

February 28, 2024

Subject: SGC 2024 Catalyst Conference: Draft Summary Report & Policy Models
Reporting Period: February 2024
Staff Lead: Sean Kennedy, Deputy Director of Energy Investments, SGC

Summary

On February 1-2, 2024, the Strategic Growth Council (SGC) convened over 300 leaders in Sacramento for the second annual California Catalyst Conference. Hosted in collaboration with the Milken Institute, the conference drew on SGC's experience to highlight best practices and tested models to catalyze equitable climate investment in California and beyond.

The 2024 Catalyst Draft Summary Report presents a high-level overview of the discussions and conversations hosted during the conference. All content is based on notes during those sessions and should not be viewed as policy recommendations. The contents of this report do not necessarily represent the views of SGC, its employees, or the State of California.

Background

Recent years have witnessed unprecedented levels of State and federal funding to address worsening climate-related challenges, particularly those faced by historically marginalized and disadvantaged communities. Across the climate investment landscape, individuals and organizations are leveraging this funding to support, design, implement, and maintain projects that generate meaningful and equitable community benefits.

While historic, the current levels of public climate funding are insufficient to meet long-term needs. In a first-of-its-kind assessment of climate finance in California, Climate Policy Initiative's report on [California Landscape of Climate Finance](#) estimates that California will need an annual average of USD 62 billion from 2023 to 2035 to stay on track for its climate goals. As such, there is a pressing need to support communities and organizations in identifying and implementing actionable, creative strategies toward equitable climate resilience now and in the future.

The 2024 SGC Catalyst Conference: Progress in Place: From Power Building to Project Implementation convened frontline leaders, researchers, funders, and government partners to learn from one another, prioritize areas of future focus, advance projects, and celebrate the transformation already underway. Sessions reflected the urgency to make place-based investments that center and support disinvested communities and the speed at which federal and state funds are deployed.

This summary report presents a high-level overview of the discussions hosted during the conference panels and breakout sessions. All content is based on notes recorded during those sessions and should not be viewed as policy recommendations. The contents of this report do not necessarily represent the views of SGC, its employees, or the State of California.

Key Themes

During the conference, participants shared proven examples of approaches to invest in clean energy, transit, affordable housing, good-paying jobs, and reducing legacy pollution in underserved communities. While significant challenges remain, the opportunities identified by participants offer hope for addressing long-standing inequities and building resilience in the face of climate change.

Presentations and discussions were wide-ranging, reflecting both the diversity of participants – including government, community, Tribal, finance, industry, and advocacy leaders – and the highly varied ways that climate equity challenges are affecting communities across California. Across these discussions, however, four key themes emerged:

1. **Tribal Access and Investment:** A number of Tribal organizations are working to use the historic influx of federal funding, such as the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), while asserting their sovereignty. Opportunities identified by panelists include using IRA dollars to invest in solar on Tribal lands to support Tribal energy sovereignty. The sessions on Tribal Access and Investment focused on the importance of affirming Tribal sovereignty when implementing projects. Participants highlighted a lack of education by state and federal governments and technical assistance (TA) providers regarding how Tribes operate. Participants noted that funding and capacity-building must meet the unique needs of Tribes.
2. **Project and Community Readiness:** Prioritizing capacity building and technical assistance for project development and implementation is increasingly regarded as a necessity for entities to apply for and implement funding successfully. Speakers across multiple sessions identified technical assistance and capacity building as the greatest opportunity to improve outcomes for grant providers and grantees. Whether applicants are Tribal, local governments, or community-based organizations, TA should meet communities where they are and help develop self-sufficiency to compete for funding opportunities. The most significant barriers applicants face are a lack of capacity and the complexity of funding applications. Presenters shared that without capacity-building support, communities with the most need are likely to miss out on the historic federal investment, further exacerbating inequality. Simplifying the application process makes funds more accessible and reduces the need for technical assistance in the application phase.
3. **Strategies for Successful Implementation:** Participants identified how to successfully engage communities when implementing and how to center community benefits in capital development. Conference participants discussed education, tools, and strategies to prepare under-resourced communities for near-term implementation challenges. Presenters introduced opportunities to address inequities in housing and energy sectors



through strategies such as gap funding for smaller-scale development projects, a due diligence framework to advance equity, and accountability mapping.

4. **Beyond Implementation:** Presenters discussed the need for communities to access historic public climate funding while recognizing that current opportunities are insufficient to meet long-term resiliency goals. Opportunities identified include engaging youth, fostering community collaboration, and carefully evaluating when and where private finance can support or hinder climate equity objectives. Models such as SGC's Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) and Regional Climate Collaboratives (RCC) Programs effectively build trusting partners and community collaboration, which are critical to sustaining efforts toward equitable climate resilience. Barriers discussed centered around a lack of opportunities to empower youth, such as paid leadership positions in climate mitigation efforts. Tribal attendees expressed that the State's lack of awareness regarding Tribal culture and practices continues to be a barrier to seeking and implementing funding opportunities.

Discussion Questions

1. Which of the opportunities presented today would your agency be most interested in exploring over the next 12 months?
2. What kind of support from SGC or the Council would help facilitate the advancement of topics you are interested in?

Attachments

Attachment A: 2024 Catalyst Draft Summary Report

