

100 LEADERSHIP when it matters most

The James Irvine Foundation Leadership Awards have recognized 100 innovative leaders making a difference in California. Facing the COVID-19 pandemic and other challenges, many of these leaders have adapted their work and continued to innovate.

Leadership Award Recipients Pivot to Address Challenges in Workforce + Economic Development

The four Leadership Award recipients featured in this brief have supported people as they navigate challenges in a disrupted workforce and economy due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Their efforts include:

- Providing targeted financial support to minority- and women-owned businesses
- Delivering monthly payments and financial capability services to low-income youth
- Offering apprenticeship programs for people with significant barriers to employment
- Providing employment opportunities while preserving the environment through recycling

By highlighting the work and ideas of these leaders, the Irvine Foundation hopes to help policymakers and our peers in philanthropy advance effective solutions in workforce and economic development.



ERIC WEAVER 2006 AWARD RECIPIENT

ACCION OPPORTUNITY FUND | STATEWIDE

Accion Opportunity Fund provides loans to low-to-moderate income small business owners and entrepreneurs, particularly those underserved by larger financial institutions, to help them jumpstart their businesses. As the leading nonprofit microlender in the country, Accion Opportunity Fund is alleviating financial stress for borrowers experiencing unforeseen revenue losses due to the pandemic by raising tens of millions in donations to partially forgive loans and by deferring \$5 million (and counting) worth of loan payments. The mission-driven lender has also helped more than 1,000 entrepreneurs

receive loans through the federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). Nationally, among PPP borrowers who self-reported, 83 percent were white, and 78 percent were male, while Accion Opportunity Fund's PPP borrowers are 64 percent people of color and 37 percent women. The lender's service model has successfully helped small business owners that were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic withstand the economic crisis, maintain operations, and keep their workforce employed.

Lessons Learned

Minority- and women-owned small businesses need priority access to capital through state and federal incentive and relief programs or they will continue to be at higher risk for permanent closure.

Policy Considerations: Target small business aid to populations that have been historically underserved by financial institutions and state and federal relief efforts. Government loan programs can partner with qualified community-centered organizations, such as Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), to reach underserved entrepreneurs.



MARGARET LIBBY 2020 AWARD RECIPIENT

MYPATH | STATEWIDE

MyPath provides youth from low-income communities of color, including parenting and foster youth, with the resources they need to achieve financial independence and get on a path to wealth-building. A dozen credit unions have adopted the organization's youth banking standards – which reduce barriers for young people to open and manage a bank account; and 90 youth employment programs have implemented direct deposit payments alongside MyPath's financial education and products. In response to the COVID-19 crisis, the organization launched two first-in-the-nation

Universal Basic Income (UBI) pilot programs to provide monthly payments and optional financial capability services to young people who were acutely impacted by the pandemic. Additionally, MyPath delivered new virtual resources and webinars to help young people mitigate the recent economic shocks and avoid credit scams. Over the last year, MyPath engaged 50 partners and more than 5,200 youth, helping credit participants improve their credit scores by an average of 22-points, and savings participants commit an average of \$437 to their savings goals– all through virtual financial capability services. Inspired by this success, the organization launched MyPath Wealth Equity Lab, a project that will build the next generation of technology to support youth wealth-building. The organization is currently working with young adults to create a Youth Economic Bill of Rights that will shape their advocacy for an equitable economic recovery.

Lessons Learned

Youth and families with insufficient financial education and resources are at greater risk for engaging in predatory lending and other activities that could jeopardize their financial stability and delay a full recovery from the pandemic-induced economic recession. By providing access to safe and affordable banking products and services, young people can build wealth and be prepared for any disruptions in employment or income.

Policy Considerations: Financial capability programs must be included in the state's social services for often overlooked populations such as foster youth. These skills impact how youth save money, transact, build assets, and participate in the state's economic growth.



JENNIFER GILMORE

2020 AWARD RECIPIENT

KITCHENS FOR GOOD |
SAN DIEGO AND IMPERIAL COUNTIES



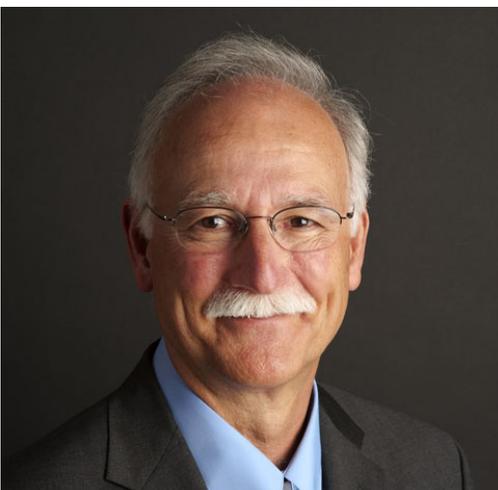
Kitchens for Good prepares people with significant barriers to employment for careers in the culinary and hospitality industries. Their classes are comprised of formerly incarcerated adults, youth transitioning out of foster care, domestic violence survivors, people living with mental health challenges, and those with substance abuse history. Kitchens for Good’s programs also play a critical role in reducing hunger. Since the pandemic began,

the organization has doubled its efforts to mass produce nutritious meals to meet growing community needs. As a result, Kitchens for Good helped their apprentices maintain employment and continue practicing their culinary skills while serving about a quarter of a million meals in food pantries and schools. The organization even launched two new apprenticeship programs - baking and hospitality management - to build pathways for employment in patisseries and hotels.

Lessons Learned

Apprenticeship programs provide low-barrier opportunities to enter and thrive in the workforce for individuals who are often deemed “unemployable.” When combined with community services like producing meals for low-income individuals, apprenticeship programs help individuals gain valuable skills, contribute to the local economy, and adapt to meet real-time community needs.

Policy Considerations: Invest in employer training and apprenticeship programs that prioritize hiring, retaining, and promoting populations previously deemed unemployable. Improve statewide infrastructure to share and replicate successful models of community-centered workforce development and apprenticeship programs.



RICHARD VALLE

2009 AWARD RECIPIENT

TRI-CED COMMUNITY RECYCLING | SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA

[Tri-City Economic Development Corporation, also known as Tri-CED Community Recycling, provides employment opportunities while preserving the environment through recycling.](#) Tri-CED Community Recycling employs low-income youth and adults and shares proceeds with other nonprofit organizations. While other recycling centers in the state have ceased or limited operations due to the COVID-19 crisis, Tri-CED Community Recycling safely continued to function as a lifeline to the 200,000 Californians it serves. Further, many of the organization’s low-income



customers rely on collecting recyclables for redemption as a vital source of income. Through its continued operations, Tri-CED Community Recycling was able to offer financial stability for many low-income youth and adults facing pandemic-induced housing and economic insecurity. Ongoing, the organization shares its expertise with the newly formed Statewide Commission on Recycling Markets and Curbside Recycling to provide policy recommendations and better data on recycling and compostable products.

Lessons Learned

Mission-driven organizations are providing job and skill-building opportunities to people with significant barriers to employment and successfully addressing other critical public needs – such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions through recycling.

Policy Considerations: Align workforce development programs with in-demand services like recycling and other policy goals like climate change mitigation to increase impact.

About the Leadership Awards

The James Irvine Foundation Leadership Awards recognize leaders whose innovative solutions to critical state challenges improve people's lives, create opportunity, and contribute to a better California.

To learn more about the program or the 100 Leadership Award recipients, please visit www.IrvineAwards.org.