



ABOUT CEMI

The **Community Economic Mobilization Initiative (CEMI)** partners with a growing list of **funded partners** (grantees) that put communities first. As a trailblazing nonprofit capacity-building effort, CEMI was created to strengthen the ability of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (**BIPOC**)-led and serving organizations¹ to secure and influence the use of public funds for broad economic and environmental benefit. It uses power building, grantmaking, and technical assistance strategies to achieve this goal.

Managed by The Center at Sierra Health Foundation (**The Center**), CEMI is funded by a collaborative of philanthropic partners (**funding partners**) and leverages the expertise of six **strategic partners** to strengthen funded partner capacities in resource development, the management of public grants and contracts, and advocacy and power building.

YEAR 2 HIGHLIGHTS

- With CEMI support, 77% of funded partners have pursued public funding (65% independently and 26% as part of a collaborative proposal).² This has resulted in over \$66 million in public grants awarded. However, the political climate in which they work became more hostile, and the economic outlook more uncertain, with the change in federal administration in January 2025.
- 79% of funded partners (n=34) surveyed report that CEMI funds enable them to implement community economic development efforts.
- Nearly all funded partners (97%) surveyed say they are using a power building approach in their work.
- Funded partners' ratings of CEMI's responsiveness in Year 2 have steadily improved over Year 1.

\$66,387,820
 in new public funding
 won since funded
 partners became part of
 CEMI.

THE INFLUENCE OF CEMI'S SUPPORT

CEMI contributes to funded partners' resource development and community economic development efforts in three ways:

1. Funded partners say CEMI impacts them by **changing their perspectives**, prompting them to re-imagine what is possible for their organization.
2. The combination of technical assistance (**TA**) with flexible, unrestricted grants that can be invested in areas not commonly supported by donors, such as development staff, **is strengthening the know-how and know-who of funded partners to secure and manage public dollars.**
3. Receiving CEMI funds confers a "seal of approval," and this **validation effect** helps partners pursue other resources.

"CEMI has been most helpful in inspiring us to think bigger ... We're playing in a different league now."

– CEMI Funded Partner

"Since joining CEMI, we re-evaluated our approach to applying for county funds. We created a more data-driven approach ... and got larger contracts than before."

– CEMI Funded Partner

"CEMI funding was instrumental in this process. It provided credibility and validation of our work."

– CEMI Funded Partner

¹ Defined as organizations in which people who identify as part of communities that experience discrimination based on race or ethnicity hold substantive decision-making positions and are at the heart of the organization's mission.

² 15% of funded partners have pursued public funding both independently and collaboratively.

WHAT'S CHANGING FOR COMMUNITIES

As funder partners use CEMI grants to strengthen their work and bring new public investment into their communities, they contribute to more inclusive, climate-friendly, and thriving economies.

- The West Fresno Family Resource Center used some of its CEMI support to expand the **Sweet Potato Project**, an agricultural and entrepreneurship education program for youth rooted in African American culture that offers hands-on learning experiences in business, culinary, marketing, and farming skills.
- In Los Angeles, **Visión y Compromiso** supports the professionalization of the workforce of *promotoras* (or community health workers) through training, leadership development, and advocacy. Valuing work like this—caring and connecting work—expands the economy by making it more inclusive.
- In the San Francisco Bay Area, Working Partnerships USA supports the **Bay Area High Road Manufacturing Initiative** to help the Bay Area's manufacturing sector grow in a way that centers equity, job quality, climate resilience, and worker/community voice.



The Sweet Potato Project, Fresno

“Our participation with CEMI influenced our decision to create a small business services advisory committee, where we bring together board members and people from our community. CEMI’s support enabled us to double, or maybe triple, the number of small business owners and entrepreneurs participating in our cohorts.”

**– Stanislaus Equity Partners
(Funded Partner)**

“Our focus since CEMI has been on the ‘lower-end’ market ... We want to lift up from the bottom, not trickle down from the top. We’ve been working with disadvantaged people in rural areas who haven’t graduated from high school. We have a subsidized employment program where we employ individuals to get job skills training and place them into manufacturing jobs.”

– Connecting Point (Funded Partner)



*Bay Area High Road Manufacturers Initiative.
Photo courtesy of Working Partnerships USA, a funded partner.*

WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

While the [Year 1 report](#) explored how CEMI's funded partners advance work related to building inclusive economies, the Year 2 report explores how partners build power in the communities in which they work.

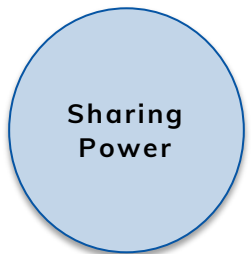


CEMI's partners illustrate what power building looks like in practice. Nearly all of CEMI's funded partners report using a power-building approach, but the specifics of this approach reflect each organization's unique context. Despite this diversity of practical experience, some common themes emerge.

For many partners, power building:

- Is relational. It can only occur in community and through the creation of relationships with others.
- Amplifies the voices of those least heard in society and brings them into decision-making spaces.
- Increases access to knowledge, funding, and other resources.

For some partners, power building is also about leadership development, and these partners connect individual leadership skills to community empowerment.



CEMI itself is a model that provides insights into how intermediary funders advance power sharing. As an intermediary, CEMI models a mechanism for its own funders to devolve some of their decision-making power. CEMI has also expanded this power by providing some larger partners, including community foundations, with the opportunity to regrant CEMI funds to other organizations in their community. Strategic partners that provide technical assistance have modeled this by building their strategies through partner input.

LOOKING AHEAD

Given the uncertainty and anxiety generated by a federal government currently using its funding and regulation powers to attack civil society, CEMI's emphasis on strengthening the capacity of a field of organizations to uplift community-based, inclusive economies that incorporate environmental safeguards is more crucial than ever. To adapt and to fortify its partners during these turbulent times, CEMI and its funders can explore some of the following opportunities.

- **Opportunities to solidify and protect progress.** Support funded partners as they pivot to state and local public funding sources or fight efforts to claw back previously awarded funding by the federal government.
- **Opportunities to prepare for the future.** CEMI can identify opportunities to define policy and advocacy priorities that will protect or lower barriers to public funding and elevate the importance of nonprofits as economic development partners. CEMI's strategic partners can provide financial planning guidance, which may entail onboarding a strategic partner with financing expertise.
- **Opportunities to learn.** Additional evaluation and learning questions remain open for exploration in Year 3. Exploring questions such as *"What will it take to ensure that long-lasting financial infrastructure for inclusive economic development work exists and is accessible to BIPOC-led and serving community organizations in California?"* will also yield practical insights for funded and funding partners.