

SlingShot

Accelerating Income Mobility through Regional Collaboration

The Challenge

Despite our state's overall prosperity, too many Californians are in danger of being left behind, not making ends meet and unable to create a middleclass life for themselves and their families. Many Californians face substantial challenges in finding good jobs and supporting themselves and their families in an era with volatile, rapidly evolving labor markets. As a result, regions across California face a combination of shortages of skilled workers in key industries and cohorts of students and workers ill equipped to compete for mid- to high-skilled jobs. All of this places increasing strain on equality of opportunity, a core component of the American Dream, and the ability of this generation and the next to rise above the economic and social station of their parents. Equal opportunity is at risk of becoming myth for whole generations of young Californians.

Traditional workforce, education, and economic development strategies have not had sufficient impact in helping enough workers to build needed skills, find good jobs and realize positive economic mobility. And even promising strategies lack the speed and agility in execution needed to respond to current and emerging skills and job demands. We need to bring the creativity for which California is known to bear and create new strategies that achieve scalable impact.

What Are We Trying to Accomplish?

SlingShot seeks to seed collaborative efforts by employers and industry, government, workforce and economic development, and education stakeholders within a region to identify and then work to solve employment challenges that slow California's economic engine -- with regionally-selected solutions to regionally-defined problems.

This guiding premise contains five dimensions:

- **We can make the greatest impact on major jobs and employment issues at the regional level.** California is a collection of distinct regional economies; aligning our work at that level will be more effective than either city/county/district level efforts or statewide strategies.
- **We must turn the tide on income mobility in California.** Our systems must accelerate education, employment, and economic development for those Californians in danger of being left out of our State's prosperity.
- **We need to tackle big issues.** California's regions face no shortage of vexing workforce challenges. Slingshot offers an opportunity to take on a tough issue that if solved would meaningfully move the needle on employment.
- **We need to measure what we undertake.** All strategies need to be grounded in effective use of data and metrics.
- **We must create the space to take risks.** In an era of perpetual economic volatility, traditional programs don't solve tough workforce challenges. Slingshot encourages regional partnerships to prototype new ideas, based on strong research and development, without fear of "failure" if the effort falls short of expectations. For every impactful practice that emerges, there will be others that are tried and then dropped for lack of sufficient impact.

Implementation Game Plan

Stage 1: Action Plan

A regional partnership will develop and submit a brief (2 page) Action Plan to CWIB seeking initial funding. This will qualify the partnership to be considered for development and implementation support (both funding and increased administrative flexibility) from the state. A successful Action Plan will include:

- A clear logic that the geography proposed reflects a shared base of economic activity -- an Employment Zone;
- Commitments from key partners within the region to the SlingShot Coalition work, such as business, education, workforce, economic development, community development, labor, industry and civic leaders;
- Identification of at least one major employment, education, or jobs issue the region faces, and a commitment to develop strategies that could result in large-scale impacts on the targeted issue; and
- A plan for a research, design and development phase of work that would result in implementation-ready strategies.

Stage 2: Research, Design and Development

SlingShot coalitions whose Action Plans are approved will receive up to \$20,000 grants that will be matched 1:1 by funds from within the region for a total of up to \$40,000, with the exact amount based on budgets submitted as part of the action plan.

During this phase, regional partners will deepen their research as needed about key workforce issues and possible strategies to undertake, and then design and develop a mix of selected strategies for implementation.

Stage 3: Implementation

Implementation grants will be awarded to regional coalitions with well-crafted strategies coming out of stage 2. Expectations include:

- The issue being targeted is a large-scale employment, education, or jobs challenge in the region that will take substantial collective effort and innovative strategies to impact. Examples of large-scale challenges (illustrative not exhaustive): increasing literacy rates, reducing youth disconnection from school and work, reducing youth offender recidivism, increasing educational attainment levels, increasing income levels, reducing long-term unemployment.
- Metrics to be employed will include total population scale change (e.g. educational attainment among all working age adults in the region), not only the results with program enrollees.
- The coalition will craft an overall, long-term approach for tackling the chosen issue, and will seek initial funding for initial strategies in service of that long-term game plan.
- Coalitions are encouraged to treat this as an R&D approach – to adopt initial strategies that take risks – to try approaches and ideas that go beyond the “usual suspects,” those that the partners believe have a chance of being game changers. Our assumption is that coming out of initial implementation of specific strategies, Slingshot coalitions will determine either: a) the strategy is scalable; b) the strategy is helpful but one of several needed; or c) the strategy isn’t sufficiently promising and should be dropped in favor of focusing on other strategies.

Stage 4: Sustain & Grow

The California Workforce Investment Board is interested in working with state partners to assemble a much larger, multi-agency pool of funding that can be used to support continuing strategy development in support of impacting the big issues that the regional coalitions identify. Based on what can be assembled, we envision the Slingshot coalitions periodically seeking additional funding as strategies are implemented and next stage approaches are timely to sustain and grow the impact of their efforts.