

Job Front: Regional job growth plan sought for Sacramento

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It will take a regional effort to create jobs and boost Sacramento's moribund economy, says corporate and government consultant Lenny Mendonca.

Mendonca, who helped write Lt. Gov. [Gavin Newsom's](#) blueprint for economic growth and competitiveness released in July, and has advocated nationwide for regional solutions to economic problems, was the keynote speaker at the Sacramento Metro Chamber's State of the Region at the [Hyatt Regency](#) on Friday.

The Friday meeting launched the "Next Economy" initiative bringing together community leaders in a regional effort to create jobs and diversify the slumping Sacramento-area economy.

The yearlong effort will culminate with the summer 2012 release of the Capital Region Prosperity Plan.

In interviews with The Bee last week, Mendonca said a Sacramento region beset by high [unemployment](#) and struggling government and housing sectors must innovate to both create jobs and diversify its economy beyond its traditional bases.

"Sacramento is a microcosm of the challenges facing the country," Mendonca said. "There was a lot of [job growth](#) and general regional success that's not going to be as attractive going forward. The region has to look to sectors that are more innovative."

It doesn't matter if it's technology, agribusiness or other sectors, but it's crucial to ensure the region has three or four legs on its economic stool.

That means civic, academic and government leaders in the region need to work together – and not look so readily to state or federal leaders for solutions.

"The most successful parts of the country are bringing together civic, academic and government," he said.

Mendonca pointed to Minneapolis, North Carolina's Research Triangle, Boston and [Silicon Valley](#) as places where regional public-private partnerships transformed their communities.

"Regions are deciding to take matters in their own hands," he said.

With the Sacramento region's universities, its active tech sector and access to state leaders, it is poised to take advantage, he said.

Though righting the region's economic fortunes will be long, difficult work, initiatives like "Next Economy" are a positive first step, Mendonca said.

"It's a major challenge, but people are not pessimistic by nature in the Valley. You've got a group of hardworking, collaborative leadership," the Turlock native said.

"It's not going to happen overnight, but they're asking the right questions," he continued. "Having a high-quality institution like (University of California) Davis helps a lot, and the proximity to the Capitol is a benefit and a challenge."

On Friday, Mendonca reminded the State of the Region audience members of the challenges they face in reshaping the regional economy.

"It's really important to take to heart the phrase, 'the next economy.' This is not your grandfather's recession. This is a real one, folks," he said, adding that any economic plan "can't be an exercise of writing things on paper."

But Friday, during a break from the State of the Region, Mendonca was pleased with what he saw.

"It's 400 people talking about action. It's 'What are we going to do?' " Mendonca said. "It's taking responsibility. I like the notion of the 'next economy' and not relying on past successes. I would bet on what's next, not what was."