

## **Sonoma County Innovation Council Executive Summary**

The Sonoma County Economic Development Department (EDD), the Sonoma County Human Services Department (HSD), and the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA), in cooperation with a number of groups, propose the development of an economic strategic plan (“the Plan”) for Sonoma County. The Plan, to be completed within one year, will be designed primarily to create actionable strategies that will help ensure a viable business climate and healthy economy in the coming decade. The effort will be overseen by an *ad hoc* advisory committee appointed by the Board of Supervisors that will be comprised of a broad-based group of business and community leaders known as the Sonoma County Innovation Council (“the Council”).

The Plan that is developed will work within the confines of existing policies on land use, transportation, housing, and other infrastructure, land development, environmental and social issues. Efforts will be made to include information from a variety of sources that may be applicable to the economic nature of the Council’s mission, including projects such as the Community Climate Action Plan, County and City General Plans, and others. The Council will also draw upon the considerable resources of the County Government Strategic Plan, and its work will be intended to complement that plan’s findings and recommendations. The Council will attempt to integrate its work with the planning efforts of other groups as well, and will avoid duplicating the undertakings of any other group.

Over the next 10 years, the Sonoma County economy will be faced with a number of formidable challenges and exciting opportunities. For instance, unprecedented change is expected in a number of areas including workforce demographics, global competitiveness, and natural resource availability, among others. Despite the challenges that these anticipated changes present, Sonoma County has the ability to seize important opportunities. New industries and jobs are being created that need support for their future success, and possibilities are emerging in clean/alternative energy technology, life sciences, medical equipment, and other areas. Local businesses can also take advantage of new markets that are opening up overseas in places such as China and India.

The challenges facing our region require creativity and innovation to ensure Sonoma County remains economically competitive. The Council’s purpose is to recommend a plan of action – including benchmarks, timelines, roles and responsibilities – for dealing with the economic challenges facing Sonoma County in the next 10 years. Because the challenges are great and resources are limited, this project will provide the county’s economic actors – business owners, government agencies, educational providers, business/professional organizations, and other interest groups – the opportunity to work together with the community in a coordinated effort to promote sustainable economic development.

In many ways, the Council will operate as a successor to the Economic Vitality Project (EVP) of 10 years ago, which resulted in a new Engineering Sciences program at Sonoma State University, a new tourism program, new collaborative efforts among a consortium of local agriculture groups, and a new local economic research program.

The Council will consist of 34 members including a steering committee and co-chairs and will utilize the expertise of an economic consultant and a Project Facilitator, as well as a variety of local resources. A technical assistance committee of staffers from various partner organizations and public agencies will assist in project development and execution. The Council will act in accordance with the provisions of California’s Ralph M. Brown Act.

The project will culminate in a final report and action plan that will summarize the Council’s findings and identify action opportunities that will help ensure that Sonoma County continues to be economically dynamic over the next 10 years. This plan will contain a list of action items to be addressed by business, government, and education, including benchmarks, timelines, roles, and responsibilities, with tasks being delegated to a variety of groups. This report and action plan will be presented to the Board of Supervisors for their consideration. Once approved by the Board, it will be presented to the public through a community conference. The group will “sunset” after the community conference. Interested groups will be encouraged to integrate the findings of the report into their future planning.