Developing Policy Literacy to Advance a Rural Agenda

November 5, 2025
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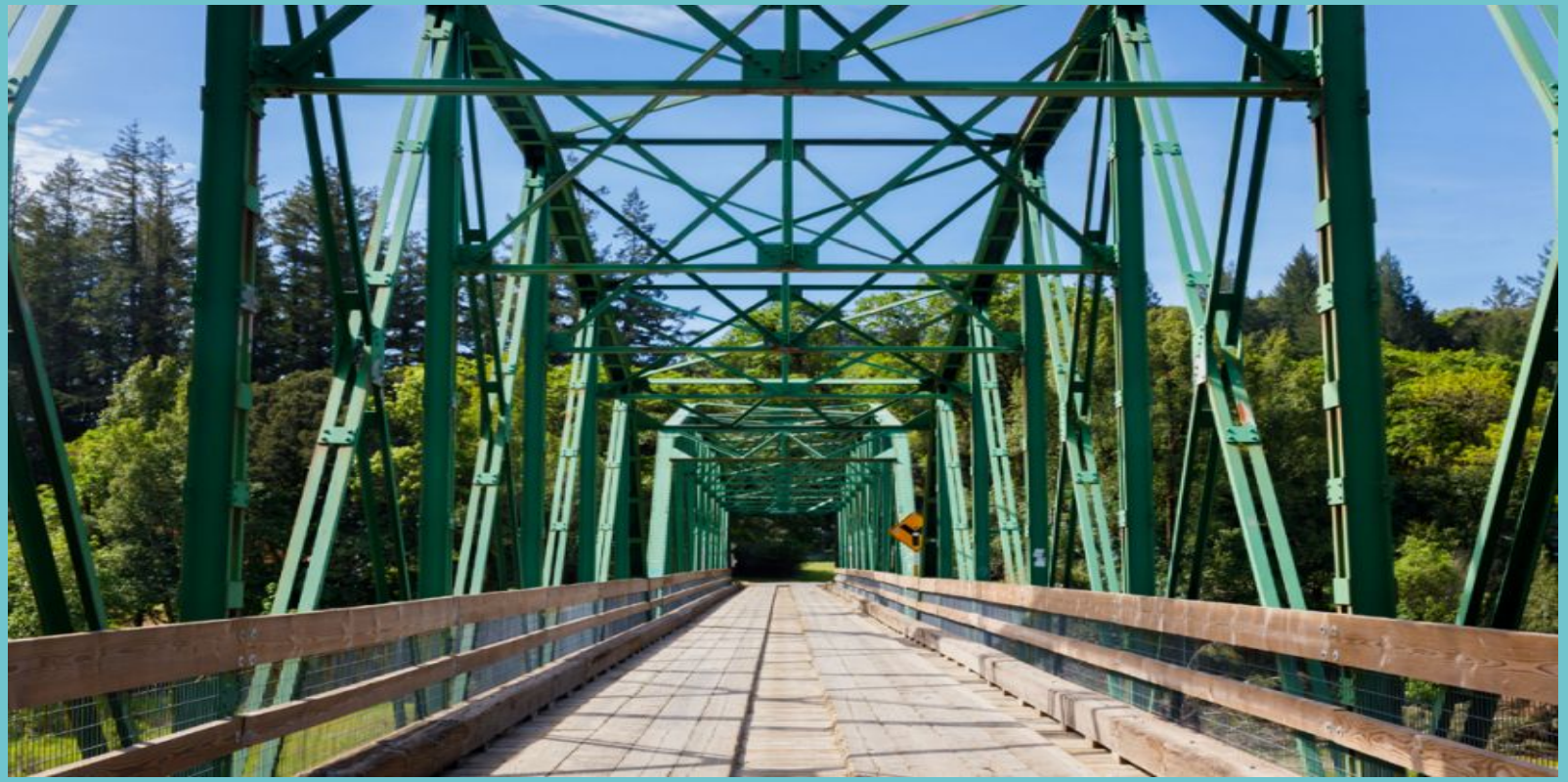
Agenda - Developing a Policy Literacy to Advance a Rural Agenda

1. Overview of the Policy Literacy Initiative and Introductions (*Includes an Exercise*)
1. Identifying Priority Issues Based on Collaborative Actions *(Includes an Exercise)*
1. Researching Issues within a Local, Regional, and State Context *(Includes an Exercise)*
1. Linking Community Priorities with Public Policy (*Includes an Exercise*)

Conclusion - *Let's have lunch!*

1 - Overview and Introductions



What is Policy Literacy? *(working definition)*

“It's about knowing where to look, what and who to trust, and how to make sense of it all.”

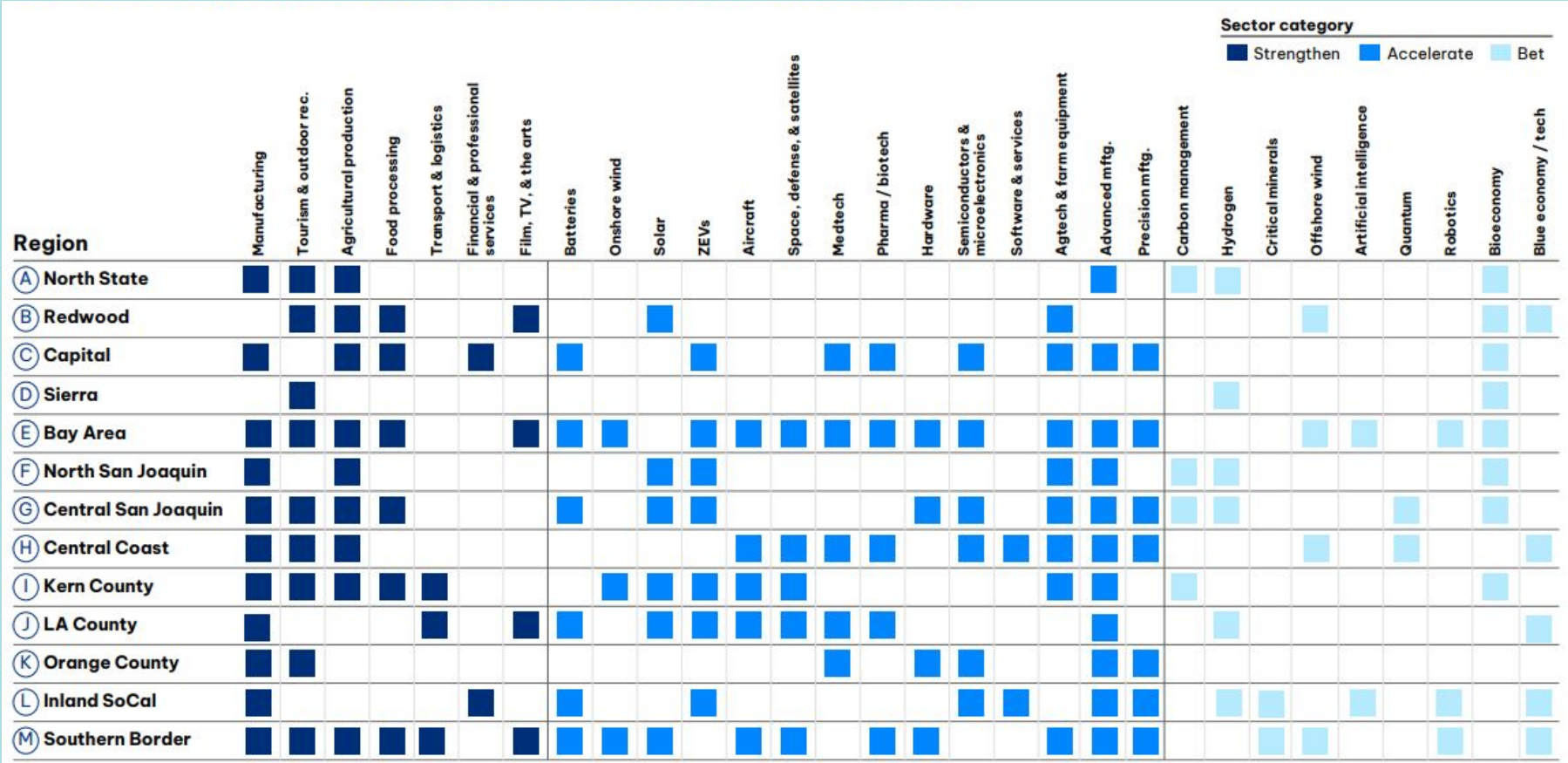
Why Develop Your Policy Literacy?

1. Help solve complex issues facing your region.
1. Amplify the needs and priorities of disinvested communities.
1. Influence policies that others are advancing that impact your region.
1. Develop your skills in data analysis, critical thinking, strategy, and leadership.

**Successful engagement with government is a precondition for implementing many of the elements of the Regional Plan.

Workshop Purpose

- Introduce the RRRISE Policy Literacy Initiative
- Explore ways rural communities can build a stronger collective voice in policy discussions
- Practice a few core skills and practical approaches to organizing advocacy.



Source: August – October 2024 working discussions with GO-Biz and LWDA, Lightcast, Moody's Analytics, Pitchbook, US Cluster Mapping Project, Jobs First Regional Plans Part 2, meetings with Jobs First Regional Collaboratives conveners

Group Introductions - Making Your Introductions Count

- Public policy engagement is often done in formal settings under tight timeframes.
- Every policy meeting should have a plan and an agenda.
- Best Practices for Introductions
  - Set a measured pace, use a clear speaking voice, and avoid abbreviations.
  - Recognize the opportunity and adjust to the situation.
  - Connect the dots - Be intentional in what you plan to convey.
  - Still needs to be brief
  - Practice your introduction
- Now let’s practice with an Introduction Exercise

Introductions Exercise

Exercise:

- Name
- Affiliation
- Community or Issue Connection

Goal: Use the introduction to convey your (a) public policy, (b) disinvested community, or (c) target industry experience.

Examples (*each lasting 10 seconds or less*):

1. Good morning. (pause) My name is Toni Symonds (pause), founder and principal with Policy Works California, and like (Mike/Earthworks), we are a justice-focused strategy (group/firm) that links communities and government.
2. First, thank you for inviting Policy Works CA to participate. (pause) My name is Toni Symonds (pause), and I am here representing the 4.1 million entrepreneurs in California.
3. Good morning. (pause) My name is Toni Symonds (pause), and after 37 years in state and federal government, I founded Policy Works California to help disinvested communities effectively engage government.

2 - Identifying Priority Issues

Build a Policy Platform Based on Prior Collaborative Actions

> *"We envision the Redwood Region a healing place where everyone belongs, with stable jobs, accessible healthcare, and a flourishing natural environment. Together, we work towards a future where anyone can thrive."*
>
> **- Redwood Region Resilient, Inclusive, Sustainable, Economy Collaborative Vision Statement**

- Regional Plan
- Vision
- Theory of Change
- Bylaws
- Activation Plans for target industries:

1. Arts, Culture, and Tourism
2. Health and Caregiving
3. Renewable and Resilient Energy
4. Working Lands and Blue Economy

What is a Policy Platform?

- A policy platform is a formal document of a group's principles, goals, and proposed actions on key issues, used to guide its strategy, advocacy, decision-making, and public communication.
- A policy platform goes beyond simply stating policies, and also defines the agreements made within the group on strategy and process.

Things You Would Find in a Policy Platform

- Purpose, Process, and Use of this Policy Agenda
- History of Region and Highlights of Key Issues
- Organized Around Goals and Priorities with Associated Recommendations
- Policies can be:
  - Foundational beliefs, such as equity and environmental stewardship.
  - Cross-cutting strategies, such a public private partnerships, resource-sharing, and entrepreneurship, and supportive regulatory environment.
  - Issues, such as workforce pipeline investments and health care access.
  - Industry and project specific, such as broadband and Red Hills Bioenergy Facility.

Things You Might Do With a Policy Platform

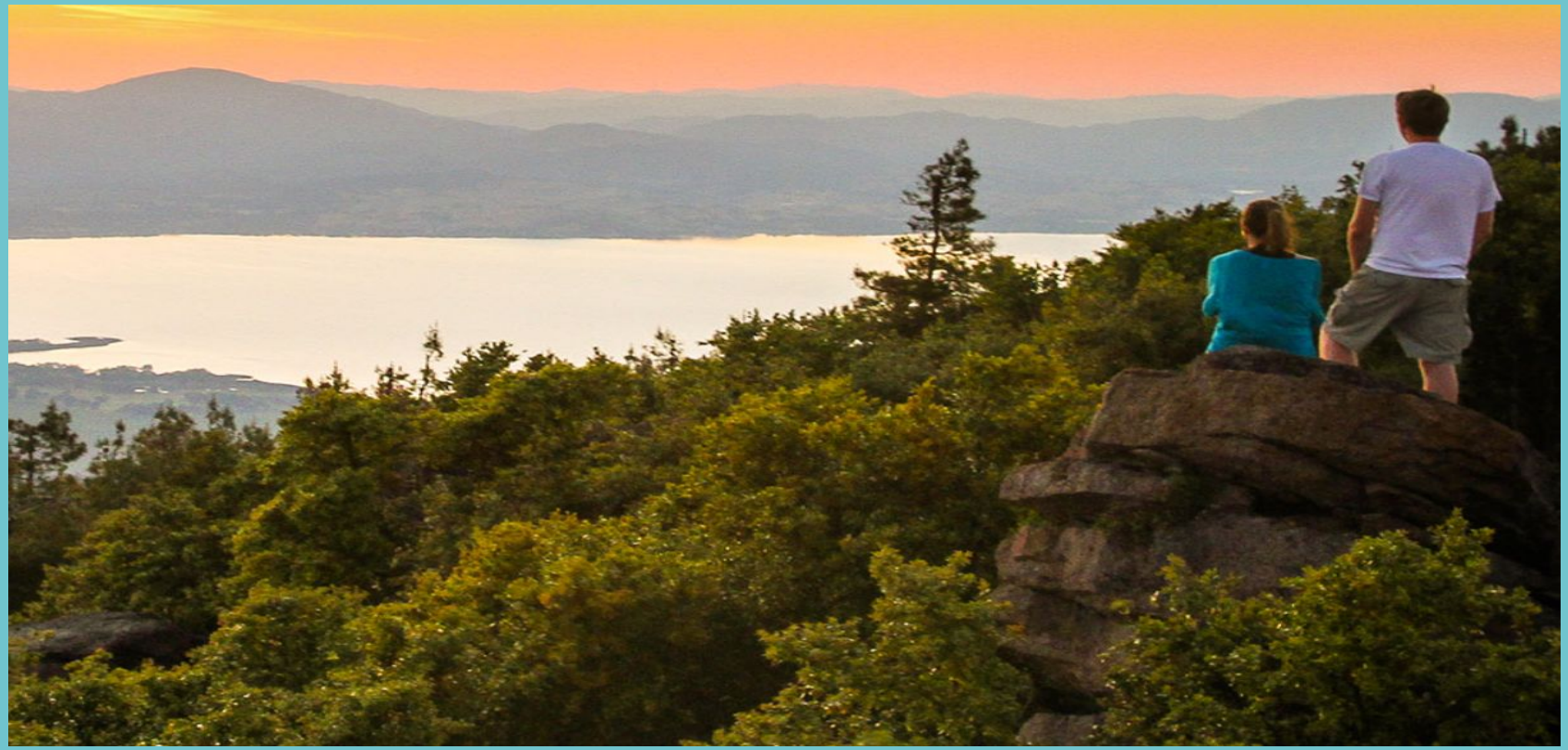
- ***Education***: Explaining issues and projects to a decision maker.
- ***Research***: Disseminating data that makes the case.
- **Coalition & Relationship Building**: Engaging and sharing info with partners.
- ***Media Outreach & P.R.***: Writing an op-ed or participating in a podcast.
- ***Organizing***: Convening Interest holders or nonpartisan voter engagement related to a priority issue or project.
- ***Lobbying***: Requesting that a decision maker takes a particular stand on an issue via legislation.

Please note that lobbying is last on the list and by no means the only use of a policy platform.

Exercise: Identifying Priorities for Policy Engagement

- This exercise includes 20 policy statements and is intended to do two things:
  - Help inform the development of the Policy Platform
  - To underscore how phrases like most important can mean difference things to different groups.
- Directions:
  - For each of the 20 items, please rate their value of importance on a scale of 1-5, with five being the most important.
  - In Column 1, rate the importance of the issue to your organization.
  - In Column 2, rate the importance of the issue to the successful implementation of the Regional Plan.
  - There is no need to limit the number of 5s you assign.

3 - Researching Priority Issues within a Government Context



Overview of the Legislative and Executive Powers

- Three Co-equal Branches of Government - Executive, Legislative, and Judicial
- Executive Branch is Led by the Governor
  - There are five other Constitutional Officers (Lt. Governor, State Treasurer, Superintendent of Public Instruction, State Controller, and State Insurance Commissioner).
  - All serve four-year terms.
- The Legislative Branch has two houses: State Senate and State Assembly
  - The Senate has 40 members who each serve four-year terms.
  - The Assembly has 80 members who each serve two-year terms.
  - Members can serve no more than 12 years

Policy Literacy Resource List - One

Executive Branch

- Governor's Office - link
- Governor's Newsroom - link
- Chart of the Executive Branch - link
- California Departments - link

Legislature

- State Senate - www.senate.ca.gov and State Assembly - www.assembly.ca.gov/
- Legislative Committee Websites - Committee Jurisdictions, End-of-Session Reports, and Other Publications - Assembly and Senate
- Legislative Calendars: Assembly and Senate
- Fact Sheet on Information in the Daily File: Access Assembly and Senate Files

Finding Information about Bills and the Law

- Find and Track Legislation - CA Leg Info
- California Statute - link
- Office of Administrative Law - https://oal.ca.gov/ State Regulations
- State Auditor - https://www.auditor.ca.gov/reports/
- Legislative Analyst's Office - www.lao.ca.gov

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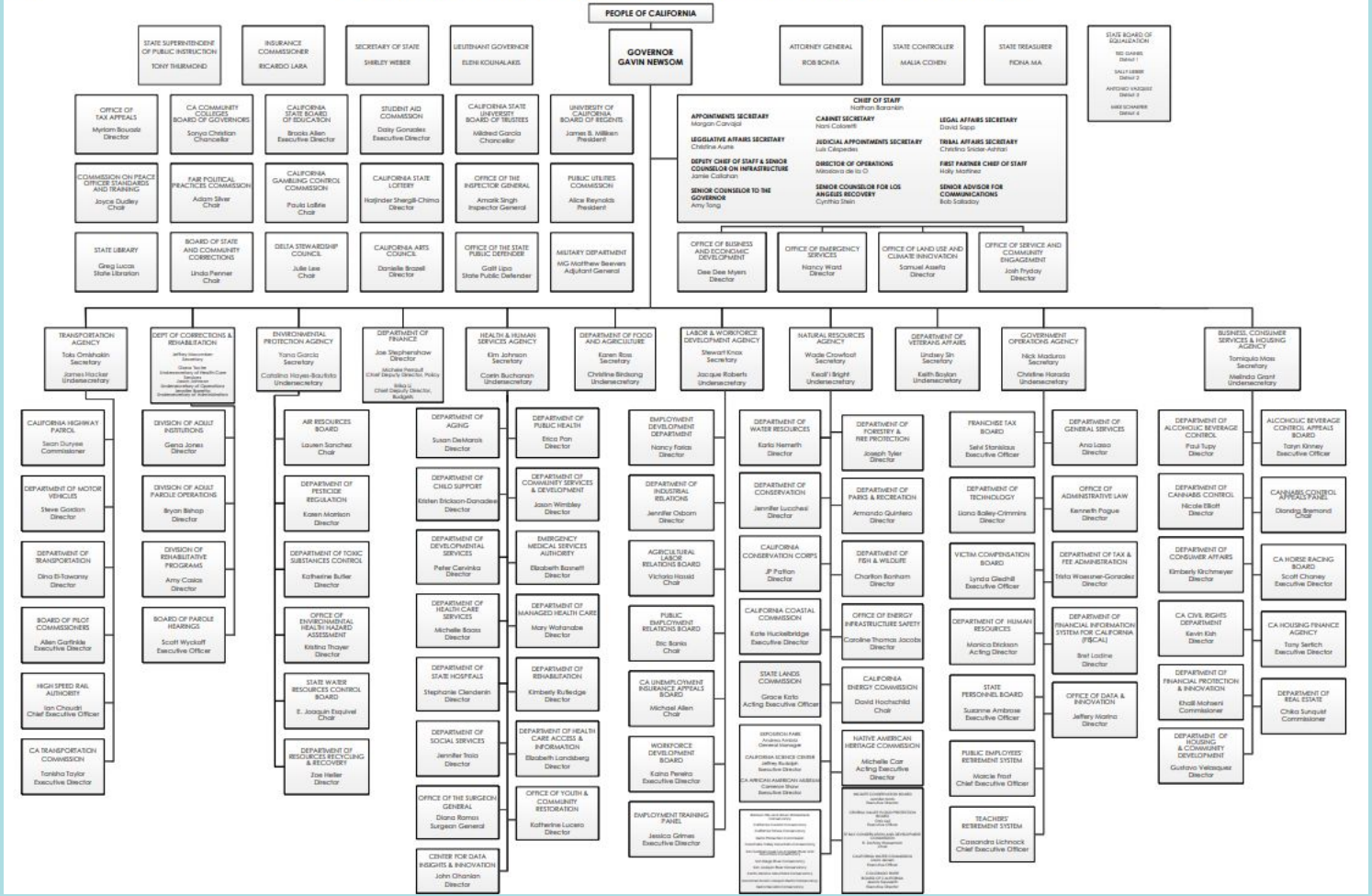
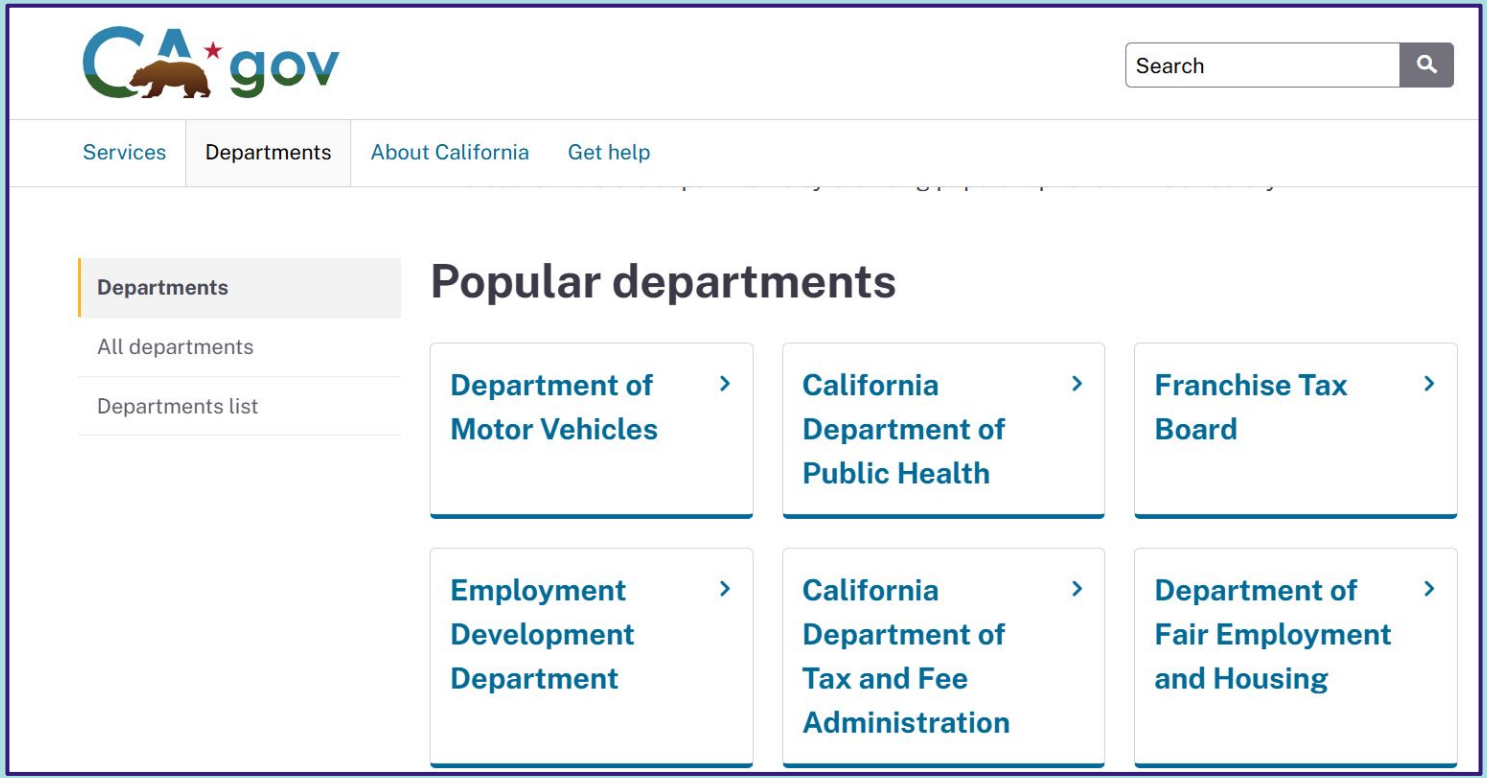
CALIFORNIA STATE GOVERNMENT – THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH



State Government Departments: https://www.ca.gov/departments/



Checklist for Preparing for Policy Engagement

Get Organized:

- Weblink Resource List
- Excel Contact List
- Download and/or link material to the Resource list.

Identify Key Policy Committees:

- Download End-of-Session Reports
- Use the report to identify major legislation, laws, and state government departments impacting your issue

Audits: Check to see if there are any recent audits or reports of the Bureau of State Audits (link)

Legislative Analyst's Office: What has the LAO reported about key programs and/or departments in the last four years? (link)

Department of Finance - Budget and Bills: Review the DOF website to identify information related to your key programs or departments. (link)

Government Policies - What are the major initiatives being advanced by key departments and the Governor that impact your issue? (link)

Exercise: Capturing What We Know

This is a brainstorming exercise about how the state government may impact the goals, strategies, and projects of RRRISE.

We will be doing this as a tabletop exercise.

1. We need someone at the table to volunteer to take notes.
2. Collectively, the table should choose one of the following topics: Workforce Training, Infrastructure, or Sustainability and Environmental Stewardship
3. Based on your selected topic, identify key state or regional agencies, programs, services, reports, and local partners.

We are just doing a list.

4 - Linking Community Priorities with Public Policy

Tools of the Trade

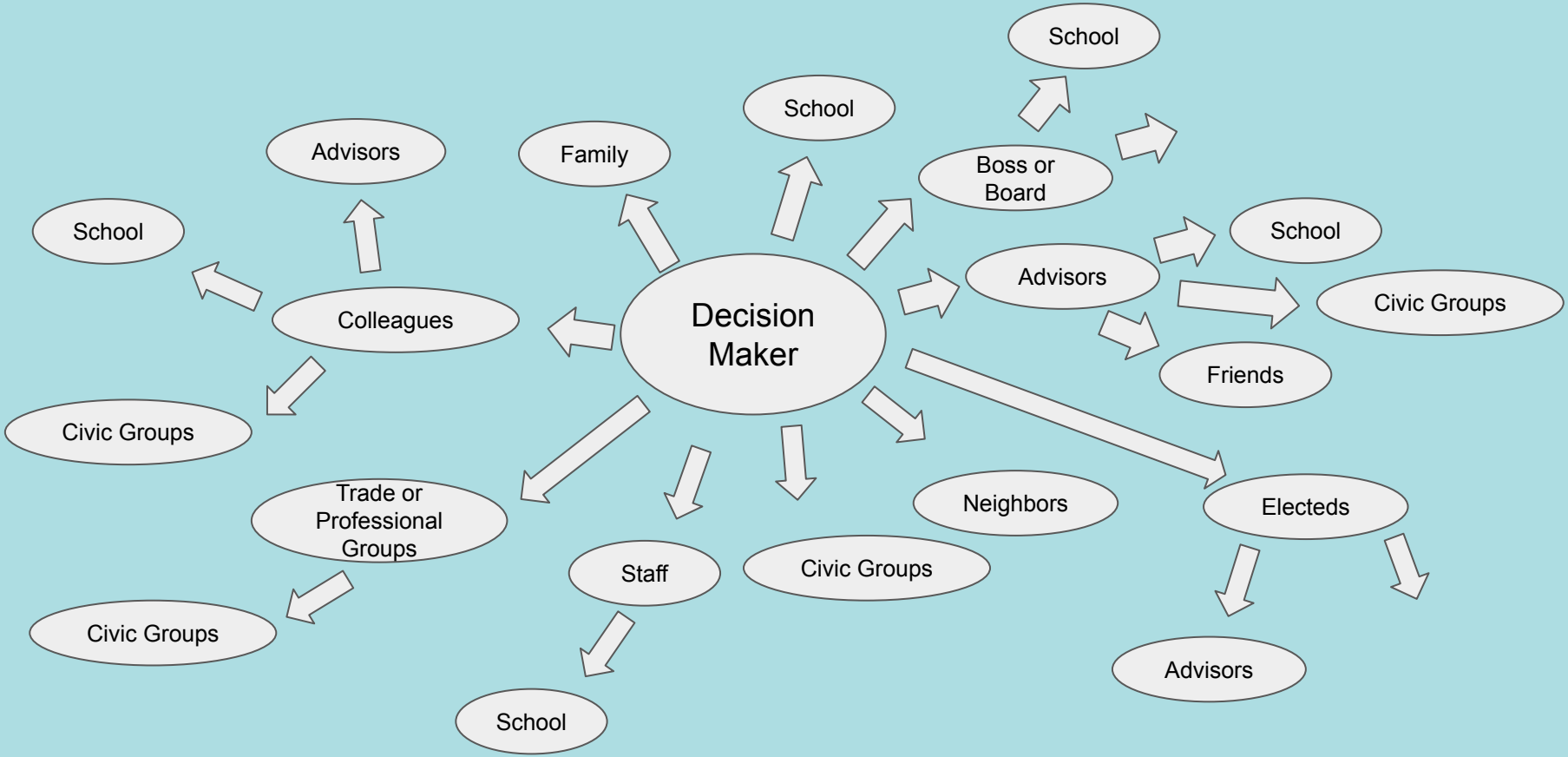
- Foundation - Clear understanding of what you want.
- Tools -
  - Data
  - Fact Sheets
  - Local Examples, including Case Studies
  - Process for Establishing Public Policy Positions
  - Strategy for Engagement
  - Power Mapping
  - A Network of Allies and Partners that have the Ability to Respond

Mapping Power

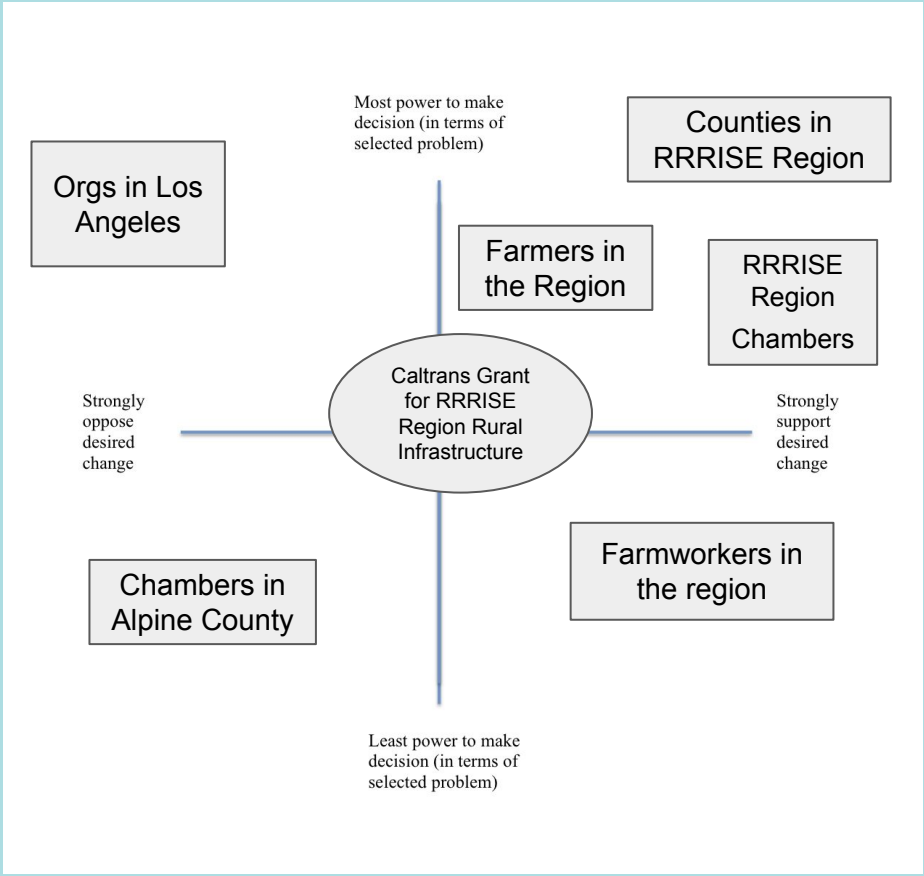
- Helps your coalition to understand its current influence and assess how it could grow through partnerships.
- Identifies key players and understand their interests and weaknesses.
- Forms the basis of an effective advocacy strategy.
- While general mapping can be useful, it is more effective to initiate once the players and policy environment are identified.

Exercise: Power Mapping to Support Your Strategy — Building on our priority issues survey and brainstorming sessions, we will begin mapping players and institutions using a tabletop exercise.

Mapping Influence on Decision Makers



Mapping Decisions Involving Competing Interests



Exercise - Power Mapping to Support Your Strategy

Tools: Power Mapping Template (with directions) and Checklist

Directions:

1. Use the 2x2 Matrix to identify key players and their relationship to the project or issue.
2. Who has the power to decide? Put the name of that entity in the center.
3. Who are people or groups that influence the decision? Use sticky notes to position people and institutions in your community on the matrix.
4. Draw arrows between actors to reflect their connections and relationships.
5. Who among the influencers has the most power? ***Circle*** their names.
6. Who among the influencers does someone in the group have a connection with? Place a ***star*** by their name for each connection.

Three Key Take Aways

1. Having a clear idea of who we are, what we want, and what we need is the first step in advocating for the needs and priorities of our region.

1. Public policy has its own norms, customs, and language.

1. We have the power and can build the skills necessary to advocate for the needs and priorities of our region.

Post Workshop Activities

1. Create a Work Group (*Contact Convener if Interested and Have Time*)
2. Convene Three to Four Online Engagements (*First Quarter 2026*)
3. Develop a Preliminary Policy Platform for Review and Comment by RRRISE Government Bodies.
4. Revise the Policy Platform to Address Comments

Long-term Objective: At the end of the process, the Voting Block will have an inclusively developed DRAFT policy platform and draft implementation strategy.

Along the Way: Further Develop Skills and Tools from Today's Workshop

Conclusion - Thank you for your participation