

Memo: Rethinking “Disinvested Communities”

TO	State CERF Convening Team
FROM	Redwood Region RISE (Resilient Inclusive Sustainable Economy)
DATE	May 22, 2023
SUBJECT	Disinvested Communities on the Redwood Coast

On April 27, 2023, fifty organizations and individuals involved in the Redwood Coast Region’s CERF process came together to discuss disinvestment in the Region and critically examine working definitions of the term and affected populations. Our objective was to craft a more meaningful, accurate, and shared understanding of “disinvested communities” that can help drive our work forward. The community is deeply aware of the urban-rural divide in California, which renders our entire region “disinvested” per the CERF definition. There is also recognition that this burden is shouldered unevenly by groups in our region that need to be the focus of our CERF projects, plans, and strategies.

Generally, *disinvested communities face many challenges resulting from inequitable land use and zoning policies, exclusionary economic development processes, underinvestment, and a lack of meaningful engagement with community residents in planning and policy decisions* (OPR 2022). This observation calls on us to think about disinvestment geographically. For community members in the Redwood Coast Region, this tracks most closely with the experiences of deeply rural, remote, and unincorporated communities who feel marginalized by political representation; must travel great distances to services; are underserved by public investment into infrastructure; and struggle to access educational opportunities, healthcare, internet, utilities, transportation, affordable and healthy food, and other community resources present in established town centers throughout the region.

¹ CERF defines ‘disinvested communities’ as any of the following: Census tracts identified as ‘disadvantaged’ by the California Environmental Protection Agency¹⁶; Census tracts with median household incomes at or below 80 percent of the statewide median income or with the median household incomes at or below the threshold designated as low income by the Department of Housing and Community Development’s list of state income limits adopted pursuant to Section 50093 of the California Health and Safety Code; ‘High poverty area’ and ‘High unemployment area’ as designated by the California Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development California Competes Tax Credit Program; California Native American Tribes as defined by the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) Tribal Consultation Policy.

Speaking directly to the core of Just Transition goals, while all of our communities have been and will increasingly be impacted by challenges posed by climate change, many of these deeply rural, remote, and unincorporated communities relied on employment in industries such as timber and fisheries, and have acutely felt their environmental impacts and ultimate decline. Moving forward, we are hoping to uplift these and other communities that are likely to be disproportionately affected by climate change.

Our community wants to recognize limitations to the term “disinvestment”—first, that it implies there was ever investment to begin with, and second, that the term negates the strengths, wisdom, resilience, and cultural wealth present in those communities which we intend to center in our CERF efforts. Rather than bounding disinvestment in terms of geography, we believe it is more useful and accurate to consider the communities who have been marginalized by traditional planning efforts and institutions. We can think of “disinvested communities” as people who face a confluence of relatively severe and often interconnected hardships including, but not limited to, poverty, disability, lack of access to household or community resources, or lack of economic or educational opportunities. The Redwood Coast Region recognizes the experiences of BIPOC communities, of Indian Country including non federally recognized tribes, our New American communities, of youth and the elderly who are generally underinvested in, and the profound and difficult to define role trauma and disability is playing in our workforce.

As a first step to centering the experiences of these communities in our work, Redwood Coast Region’s Outreach and Engagement lead North Coast Opportunities has built their strategy around conversations with:

- Advocates for the populations listed above
- Community organizations that support people to rise above their struggles
- Individuals with lived experiences

While rural and urban areas may share similar struggles, it is important to recognize and understand that these issues are often compounded exponentially for rural areas. We are grateful to have this opportunity to communicate with the state, and we look forward to continuing to work with our partners including at the state level to create mechanisms that channel investment and resources where they are needed the most.

Thank you.