

# Regional effort launched to boost Sacramento area's economy

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Community leaders launched a regional effort Friday to lift the Sacramento area out of its financial and employment doldrums and set it on the path toward creating jobs and building a stronger, more diverse economy.

The plan is intended to make Sacramento a "story of success in the next economy," said Sacramento Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce Board Chairman Gregory Eldridge.

The initiative, branded "The Next Economy," was unveiled before an audience of 400 at the Metro Chamber's State of the Region event Friday at the [Hyatt Regency](#) in downtown Sacramento.

Its charge is to expand the region's economic base beyond the two-legged stool of government and construction that had long sustained Sacramento but now is creaking under the weight of recession and [budget cuts](#).

"How we do this will define our region," said new Metro Chamber President and Chief Executive Officer Pat Fong Kushida. "There's a wisdom in giving power to our voice. We can't simply afford to sit on the sidelines."

The groups cooperating on the regional strategy are the Metro Chamber; Valley Vision, a local nonprofit dedicated to regional planning; the Sacramento Area Commerce and Trade Organization, or SACTO, a nonprofit that recruits companies to the region; and the Sacramento Area Regional Technology Alliance, or SARTA, a regional technology incubator.

The plan will be broken into four phases: startup; assembling civic, academic and government leaders and gathering data to help guide the plan; identifying which strategies will work best; and developing the plan, scheduled for release in summer 2012.

"The next economy is about jobs for our region. We want to be a growth hub for jobs," said James Beckwith, chairman of the board of Valley Vision and chief executive officer of Sacramento-based Five Star Bank.

Recovery is still a long way off in the Sacramento region.

The region's [unemployment](#) rate stands at 12.5 percent. More than 145,000 people have lost jobs in the region since the recession took hold – roughly the population of Elk Grove, according to the Center for Strategic Economic Research in Sacramento.

"This isn't your grandfather's recession. This is a real one, folks," said keynote speaker Lenny Mendonca, chairman of the Economic Institute of the [Bay Area](#) and an architect of the lieutenant governor's Economic Growth and Competitiveness Agenda for California.

A self-described "Central Valley boy" raised in Turlock, Mendonca is a national advocate of regional solutions to economic problems.

Mendonca called on regional leaders to meet the triple challenges of productivity, jobs and innovation and said Friday's forum was a good start.

"You're not sitting back waiting for the government to solve this for you. You're asking, 'What are we going to do to make this happen ourselves?'"

Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson, perhaps the region's most prominent voice, was meeting with statewide labor leaders in Old Sacramento to discuss his "Think Big Sacramento" initiative, and did not attend the State of the Region event.

But mayoral spokesman R.E. Graswich said Johnson supports the regional effort.

"This is what he wants to hear. This is something we can all rally behind," Graswich said.

Meg Arnold, chief executive officer of SARTA, said the time is right to develop a regional approach to economic issues.

"It's not easy, but there's a general will," she said. "If not now, when? If not in the face of adversity, then when will we do it?"