

# BUILDING A NEW CALIFORNIA ECONOMY



## MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

### Continuing to Build a New California Economy that is resilient, sustainable, and inclusive

2026 is shaping up to be a major year for California. A shifting federal landscape, combined with increasingly frequent and severe geopolitical and climate impacts, means California and its regions are in a near-constant state of uncertainty. For [California Forward \(CA FWD\)](#), our work is more important than ever.

For nearly two decades, CA FWD has provided the interconnective tissue between communities, regions, and the state. Along with our core partners at the [California Stewardship Network](#), we support economic growth that stewards state resources and builds resilience in the face of a changing economy and climate. Our work focuses on systems change: not just addressing one element of California's economic future, but working across silos to provide thought leadership, policy priorities, and pragmatic solutions on the ground.

The coming year will bring plenty of opportunities for systems change, as we look ahead at a Governor's race and changing legislative leadership. The new Governor will come into a state facing key challenges—including increasing inequality across every region, and rising costs for consumers and ratepayers—but also big opportunities for California leadership and innovation.

CA FWD has been a partner to Governor Newsom in his efforts to help Regions Rise Together since the beginning of his administration. In 2026, CA FWD will provide that same support to gubernatorial candidates, providing education and expertise on the importance of investing in a more resilient economy that creates truly shared prosperity. Once elected, we'll support the new Governor and the legislature to drive real change.

Meanwhile, we'll keep leaning into our work to support the state, our regions, and our communities with pragmatic and honest implementation strategies that create shared prosperity and long-term economic resilience. We're not just opining—we're actually doing the work on everything from bioeconomy and battery supply chain strategies, to developing best practices for community benefits agreements, to mobilizing capital for community-led climate resilience projects, to innovative approaches to corporate carbon management.

I invite you to take a look at the programs, projects, and initiatives CA FWD is leading this year. You'll find they serve a common purpose: **to build a New California Economy where people across every region and community can prosper, both today and into the future.**

In Solidarity,

Kate Gordon  
CEO, CA FWD

## CA FWD IN ACTION LAST YEAR

1. We partnered with our [Regions-Up Workgroup](#) to envision a more durable regions-up economic development model building on the successes of the Newsom administration.
2. We filled a critical policy gap around growing wildfire risks and costs with our [Wildfire Policy Workgroup](#) and [Wildfire Policy Brief](#).
3. We leaned into best practices for ensuring community and worker benefits from clean energy developments through our [Energy Project Benefits Agreement Database](#).
4. We invested in the regional leaders of tomorrow through our [Young Leaders Program](#) and [Morgan Fellows](#) program.

# OUR APPROACH

*How we're building a New California Economy*

We believe California's economy is most resilient when it leans into our strengths: our people, our land, and our firm commitment to sustainability and shared prosperity. At CA FWD, we drive systemic policy change that creates opportunities for all regions to thrive.

California deserves an economy that is resilient in the face of changing geopolitics and climate impacts. CA FWD works to ensure that California's new energy and industrial economy includes advanced manufacturing and supply chains that generate tangible benefits within and across our diverse regions.

**Energy &  
Industrial  
(R)Evolution**

A resilient economy requires managing climate risks as a fiscal and economic issue. CA FWD unlocks sustained investment in climate risk reduction, pilots scalable resilience solutions, and aligns public and private incentives to improve insurability.

**Fiscal  
Resilience in  
a Changing  
Climate**

**NEW  
CALIFORNIA  
ECONOMY**

**Models for  
Shared  
Prosperity**

The clean energy transition is driving major place-based investment. CA FWD promotes models that align developers, communities, and workers to ensure new projects deliver shared economic benefits.

**Thriving  
Regions**

CA FWD and the California Stewardship Network (CSN) believe that regional voices should be heard in Sacramento, while the state should provide consistent direction and support back down to the regions. Together, we are designing policy to support a durable state-regional system that builds toward an economy that works for all.

**Leadership  
Development**

Strong regions need collaborative leaders. CA FWD's peer networks and leadership development programs equip leaders at all stages and across sectors to build coalitions, understand regional challenges, and advance integrated solutions that strengthen California's economy.

# 2026 PROGRAMS & PROJECTS

To Build a New California Economy, CA FWD, along with our partners, is committed to the following this year:

## Thriving Regions

Our [Regions-Up](#) Work Group will go out on the road, testing recommendations and building a diverse coalition for a more durable and sustainable state-regional economic development model and refining them into a policy playbook for California's legislative leaders and incoming governor. At the same time, we'll continue to support the California Stewardship Network and other regional partners in efforts to ensure continued funding and implementation of existing California Jobs First and K-16 Collaborative priorities.

## Energy & Industrial (R)Evolution

CA FWD continues to push for [economic growth into industries](#) that support the state's climate resilience, energy transition, and shared prosperity goals. In 2026, we'll produce roadmaps for the incoming governor and legislative leadership on two priority industry sectors: Bioeconomy and Battery Manufacturing. We'll also support pragmatic approaches for current California companies working to lower their carbon emissions and drive energy transition throughout their own operations.

## Models for Shared Prosperity

Building on our 2025 [Energy Projects Benefits Agreement Database](#), CA FWD is helping to organize leaders from across California and the nation into a community of practice focused on peer learning, policy and implementation models, and storytelling around successful community-developer agreements in a range of clean energy projects. In 2026, we'll launch a steering committee to drive this work, and home in on model legislative language and governance structures for strong community outcomes—models we'll both take from, and bring back to, California.

## Fiscal Resilience in a Changing Climate

CA FWD is committed to meeting this moment of climate-driven natural disasters by [advancing bold, practical solutions](#) through an approach that considers all climate risks and that strengthens fiscal health, drives investments in climate adaptation, and aligns economic incentives to improve insurability.

### DRIVING INVESTMENT IN CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Already this year, CA FWD has launched the [Resilience District Incubator](#) to pilot local and regional strategies to build sustained revenues for risk reduction and resilience investments and the [California Resilience Implementation Accelerator](#) to energize regional resilience and accelerate project implementation through seed funding, hands-on technical support, and cross-sector learning networks.

### CATALYZING STATE AND MARKET ACTION ON FISCAL RESILIENCE

In 2026, CA FWD will convene cross-sector experts to translate technical insights into policy solutions that stabilize public budgets, address underlying insurability, and drive markets to value risk reduction at scale. We'll deliver an actionable adaptation finance framework, fill a gap by coordinating a [wildfire workgroup](#) to find policy solutions that address the growing impact to communities and our economy, and advance efforts to reform California's Rainy Day Fund and other state budget measures to reduce the volatility of the state's revenue structure.

## Leadership Development

### CSN PEER EXCHANGES

The [California Stewardship Network](#) (CSN) serves as CA FWD's strongest regional partner, with organizations represented from across every corner of the state. In 2026, the CSN will continue to share best practices for regional stewardship and civic engagement through its Peer Exchange model, while also partnering with CA FWD to advance shared goals including leadership development, models for inclusive and sustainable economic development, and the Regions-Up playbook.



### BECKY MORGAN STEWARD LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

At CA FWD, we help to build durable policy and durable regional leadership. The [Becky Morgan Steward Leadership Program](#) is a mid-career program for leaders to deepen their understanding of regional and statewide policy issues, hone decision-making and management skills, and unite with peers from across the state to learn, grow, and build a better California. The most recent class of Fellows came on board in January 2026. Fellows will hold four in-person convenings and eight virtual sessions throughout the year, graduating in December ready to take on the world—or at least their home regions.



### YOUNG LEADERS PROGRAM

The [CA FWD Young Leaders Program](#) (YLP) is an early career program that elevates the next generation of industry, policy, and non-profit leaders. Now in its fourth year, YLP will spend 2026 deepening its integration with CA FWD through events, projects, staff-led workshops, and more. Our goal is for this program to support the state's emerging regional leaders in developing important foundational skills such as policy writing, organizing, coalition building, and more—and then to support them in connecting to policy and professional networks across the state.



## CLIMATE SMART ECONOMY INITIATIVE

CA FWD believes that a strong and resilient California requires the integration of climate and economic goals. In 2026, we'll continue to co-lead—along with Resources Legacy Fund—our [state-wide campaign to advance a policy playbook for the next governor](#) that delivers an economic transition that accelerates an energy and industrial policy transition, climate resilience that protects household economic stability and public revenues, and shared prosperity that closes wealth gaps. The playbook builds on CA FWD's breadth of policy and programmatic work, and will include statewide listening sessions and engagement, a communications strategy, and expanded field capacity to support implementation.

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2025 Summit recap

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