).

As of 2008, more than six hundred business leaders are now involved in various aspects of all of these clusters. Together they provide direction for RJI because they are best equipped to know what will help their businesses prosper and grow. Business representatives from these sectors have determined the synergies that can be achieved by working together; the workforce needs that must be addressed; and the local, state, and/or federal policies that will best enable them to compete in the information age and the world of globalization.

The California State University, Fresno continues to be a key player in the emergence of RJI as a Fresno area leader in community and economic development. There are a few University-based centers that have played an important role in working with the emerging industry clusters to address economic development issues. One such effort is the Lyles Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship that provides intellectual and applied leadership to students, educators, and business leaders to promote the values and practices of innovation and entrepreneurship. Another program is the International Center for Water Technology, which oversees the water technology cluster, a collaborative effort between the University and more than thirty manufacturers of water technology and related equipment. Finally, the Construction Center of Excellence at the University is designed to strengthen and unite the construction industry through business, educational, and research support.

Despite the current difficult and volatile economic times, there is significant evidence to indicate that the Fresno region’s economy has become more diversified than ever before. In addition, significant progress has been made on RJI’s number one issue of workforce development, and the community has been engaged in collaborative problem-solving like never before. As of 2008 some specific RJI highlights include:

- Two startup companies in the software cluster received venture capital, a first for the region.
- A new Logistics and Distribution academic program began at California State University, Fresno. The College of Engineering is working closely with representatives of several RJI clusters to better meet their needs and increase its student capacity.
- The Claude Laval Water and Energy Technology Incubator, located on the California State University, Fresno campus, opened and was 100 percent occupied within the first thirty days. The Central Valley Business Incubator and the University’s International Center for Water Technology combined forces to create the incubator, the first of its kind in the United States.

- An Advanced Manufacturing Center feasibility study was completed in cooperation with industry stakeholders, identifying the need for the Center and recommending that the facility be built at California State University, Fresno (Regional Jobs Initiative 2008, 3).

As of 2008, a number of RJI's planned projects have been implemented. As RJI prepares to launch its next phase, one thing is abundantly clear: The Fresno region cannot go back to the "business as usual" approach to community and economic development. Prior to the RJI effort, agencies and nonprofits worked against one another in a competitive environment. The private sector was not meaningfully engaged and public institutions were not using their resources in a strategic way to support the growth of local businesses. Now, community leaders are collaborating across sectors to seek quality solutions to long-term, significant issues; the private sector is actively engaged; and resources are being used in a strategic way to improve economic conditions.

As universities work to impact their regions through university-led collaborations, the RJI experience has provided four important lessons. First, the university must have a structure that includes an entity that is responsible for overseeing and implementing its collaborative community and economic development efforts. In the case of California State University, Fresno, that entity is the Office of Community and Economic Development (OCED). The executive director of OCED reports directly to the university president and provost. This separates the position from any allegiance to a particular academic school or college within the University and allows OCED to take a broad-based approach to economic and community development, one with the flexibility to connect relevant faculty and university resources with the appropriate community needs. Second, money is in short supply, which requires universities to use an entrepreneurial, boot-strap approach that focuses on serving the region first and building the institution second. Next, universities must avoid the "political fray" by embracing initiatives such as the Community Values of the Fresno Region which established a code of conduct for community business and kept political influence out of the process. Finally, universities need the right combination of executive staff and faculty involvement to constantly work on improving campus coordination through efforts such as Making Place Matter (an effort to promote regional stewardship and civic engagement at universities) and strategic planning processes.

Perhaps the biggest lesson learned in the first phase of the RJI is the importance of connecting economic development to community and human development. The consensus from participating industry leaders and community organizations is that the RJI needs to transition from a special, five-year initiative to "standard operating procedures" for community and economic development. The University is now at the center of RJI's transition into a more comprehensive approach to community and economic development. Because of the RJI experience, University and community leaders have come to better recognize that the economic and human threads of a community are inextricably linked and that one facet cannot truly succeed in the absence of success in another. This recognition, plus the need for some form of a

continued organized approach to economic development, has led to a discussion about a closer and more meaningful alignment of economic, human, and infrastructure development. One of the cornerstones of that approach is the Human Investment Initiative, a five-year initiative to link, align, and leverage the systems that address human development (education, justice, health, and social services) to improve service at the neighborhood level in order to increase the effectiveness of prevention and early intervention efforts. The initiative is being coordinated by the Fresno Business Council, and California State University, Fresno expects to play a critical role in the effort through the Office of Community and Economic Development.

The California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley

Building on the lessons learned from the success of the collaborative approach of the Regional Jobs Initiative, California State University, Fresno and business and community leaders from throughout the region called on California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger to create a state interagency task force to address the San Joaquin Valley region's unique challenges.

RJI leaders argued that the regional approach was the correct one because almost all of the challenges faced by the region are interrelated and do not recognize jurisdictional boundaries. Air, economic and workforce development, education, energy, housing, transportation, and water—all those issues cut across city and county lines and need to be addressed from a regional perspective. Such a regional approach is championed by Neal Peirce, the noted writer on state and regional trends, who observed that “smart regionalism isn't just some add-on: planned and practiced well, it can lead us straight to many of the dramatic new systems and approaches the times we're entering so urgently demand.”

In June 2005, Governor Schwarzenegger responded to the call from RJI leaders by issuing an Executive Order creating the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley (the Partnership), an unprecedented public-private partnership focused on improving the Valley's economic vitality and quality of life. The Partnership was charged with addressing the challenges of the region by implementing measureable actions on economic, environmental, and social levels to help the region emerge as “California's 21st Century Opportunity.” Through a competitive process, the state's Business, Transportation and Housing Agency selected California State University, Fresno's Office of Community and Economic Development to serve as secretariat for the Partnership.

The Partnership Board includes forty members appointed by the Governor, including eight Cabinet secretaries; a public sector member and private sector member from each of the region's eight counties; and regional consortia representatives for economic development, health care, higher education, transportation, and workforce development. The Cabinet secretaries, key players in coordinating state government

engagement in the Partnership's efforts, represent California's resource agencies: business, transportation, housing, environmental protection, health and human services, labor and workforce development, education, and consumer services.

Governor Schwarzenegger directed the Partnership Board of Directors to prepare a Strategic Action Proposal by the end of October 2006 for long-term economic prosperity and economic well-being in the San Joaquin Valley. To accomplish this assignment, the Partnership formed ten Work Groups:

- Advanced Communications Services and Information Technology
- Air Quality
- Economic Development
- Energy
- Health and Human Services
- Higher Education and Workforce Development
- K-12 Education
- Land Use, Agriculture, and Housing
- Transportation
- Water Quality, Supply and Reliability

The Partnership Board and its Work Groups coordinated public forums and roundtables with local elected officials in each of the eight counties and consulted state legislators and members of congress from the Valley to prepare the Strategic Action Proposal. All in all, more than one thousand people provided input into the preparation of the proposal document.

In October 2006, the Partnership's Board of Directors approved the Strategic Action Proposal, identifying six major initiatives:

- Grow a diversified, globally competitive economy supported by a highly skilled workforce.
- Create a model K-12 public education system (later changed to PreK-12 Education to recognize the importance of preschool to overall educational efforts).
- Implement an integrated framework for sustainable growth.
- Build a twenty-first century transportation mobility system.
- Attain clean air standards.
- Develop high quality health and human services.

To most easily measure progress and report to the public, the Partnership Board identified key primary indicators of well-being for Valley residents which will be tracked and reported to policy makers annually. The indicators and goals are:

- Per capita income – Meet or exceed the state rate by 2016
- Median household income – Remain at or improve upon the state rate by 2016
- Annual unemployment rate – Remain at or improve upon the state rate by 2016
- Percentage of families with income below the poverty level – Remain at or improve upon the state rate by 2016
- High school graduation rates – Achieve or improve upon the state rate by 2016

- Percentage of population over age twenty-five with a bachelor's degree or higher – Increase college graduation rate by 20 percent by 2016
- Number of days that exceed state standards for ozone – Achieve U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ozone standards by 2013
- People per urban acres in the region – Increase density by 15 percent in 75 percent of communities by 2010
- Acres of land in agriculture use – Maintain current levels
- Percentage change in daily vehicle hour of delay – Decrease or remain lower in hours of delay than state average
- Percent of first-time buyers who can afford to purchase a median-priced home – Meet or exceed the national average by 2016
- Electricity consumption – Improve upon the state average in efficiency by 2016
- Applied urban water use in gallons per person per year – Reduce consumption by 10 percent by 2016
- Access to primary care physicians and allied health professionals – Meet or exceed the state average by 2016
- Percentage of population reporting that they or a family member have asthma – Remain at or improve upon the state average by 2016
- Violent crimes per 100,000 people – Remain at or improve upon the state rate by 2016 (CPSJV 2007, 40-47)

Current Practices

To supplement the statistical indicators, California State University, Fresno is involved with surrounding universities on field research through the Partnership for the Assessment of Communities (PAC), a ten-year, community-based study of the Valley. The PAC research team consists of six scholars with multi-disciplinary expertise, representing three different research and educational institutions in the San Joaquin Valley. As an opportunity for multi-disciplinary, inter-university, multi-year research collaboration, this project is unique and promises to yield important results about the experiences of living in the Valley that are often obscured by regional-level measures.

The project focuses on analyzing the quality of life in the region by understanding the community-level experiences within the Valley that represent a range of rural unincorporated communities and urban neighborhoods. The methodology of the PAC research is both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative methods will utilize data taken primarily from reports and census data to establish baseline indicators for each community being studied. The research tools and questionnaires examine many facets of life in the Valley, focusing on topics including the economy, employment, transportation, homeownership, education, health care, neighborhood experience, and community involvement (CPSJV 2007, 48-49).

In November 2006, Governor Schwarzenegger accepted the Strategic Action Proposal and issued a second executive order to begin to implement the recommendations in the ten-year plan. The state of California's fiscal year 2007-08 budget included a \$5 million appropriation for the first thirty months of implementation. The Partnership

Board agreed to use \$2.5 million of the appropriation for administrative purposes and the other \$2.5 million for Seed Grant projects to jumpstart major initiatives outlined in the Strategic Action Plan that will result in significant immediate impact or will lay a foundation for long-term priority strategies and investments. The Seed Grant projects, in turn, have leveraged more than \$5 million in non-state funding, which means the state's investment has helped raise significant private sector funding for these worthwhile projects.

The Office of Community and Economic Development at California State University, Fresno oversees and administers the work of the Partnership's Board of Directors, its ten Work Groups, and Seed Grant partners. The Office has combined policy expertise with broad public outreach strategies to keep the board of directors, policy makers, and Valley residents informed of the Partnership's progress.

Each of the Partnership's ten Work Groups meets at least on a quarterly basis to address the challenges in their particular areas. The Work Groups are bringing together previously independent groups and organizations to develop solutions to common sets of challenges. In addition, the Work Groups also have begun to coordinate and communicate with each other to address their mutual issues. For example, the Higher Education and Workforce Development, Economic Development and PreK-12 Education work groups are working together to focus on tying together education and the workforce development system with economic development efforts.

Through contracts with the California Business, Transportation, and Housing Agency, California State University, Fresno entities are playing a key role in four of the Partnership's ten Work Groups:

- The Maddy Institute, which provides non-partisan, interdisciplinary and fact-driven analysis of public policy issues impacting the region and state, serves as consultant to the Air Quality Work Group. The Institute coordinates quarterly Work Group meetings to shape strategies to improve air quality in the San Joaquin Valley. More than 350 individuals have participated in Work Group efforts, including a core group of thirty-five stakeholders representing diverse views and industries.
- The University's Central Valley Health Policy Institute and the Social Welfare Evaluation, Research and Training Program serve as consultants to the Health and Human Services Work Group. The Work Group is developing a region-wide model for methamphetamine education, prevention, treatment and recovery as well as exploring the feasibility for establishing Health Enterprise Zones in communities of the San Joaquin Valley to increase access to quality health care and improve health status in those communities.
- The University's California Water Institute serves as consultant to the Partnership's Water Quality, Supply and Reliability Work Group. In that role, Institute staff has engaged with the San Joaquin Valley water community, elected officials, federal and state agencies, non-governmental organizations, and disadvantaged communities to develop an equitable and sustainable water policy that meets the needs of all eight counties.

- Finally, through participation in the Central Valley Higher Education Consortium, a coalition of twenty-four higher education institutions in the eight-county area, the University has played a pivotal role in helping the Partnership’s Higher Education and Workforce Development Work Group address its challenges. In particular, the Work Group has helped to develop The College Place, a college access and “coaching” center that will be a critical part of an ongoing effort to create a college-going culture in the San Joaquin Valley. The center, the first of its kind in the San Joaquin Valley, is located in a storefront in a shopping center and provides students and parents with college advising in an atmosphere that is welcoming and accessible to them. It provides open access to anyone interested in assistance while targeting students who are first-generation college students. The Work Group also organized a regional research group that assessed the current college-going culture in the Valley and produced a report titled, “Why Access Matters,” that provides a deeper, more specific understanding of college-going trends in the San Joaquin Valley.

California State University, Fresno also has helped to drive major change in the San Joaquin Valley through its work on Partnership-related Seed Grant projects. In addition to Seed Grant projects related to the Methamphetamine Recovery Project and the Health Enterprise Zones, the University is leading two other Seed Grant initiatives: (1) The Maddy Institute is conducting a pilot project aimed at reducing air pollution in three environmental justice communities. The centerpiece of the project, the Tune In-Tune Up Program, is aimed at reducing mobile source pollutants generated by older, out-of-tune cars, and (2) The California Water Institute is working with state and federal elected officials and a wide range of stakeholders to develop an integrated regional water plan.

The California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley represents the boldest movement of civic leadership the region has ever seen. Neal Peirce, the noted writer on state and regional trends, has called the Partnership “one of the most comprehensive efforts I’ve ever seen by a state government to engage a broad geographic area with special problems” (Peirce 2008). Through a consensus-building process, the Partnership has become an assembly that permits the Valley to speak with a unified voice to elected officials and policy makers. Time and again, parochial interests are being set aside to pursue regional interests in the Partnership’s work. One of the most striking examples of the benefits of collaboration involved the development and support of a “hot list” of trade corridor projects submitted to the California Transportation Commission for funding. Even though three of the Valley’s eight counties would not directly receive funding from the projects, their leaders wholeheartedly supported the projects because of the regional benefits. The result: more than \$205 million in additional funding for Valley transportation projects—funding that likely would have been awarded to the state’s major urban areas if the San Joaquin Valley had failed to work collaboratively.

Other signs of progress through the Partnership’s collaborative approach can be seen throughout the eight-county region. Stakeholders from a range of public and private sector interests—urban, rural, agriculture, business, environmental—have joined forces on two Partnership-related entities: The San Joaquin Valley Clean Energy Organization

and the San Joaquin Valley Housing Trust. The Clean Energy Organization already has formed a partnership with the national 25x25 Alliance in which the Valley will serve as a pilot project to focus on the renewable energy potential of the Valley. The San Joaquin Valley Housing Trust is a nonprofit organization designed to help Valley jurisdictions achieve their housing goals.

Other tangible successes include:

- Obtaining \$1 billion in state funding for improvements to Highway 99 which provides the basic transportation route through the region for people and goods and serves as a catalyst for economic and community progress
- Creating Careersinthevalley.com, a one-stop Web site that is designed to link employers, job seekers, and vocational training programs throughout the Valley
- Working to improve student achievement by helping Valley education leaders deal more effectively with students who are learning English
- Working to ensure that the high-speed rail system serves the needs of the entire San Joaquin Valley
- Obtaining state funding for Workforce Investment Boards to complete employment studies and work with community college partners to address gaps in vocational training
- Creation of the San Joaquin Valley Nursing Education Consortium to increase the number of new nurses in the region (CPSJV 2008, 11).

The Partnership faces a number of challenges as it moves beyond the original thirty-month appropriation. Given California's dire budget situation, the state government, which provided the initial appropriation to begin the Partnership, cannot be counted on to provide a reliable source of continued funding. The University will continue to support the Partnership efforts through the secretariat function at the Office of Community and Economic Development, but the University and its partners must reach out to foundations and other local partners to obtain adequate resources to continue to implement the Partnership's ten-year strategic plan. With resource pressures increasing throughout the region and state, the Partnership also must compete for time and attention from its participants, policy makers, funders and other stakeholders. Finally, the Partnership must continue to stay on task for the long-term to fully implement the Strategic Action Proposal.

The Partnership has accomplished much in a short period of time. For the first time anyone can remember, the public and private sectors from all eight counties are working together to find and implement solutions that will improve the quality of life for San Joaquin Valley residents. The Partnership also is building the capacity of the San Joaquin Valley's existing leadership and emerging leadership to continue to drive the goals and objectives of the Partnership well into the future. There is much more work that needs to be done, but the Partnership is crafting a vision of the San Joaquin Valley that no one had previously thought possible.

Conclusion

This article examined the pivotal role that the California State University, Fresno has played as a regional change agent through University-led collaborative efforts and partnerships. The article focused on the creation of the Regional Jobs Initiative (RJI) to address community and economic development in the Fresno area and the subsequent creation of the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley. California State University, Fresno continues to be an active leader within both entities. In doing so, California State University, Fresno has moved beyond the traditional goals of a university of providing a quality education to the region's workforce, and has extended its reach through these organizations to be a community-engaged university. The latter designation is well-deserved as the University has a far-reaching impact beyond academia. The California State University, Fresno will continue to be a leader, not only in education, but as a leader in community and economic development for the San Joaquin Valley.

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