

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR ECONOMIC MOBILITY WORK

DOES THIS SOUND FAMILIAR?

Challenges heard consistently from small ethnic chambers and rural chambers.

3x

higher loan denial rates for
minority-owned businesses

60%+

of CA's workforce are workers
of color — underrepresented
in mobility programs

1-2

staff running the full
chamber operation while
seeing the need grow

You see the gap. Your members live it. The question is how to build the capacity to bridge it.

THREE BARRIERS YOUR COMMUNITY NAMES FIRST

Structural — not personal. And addressable — with the right funding and partnerships.

LANGUAGE & PROGRAM ACCESS

LEP workers

blocked from programs that exist for them

Workforce training, upskilling pathways, and economic mobility services exist — but they aren't delivered in the languages your community speaks, through channels they trust, or in formats that fit their lives.

HOUSING & COST OF LIVING

\$2,500+ /mo

average 1BR rent in CA coastal metros

California's housing cost crisis is a workforce crisis. Workers who can't afford to live near job centers can't take the jobs. Workers who move to afford rent lose access to community and social networks that support mobility.

CAPITAL & BUSINESS STABILITY

3x denied

minority-owned businesses for business loans

When your member businesses can't access capital, they can't hire, retain, or pay competitive wages. The capital access gap compounds the workforce gap — and leaves economic mobility out of reach for workers and owners alike.

THE CHALLENGE ISN'T ELIGIBILITY. IT'S CAPACITY.

The resources exist.

Funding, partnership models, workforce programs, and technical assistance flow through federal, state, and philanthropic channels every year. Much of it goes unclaimed by the communities that need it most.

The capacity is buildable.

Most ethnic chambers haven't yet built the grant track record, partner relationships, and internal systems to access these resources consistently. The good news: you can start today, with what you already have.

WHY ETHNIC-SERVING CHAMBERS WIN

Funders say they want to reach underserved communities. You already live there.

01

Cultural Bridge

You can reach workers, business owners, and community members that workforce systems, government agencies, and foundations consistently miss. You speak their language — literally and figuratively. That access cannot be manufactured.

02

Business Community Voice

You know what your member businesses actually need — not what the county workforce board assumes. You can translate community workforce realities into language that funders, educators, and policymakers can act on.

03

Earned Institutional Trust

The communities you serve have reason to be skeptical of institutions. They trust your chamber. That trust took years — sometimes decades — to build. It is exactly what every funder says they want and almost none of them have. You do.

THREE TRACKS. ONE CHAMBER.

You don't have to do all three at once. Pick one entry point — the others start to follow.

01 Employer Engagement

Start with the relationships you already have

- Start** Run a member business roundtable or bilingual survey. Name the top 3 workforce gaps your employers face and can't solve alone.
- Build** Share findings with WDB and training partners. Connect employers to programs they didn't know existed. Formalize an employer advisory group.
- Scale** Lead a sector strategy anchored in your business community. Attract workforce and training programs that serve your members.

02 Partnership Development

Build outward from your existing network

- Start** Name your Local Workforce Development Board, community college, community foundation, and SBDC contacts. Schedule one coffee with each.
- Build** Co-host events, join committees, share bilingual data. Become the go-to partner for organizations trying to reach your community.
- Scale** Anchor consortium grant applications. Lead collaborative funding requests as the culturally credible convener.

03 Funding Pursuit

Start local — then stack up

- Start** Map local and philanthropic sources. Apply for one small, accessible award to build a track record and demonstrate grant management capacity.
- Build** Apply for CA state workforce or econ dev grants. Use local awards as match and proof of capacity.
- Scale** Pursue federal grants (EDA, DOL/WIOA, MBDA, CDFI Fund). Local and state wins become your required match.

FOUR LAYERS OF FUNDING

Almost every chamber starts in the right two columns and stacks left. That is the strategy.

LOCAL & PHILANTHROPY

← START HERE

- Community foundations
- Municipal contracts
- James Irvine Foundation
- California Endowment
- Weingart Foundation
- ACCE Foundation cohorts
- Corporate giving (tech, banks, utilities, health systems)

STATE (CALIFORNIA)

← THEN HERE

- CA Employment Training Panel
- GO-Biz / CalOSBA
- CA Workforce Dev Board
- CA IBank financing
- Strong Workforce program (California Comm. Colleges)

REGIONAL

THEN HERE →

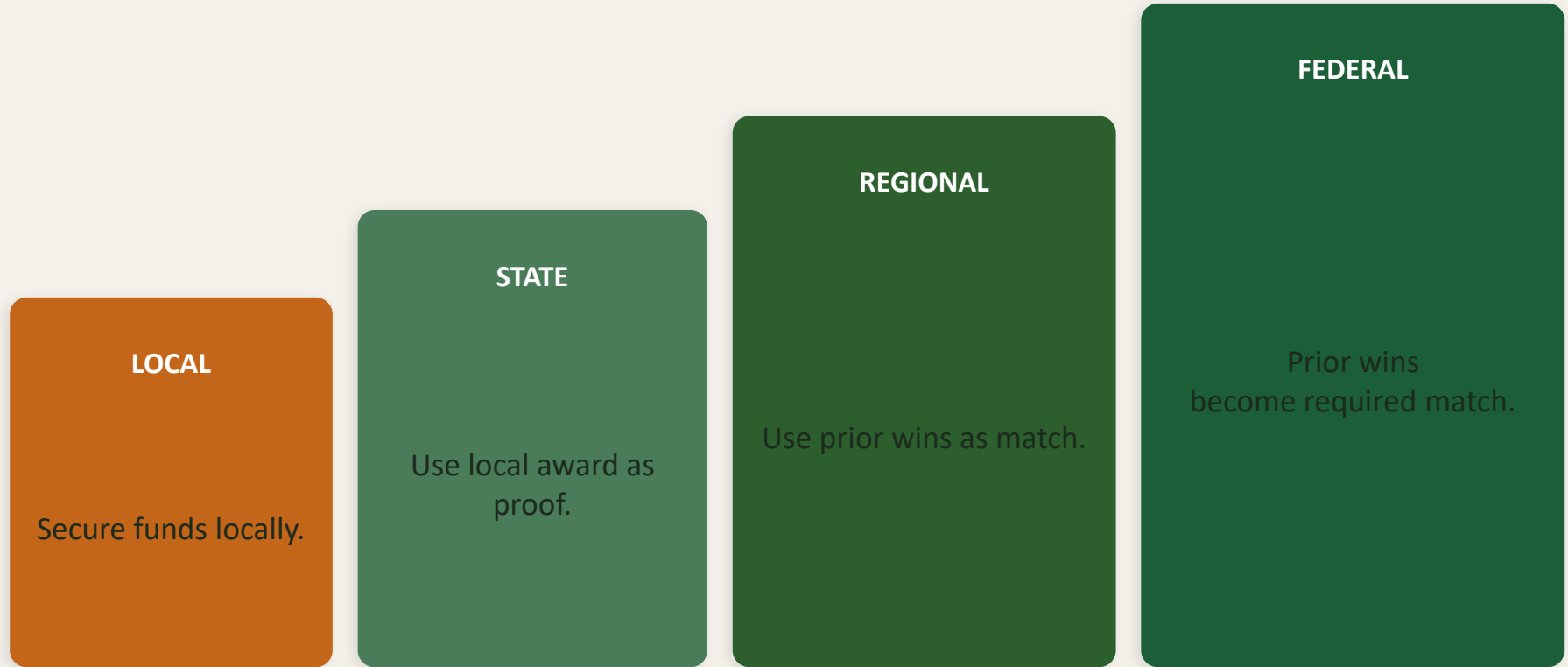
- Local Workforce Dev Boards (47 LWDBs in CA)
- SBA District Offices (LA, SF, Sacramento)
- CA-based CDFIs
- Regional planning units
- SBA Small Business Dev Centers

FEDERAL

MATCH PLAY →

- MBDA — Minority Business Development Agency
- EDA (job creation focus)
- DOL / WIOA / Apprenticeship
- SBA — 7(j), PRIME, SBDC
- CDFI Fund (Treasury)

THE STACKING STRATEGY



YOUR FIVE-STEP LAUNCH SEQUENCE

A realistic first-quarter sequence for a one- or two-person chamber operation.

1

Register on SAM.gov

Get your Unique Entity ID and active registration. Free — but allow 2-4 weeks. Do this now, before you find a specific federal grant.

2

Map Your Partners

Write down the actual person at your LWDB, community college, community foundation, and regional SBDC. Relationships — not just organizations.

3

Find a Fiscal Sponsor

A 501(c)(3) partner unlocks foundation dollars a 501(c)(6) can't receive directly. Your community foundation or a CBO partner can hold funds while you deliver.

4

Pick ONE Target

One community need. One funder. Before you apply, call the program officer and tell them who you serve. That call dramatically increases your odds.

5

Stack Locally First

Win a small local or state award. Use it as match, proof of capacity, and the first line of every future application. Momentum compounds.



STARTING BEFORE YOU'RE READY

Zero-cost pilots that build credibility, data, and partnerships — before any grant application.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

Member Business Roundtable

Name 5 business members. Host a 90-minute bilingual lunch. Ask: what workforce barrier is costing you the most? Their answers become your data, your case, and the foundation of every grant application and partner conversation that follows.

DATA BUILDING

Bilingual Workforce Survey

A 10-question survey of your member businesses — offered in English and your community's primary language — surfaces gap data every funder will ask you to prove. Establishes your chamber as the organization that actually measures what others assume.

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Community College Partnership

California's community college system is one of the most robust in the country. One meeting with your local college's workforce dean or CTE director is the first step toward Strong Workforce dollars, apprenticeship programs, and Perkins-funded employer engagement.

PARTNERSHIP + FUNDING

LWDB Co-Sponsorship

Join a committee, co-host a hiring event, or make 3 employer introductions to your Local Workforce Development Board. Your LWDB has WIOA funding and no trusted pathway to your business community. You have the opposite. That is a partnership worth making.

Coaching guidance: Start with relationships you already have · Focus on one lever before scaling · Keep ideas simple and mobilizable · Be ready to act when opportunities arise

Your community needs a trusted cultural bridge. That's your chamber.

Pick one track. Take one step. Start with what you already have.
Capacity builds from action — not from waiting until everything is in place.



KEY RESOURCES TO BOOKMARK

Federal Portals

- [grants.gov](https://www.grants.gov) — all federal grants
- sam.gov — register first
- mbda.gov — minority business programs
- eda.gov/funding — EDA programs
- sba.gov — SBA programs (7j, PRIME, SBDC)

California-Specific

- etp.ca.gov — Employment Training Panel
- gobiz.ca.gov — GO-Biz programs
- ibank.ca.gov — IBank financing
- caworkforces.org — CA workforce system
- strongworkforce.cccco.edu — comm. college

Philanthropy & Search

- candid.org — foundation directory
- cof.org — community foundations
- irvine.org — James Irvine Foundation
- californiaendowment.org
- secure.acce.org — ACCE Foundation

501(c)(6) note: Chambers can apply directly for most federal grants. For foundation grants requiring 501(c)(3) status, a community foundation fiscal sponsor is the typical solution — ask yours if they offer this.

Thank you.

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