

Building a Wellbeing Economy in Pomona, California

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EcoCiv has been working with the Wellbeing Economy Alliance to pilot a policy design process in Pomona, California (a city in east Los Angeles county) over the past year. Through the project EcoCiv formed a partnership with the Latino-Latina Roundtable (LRT), a grassroots organization in Pomona serving the latino/latina community. Together, the organizations have mapped out a process for inviting community participation in creating a vision for wellbeing in Pomona and for leveraging American Rescue Plan Act funding from the federal government in the US to launch a community wealth building project in Pomona.

In the last several months, we hosted a stakeholder event to begin inviting other nonprofits and local leaders into the process. We also held two community engagement sessions at the end of August to begin gathering insights from Pomona residents on what they value most for wellbeing. Residents gathered to hear about EcoCiv and LRT's proposal for a community wealth building program, give their input on how the project could evolve, and describe what matters most for Pomona residents as we reimagine what the economy could look like and how it could serve all members of the community.

The economic policy landscape in Pomona is shifting, and our project comes at just the right time. In the past few months, Pomona has passed an emergency rent relief act, alleviating the pressure of possible evictions for residents who have been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. In addition, Mayor Tim Sandoval announced his intention to launch a universal basic income trial program utilizing funds from the American Rescue Plan Act..

EcoCiv and the Latino-Latina Roundtable have co-authored a proposal to launch a community wealth building program, now shaped by insight from Pomona residents at the two late-August engagement sessions. If approved, the proposal will bring funding for the first stages of a community wealth building project in the form of one or more worker-owned cooperatives. This job creation strategy will build on the commitment of anchor institutions in the Pomona area to improve community wellbeing by focusing their substantial purchasing power to create good-paying local jobs. Anchor institutions are the larger, long-term institutions in any given city or region. In partnership with staff at the Latino-Latina Roundtable, we plan to work with anchor institutions to determine how they spend their money on goods and services and whether some portion of this spending could be redirected to a worker-owned cooperative set up in Pomona, thereby providing jobs and job training to those who need them most.

Worker-owned cooperatives are business entities in which each worker receives a share of the profits and collaborates in decision-making for the business. Cities such as Cleveland, Ohio and Mondragon, Spain have established these kinds of cooperatives to work with anchor institutions who are willing to shift procurement toward the local economy. Our goal in Pomona is to build on the positive outcomes and lessons learned from existing worker-owned cooperatives in order to empower local residents through job training and skill development as they become worker-owners.