



## STAFF REPORT

**To:** ESCOG Joint Powers Authority  
**From:** Elaine Kabala, ESCOG Staff  
**Subject:** California Jobs First Update  
**Meeting date:** October 23, 2024  
**Prepared on:** October 16, 2024  
**Attachments:** A) Sierra Jobs First Region Request for Proposals  
B) Sierra Jobs First Catalyst Project Concepts List

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### **Background:**

California Jobs First is a Statewide Investment in job creation, industrial strategy, and economic development initiatives to create a greener and more equitable economy. California Jobs First has two phases: 1) the strategic planning phase was completed August 29, 2024 with the submission of the Sierra Jobs First Regional Plan, and 2) the catalyst phase, which includes the distribution of funding to advance the priorities identified in the strategic planning phase.

The Sierra Business Council (SBC), a Sierra-based nonprofit, was selected as the convener for seven county Sierra region and is tasked with the administration of the catalyst fund process. The Catalyst Fund program is designed to fund pre-development activities that will lead to projects that meet the Sierra Jobs First objectives of equity, sustainability, job quality and access, economic competitiveness, and economic resilience. The Request for Proposals for catalyst funding opened on October 15<sup>th</sup> and will close on December 15<sup>th</sup>. Depending on the number of funded projects in the first round closing December 15<sup>th</sup>, there may be subsequent rounds of funding. All funds must be expended by September 30, 2026.

A total of \$9 million in Catalyst funding is available on a reimbursement basis for exploratory and last mile projects. Project awards will be made subsequent to review by the Project Identification sub-committee and selection by the Governing Council. The funding is designed to maximize benefits across the seven-county region. Awards will range from a minimum of \$25,000 to a maximum of \$1.0 million.

### **Eligible Activities:**

- Awards under the Catalyst Program must advance the priorities identified during the Planning Phase. This includes the priority industry sectors (community health, natural and working lands, sustainable recreation and tourism, clean energy and energy resilience, and sustainable agriculture) and cross cutting initiatives (Small business development, education, workforce development, childcare, housing, and infrastructure).

- Catalyst projects should ensure that workers and disinvested communities are the primary beneficiaries.
- Catalyst projects must be designed to leverage federal, state, and private dollars with evidence of match funding included in the project budget. Catalyst funds are not designed to fully fund any particular project.
- Catalyst applications must quantify the expected number of direct jobs created with planned wage levels, target populations for new jobs, and indirect economic impact in terms of jobs created or retained.
- Applicants must ensure that existing infrastructure can support the proposed project or provide complimentary project information to create the required infrastructure.
- Applicants whose projects directly impact job growth in the region will be responsible for tracking new positions, including but not limited to entering data into CalJobs reporting databases. A team member from the application will be accountable for this, and this must be written into their scope of work.

### **Ineligible Activities**

- Projects may not fund new fossil fuel extraction or activities, or expand fossil fuel production;
- Lobbying or advocacy work to advance legislative policy or the passage of specific bills, or local propositions;
- Payments of existing debt or revolving credit related to proposed project;
- Any expenses NOT directly related to the proposed project including; ongoing operational costs for the applicant, consultant fees unrelated to the project, materials or equipment deemed unnecessary for the project or program, bonus or sales commissions of any kind, purchase of alcohol;
- Administrative costs in excess of 10% of the total costs of the project.

ESCOG staff has been meeting with industry sector partners across the region to identify and understand potential synergistic project opportunities. A list of project concepts that have been discussed is attached. Projects impacting multiple counties will be given funding preference. As such, ESCOG is a logical organization to serve as lead applicant for relevant projects in Eastern Sierra counties.

Staff requests the Board provide direction on ESCOG's role in identifying project opportunities and submitting grants on behalf of regional partners that are consistent with authorities granted by the Sustainable Recreation and Ecosystem Management Program and the Community Economic Resiliency Fund Pilot Program.

### **BUDGET IMPACTS:**

The ESCOG is not currently under contract with Sierra Business Council to convene regional partners and staff time for this work is being funded by the ESCOG general fund balance.

**LEGAL REVIEW:**

ESCOG Counsel Grace Chuchla has reviewed this item and found that it complies with the law.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff requests the Board provide direction on ESCOG's role in identifying project opportunities and submitting grants on behalf of regional partners that are consistent with authorities granted by the Sustainable Recreation and Ecosystem Management Program and the Community Economic Resiliency Fund Pilot Program, and direct staff to return with any identified grant opportunities at the December ESCOG meeting for approval.