Sierra Jobs First
Request For Proposals
Catalyst Program

Program Background and Objectives

Sierra Business Council, (SBC) is the convener and fiscal agent for the Sierra Jobs First, the Eastern Sierra Region of the California Jobs First program, which includes the counties of Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Inyo, Mariposa, Mono, and Tuolumne. Sierra Jobs First is governed by a Governing Council, a voting body of 25 members, formerly known as the HRTC (High Road Transition Council). The Council and the associated Collaborative represent a broad cross-section of the economy, industries, community benefit organizations (CBOs), and local governments in support of the Sierra Jobs First region's vision to *"build strong communities, protect healthy ecosystems, and invest in a resilient economy that supports equitable opportunities for generations to come"*

The ultimate goal of the Council and Collaborative is to guide the process for implementing the Regional Strategic Plan that will drive a community-led, climate forward economy. In support of this plan, 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. Catalyst investments will enable the region to develop exploratory projects and to move existing projects in various stages of development toward readiness for implementation funding.

Project applications to the Catalyst Fund must clearly outline the stage of readiness as defined below:[1]

- **Exploratory:** Projects in an early stage of development (or program development) that need planning funds to advance the idea to a fundable project or program. This may include funding for research, feasibility studies, capacity assessments, market analysis, or financial plan generation.

[1] ***Implementation Funding will be available for "Ready to go" projects*** *– Projects that have completed all necessary steps for implementation funding including; completed necessary plans or studies such as engineering plans, feasibility studies, comprehensive business plans, any necessary environmental impact reports, etc.*

- **Last mile** – Projects that have completed the majority of the planning process and have evidence of feasibility and long-term sustainability. These projects need funding to reach the "ready-to-go" phase. Appropriate use of funds may include business plan development, financial plan with start-up and long-term funding model identified, environmental impact report, engineering plans, community and engagement activities, or other plans necessary to ensure the success of the project.

Sierra Jobs First Guiding Principles
The guiding principles goals based on feedback from the Governing Council and subcommittees are as follows:

- **Equity and Inclusion**: Focus on strategies that build economic prosperity for disinvested communities. Ensure all voices are part of the process.
- **Job Quality and Access:** Focus on identifying and promoting jobs that offer a better quality of life – higher pay, benefits, advancement, worker input, stability, and safety.
- **Sustainability:** Prioritize self-sustaining economic development that aims for a carbon-neutral and climate-resilient economy that benefits all the region's communities.
- **Pragmatic:** Build actions that are practical, realistic, and achievable.

Funding Availability
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 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.

SBC may provide an Advanced Payment option to community-based non-profit organizations. Advanced Payment options aim to reduce barriers in participating in the Catalyst Program. An amount of up to 10% of grant request may be eligible for an advance, this subject to the availability of funds from the state. For the request to be considered, applicants will need to submit the documents requested for this grant application package. Please see the documentation requirements below in "Required Elements #7." Applicants are not required to use the Advanced Payment option if the reimbursement model is preferred.

Note – Applicants requesting Advanced Payment will only be eligible for a one-time advance payment and will be required to demonstrate good standing with the IRS. Advanced Payment is subject to approval; the requested percentage at the time of the application is not guaranteed.

The applicant is required to follow all requirements of Section 11019.1 of the Government Code and cooperate with any audits by the Department of Finance related to the advanced payments.

Projected Timeline

Date	**Milestone**	
10/15/2024	**Grant Application Portal Opens**	
Interim	Technical Assistance provided by Industry Sector Coordinators and SBC staff	
12/15/24	**Grant Application Portal Closes for Round 1**	
Interim	Applications reviewed and scored	
2/21/2025	**Finalists Virtually Pitch Project Ideas to Council**	
3/21/2025	**Governing Council Votes on Grant Awards**	
3/22 - 4/17/2025	**Funding Contract Process**	
5/15/2025	**(TBD) Round 2 Grant Application Opens** **Depending on number of projects funded in R1, there may need to be a R2 application process**	
9/30/2026	**All Projects Dollars Must be Expended**	

Eligibility Requirements

In general, Catalyst Program projects must advance the Regional Strategic Plan and support the overall goal of building a community-led, climate forward, inclusive economy. The following is an overview of eligibility requirements:

- **Lead applicant** must have attended at least one Sub-Regional Table meeting or one monthly Stakeholder Meeting between June 2023 and August 2024. Attendance by committed partners that are listed on the application will not be counted.
- **Lead applicant organization** must be **located in and applying for projects** that will take place in at least one of the seven counties of the Sierra Jobs First Region: **Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, Inyo, Mariposa, Mono, and Tuolumne.**
- The State of California mandates that the Catalyst Program adhere to the federal government's **Justice40 guidelines**.
- **Projects** must be either **"exploratory"** (an idea or a back-of-the-envelope plan that may need dedicated funding to assess and develop into potential projects) or **"last-mile"** (projects that have undergone initial steps towards development and must clear a few additional hurdles before being considered ready-to-go).
- Applicants must submit **complete budget and timeline information.** Indicate clearly who will receive the funds, including if there will be a need for consultants or an RFP to hire out work.

REQUIRED - State of CA Requirements: Alignment with State requirements of specific climate and social equity goals including:

Equity

Required Criteria	Examples
At least 40% of funds provide direct, meaningful, and assured benefits to disinvested communities	Project benefits communities located within Justice40/ICARP DAC Tool-defined disadvantaged communities
Includes an applicant or co-applicant located in or serving a disinvested community	Project partners with a CBO, tribe, or business serving disinvested communities Project has support from a disinvested community within the project boundary
Align with Executive Order N-16-22 (Racial Equity)	Project can conduct outreach to communities that will benefit/be impacted (translation, outreach partners, meeting people where they are)
Includes equity impact assessment	Project identifies stakeholders and any unintended adverse impact of the project with alternative plans as needed Sample questions: https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/RacialJusticeImpactAssessment_v5.pdf
Includes displacement analysis and avoidance strategy	Project includes methods to avoid community and business displacement due to gentrification, land use planning, lack of transportation, or climate change impacts
Community engagement & feedback mechanisms	Project has a community engagement plan and outlets to communicate project updates and receive feedback

Climate

Required Criteria	Examples
Alignment with CA Air Resources Board (CARB) Scoping plan	Project promotes walkability/bikeability/use of public transit Project decreases energy-related building emissions Project expands/benefits carbon storage in natural and working lands
Alignment with EO N-82-20 (Land and Water protection)	Project aligns with 30x30 goals by protecting biodiversity, natural and working lands
Alignment with EO N-19-19 (ZEV Transition)	Project aligns with ZEV goal of all new passenger vehicle sales being ZEV by 2035, with MD/HD vehicles by 2045

Alignment with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA)	No basins in the region are required to have groundwater protection plans under SGMA, but projects should be aligned with protecting groundwater levels and watersheds

Job Quality and Access

Required Criteria	**Examples**
Promotes the creation of family-sustaining jobs	Jobs created by the project include healthcare and retirement benefits, safe working conditions, etc The average job created by the project pays a regional "high wage" defined as $64,480 in the Regional Summary (pg. 98)
Ensure equitable access to quality jobs for communities throughout the region	The percentage of jobs created that will pay a "high wage" and don't require a college degree Jobs created provide on-the-job training and pathways to advancement

SUGGESTED - 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 member of the application team will be accountable for this, and this must be written into their scope of work.

Ineligible Costs and 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.

RFP Application and Selection Process

All applications will be reviewed for completeness by SBC staff before being presented to the Project Identification (PI) committee. SBC staff will employ best efforts to ensure all applicants have complete and accurate information to advance in the selection process. All complete project applications will be reviewed by the PI committee and assessed for an initial score based on the project scoring rubric. Once initial scores are assigned, the entire portfolio of applicants will be presented to the Council for review two weeks prior to the March Council meeting for potential awards.

Application Requirements and RFP Scoring Criteria

All Catalyst proposals will be evaluated and voted upon by the region's Governing Council. The following criteria include required guidelines from the State of California as well as regional guidelines developed by the Project Identification team and approved by the Council.

Required Elements for RFP Response:

1. Applicant name and contact
2. Description of applicant's organization, entity type, mission, and role in proposed project
3. Applicant's experience in the region (max 200 words)
4. **Description of proposed project or program seeking funding including;**
    a. Project name and overview of project plan, objectives, scope, success metrics, and timeline
    b. Explain stage of readiness of project (exploratory, last-mile, or ready-to-go)
    c. Planned beneficiaries of project – include information on geographic location, demographic profile, and how they will benefit
    d. Funding request amount and project budget including source of match funding (use provided template)
    e. Priority sector(s) and/or core Issues impacted by project
5. **Description of proposed projects alignment with California Jobs First goals**

a. Explanation of how the proposed project will advance the regional strategy and any externalities or risks for implementation (250 words max)
b. Explain the economic impact potential for the Sierra Jobs First region (i.e. jobs created or retained, capital attraction, local investment, events, etc). This section may include a detailed analysis and quantifiable data supporting the projected economic benefits of the proposed project (300 words max + exhibits)
c. Identify the proposed project's impact on sustainability, specifically a carbon-neutral, climate-resilient economy that addresses the needs of the region's communities and the innovation ecosystem (300 words max)
d. Explain how this project advances prosperity by creating living-wage, benefitted jobs or career pathways, or a path to building wealth through entrepreneurship or related activities (300 words max)

6. **Project Management and Community Support**
    a. Project team – Provide information on roles, responsibilities, and prior experience. For partnerships, provide evidence of commitment or MOU. Explain your long-term strategy for collaboration with local organizations and community stakeholders. Clearly define their scope of work, detailing their respective activities (max 400 words)
    b. Declaration of ability to meet expenditure deadline of September 2026
    c. Evidence of partnership from a "Disinvested Community"
    d. Letters of support from community leaders
7. **Advanced Payment (if applicable)**
    a. One page statement detailing the need for the Advanced Payment. The statement must include the type of organization, amount requested, and information on the organizational structure that supports the request
    b. Up to six-month timeline advance payment budget
        i. Applicants requesting Advanced Payment must submit a projected 6-month timeline for spending the amount advanced. The applicants are strongly encouraged to develop a detailed plan that demonstrates their ability to spend the requested amount. The timeline must align with all project objectives and demonstrate sound rationale for supporting the project from Advanced Payment to reimbursable.

    Note – If the applicant is not requesting Advanced Payment, please select "Not Applicable," below the project name.

Catalyst proposals will be evaluated as follows:

Note for evaluation committee – The criteria will be built out with scoring guidelines once the Project Identification committee has approved the baseline criteria.

	Recommended Regional Criteria	Eligible Scoring Points	Evaluation Criteria and Indicators
1	Project demonstrates strong collaborations to maximize impact and the breaking down of silos in region	15	• Evidence of multiple entities focused on a collective goal • Project has specific, well supported quantitative and qualitative impact goals (# of people impacted, disinvested communities impacted, etc)
2	Project supports the Regional Strategic Plan vision by advancing at least one of the priority sectors or cross cutting infrastructure needs	15	• Will this project be a "catalyst" for a larger project or investment (i.e. award would not fund existing operations) • Does the project advance multiple sectors and/or core issues
3	Overall feasibility of project – how likely the project is to advance to implementation	10	• Is project budget reasonable and has local financial support • Is the requested funding sufficient to move project towards implementation
4	Project budget and ability to attract additional funding for development and ongoing maintenance	15	• Does project budget narrative consider long- term sustainability of the implementation phase • Project has obtained or intends to apply for match funding
	REQUIRED State Criteria		
9	Alignment with state climate goals: Sustainable Groundwater Management Act CA Air Resources Scoping Plan	15	• Does the project provide carbon-neutral environmental benefits to the community • Does the project increase resilience of communities to climate change impacts
10	Alignment with state equity goals: Racial Equity Executive Order Justice40 guidelines	15	• Does the project respond to disinvested communities and their needs • Do disinvested communities have a leadership role in the decision making process and outcomes • Beneficiary communities and populations are explicitly named in the proposal
11	Alignment with Job Quality and Access Criteria	15	• Does the project advance livable wage, benefitted jobs, and represent systems change approach to workforce development • Does the project remove access barriers for low wage workers or

			marginalized communities (i.e. childcare, transportation, housing)
	Bonus Points		
	Project impacts >40% (up to 20 bonus points) Project directly impacts multiple counties		
	TOTAL POINTS	100+	

Project Budget
Template Provided – See Appendix

Disclaimers
- Submitting a Catalyst application does not guarantee funding
- Regional Conveners do not approve projects
- Grant amount must be clearly stated and requested by the applicant
- All proposals will be reviewed and scored by multiple reviewers
- All grant funding must be expensed by September 30, 2026
- If a project is not awarded in this round the project may reapply in the following rounds