



CALIFORNIA JOBS FIRST

Executive Summary





This Strategic Plan marks a turning point for the North San Joaquin Valley.

This Executive Summary provides a concise overview of the North San Joaquin Valley's Regional Strategic Plan, a robust strategy for inclusive economic development across San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Merced Counties. The full Regional Plan, available at northvalleythrive.org, details the comprehensive vision, goals, and action steps to achieve a more equitable, resilient, and sustainable future for the North San Joaquin Valley.

What you're reading is more than a roadmap for the journey ahead. This strategic plan also celebrates our tri-county region's unprecedented collaborative spirit and untapped potential. Together, we are poised to foster the growth of emerging industries while preserving the core values that have always made our communities strong. This plan was crafted through collective effort, and it is through that same unity that we will achieve our shared vision.

This plan charts our roadmap to a sustainable and inclusive future, where the people of San Joaquin, Stanislaus, and Merced Counties together realize our region's full potential. We envision a future where we're known for what we create and how we innovate as well as for how we care for each other and the land in and around our communities. We will continue to be a key part of the dynamic Northern California Megaregion, with growing links to the Bay Area and Sacramento region. But we are also realizing our own identity as a thriving, self-sustaining hub of opportunity and economic vitality, where our ability to live up to our full potential lifts neighboring regions and beyond.





Who We Are

The NSJV's identity is deeply intertwined with its historical and cultural roots. From its early days as a bustling agricultural and industrial hub, to its present-day challenges and opportunities, the region has been shaped by waves of migration, industrial growth, and environmental changes. The region's economy, traditionally reliant on agriculture and manufacturing, is now in the midst of a transition to a carbon neutral economy, driven by opportunities in more climate friendly industries and a need for more sustainable practices.

Vision for the Future

Guided by the North Valley THRIVE initiative, the NSJV is committed to fostering a high-road economy that prioritizes equity, environmental stewardship, and sustainable growth. The region's vision centers on creating equitable access to quality jobs, protecting natural resources, and ensuring that economic growth benefits all communities, particularly those that have been historically disinvested.

Challenges and Opportunities

The NSJV faces several challenges, including high unemployment, low educational attainment, and significant environmental vulnerabilities. However, the region also has unique opportunities, such as its strategic location within the Northern California Megaregion, a strong agricultural base, and a growing university ecosystem that can drive innovation and economic diversification.

The NSJV's future depends on its ability to come together as a cohesive region, leveraging its strengths and addressing its challenges through collaborative, equitable, and sustainable strategies. The North Valley THRIVE initiative serves as a blueprint for this transformation, laying the groundwork for an inclusive and resilient regional economy that can compete on a global scale while ensuring prosperity for all its residents.



Priority Sectors

The NSJV Strategic Plan outlines a transformative vision for the region’s economic future by focusing on first deploying new technologies within the region, then on translating and manufacturing of advanced products and technologies within the region, and simultaneously on nurturing home grown start-ups that take root within the region and help form distinct industry. The strategies described below focus on four priority sectors: Advanced Manufacturing, Clean Energy, Carbon Management, and the Circular Bioeconomy. These sectors are identified as pivotal in transitioning the NSJV toward a more sustainable, equitable, and high-value economy that can meet the challenges of the 21st century, such as climate change, relocalization of supply chains, and increasing economic resilience in the face of technological disruption.

Advanced Manufacturing is positioned as a cornerstone of the region’s economic evolution. Historically rooted in food processing and logistics, the NSJV’s current manufacturing sector is expanding into higher-value activities. The plan identifies key areas such as building materials, mobility technologies, and measurement and testing products as critical subsectors. These industries not only offer higher wages and more resilient career pathways but also align with the broader goal of reducing the region’s environmental footprint. The strategic plan emphasizes the importance of creating a cluster of advanced manufacturing industries that can benefit from shared talent pools, localized supply chains, and knowledge spillovers, driving innovation and competitiveness in the global market.

Clean Energy is the broad portion of the energy sector that does not use fossil fuels. The NSJV is uniquely positioned to become a hub for clean energy innovation, particularly in solar energy, green hydrogen, and biofuels. The region’s abundant sunlight, available land, and existing infrastructure make it an ideal location for large-scale renewable energy projects. The plan highlights the potential for the NSJV to lead in prototyping and scaling new clean energy technologies, which will not only contribute to the state’s decarbonization goals but also create significant job opportunities in energy efficiency, renewable energy generation, and the manufacturing of energy-efficient products. By strategically developing this sector, the NSJV can improve local air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and ensure that the benefits of clean energy development are equitably distributed among its residents.



Carbon Management is an emerging sector with enormous growth potential, driven by the increasing demand for carbon capture and sequestration technologies. The NSJV’s geological features, particularly the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, offer substantial capacity for underground carbon storage, making the region a prime candidate for carbon management projects. The plan recognizes the need for a community-driven approach to Carbon Management in a way that shapes projects and investments and results in local and regional benefits. The region already has industry leading local companies and has an opportunity to foster new startups that can lead in the development of carbon capture, utilization, and storage technologies. This sector is expected to create high-quality jobs, many of which can leverage the existing skills of the region’s workforce, particularly those transitioning from the fossil fuel industry. The strategic development of carbon management infrastructure will not only contribute to global climate goals but also position the NSJV as a leader in this emerging field.

The Circular Bioeconomy strategy seeks to position the region as one of the nation’s leading locations for bioindustrial manufacturing and the broader circular bioeconomy, a forward-looking sector that is transforming waste streams from biomass (such as agricultural and forestry residues, municipal solid waste, and food processing byproducts) into valuable bioproducts such as fuels, plastics, chemicals, solvents, fabrics, polymers, food additives, and alternative proteins. By supporting the growth of this sector, the region can reduce waste, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and create new economic opportunities. The strategic plan outlines the importance of nurturing innovation in this sector, developing a robust talent pipeline, and ensuring that the growth of the bioeconomy is inclusive and benefits local communities. The plan also emphasizes the alignment of the circular bioeconomy with broader state and national strategies for sustainable development, positioning the NSJV as a leader in bioindustrial manufacturing.



Priority Sector Investment Strategies

To support development of the Priority sectors, the NSJV Strategic Plan proposes a series of investment strategies. These consist of three region-wide investment strategies, as well as specific strategies for each of the priority sectors.



Regionwide Sector Strategy 1: Technology Deployment

This strategy seeks to position the region as a leading hub for deploying key technologies, with a focus on clean technology to support major manufacturers and large power consumers. It aims to boost the adoption of existing clean technologies, particularly in solar, biofuels, and advanced manufacturing, among local companies. By doing so, the strategy will not only promote clean energy use but also create local construction jobs as part of these projects.

Regionwide Sector Strategy 2: Translation and Production

This strategy supports the NSJV's efforts to become a "Translation Destination" by expanding testing facilities and infrastructure to accommodate the development, testing, and prototyping of new technologies. It seeks to establish the region as a hub for innovation, where projects like carbon capture facilities and electric vehicle (EV) manufacturing can be developed and refined. By positioning the NSJV as a center for testing and scaling up innovations, the region can leverage its proximity to cutting-edge knowledge generated in other regions like the Bay Area and foster local economic growth.

Regionwide Sector Strategy 3: Cluster Formation

This strategy aims to develop competitive industry clusters in the region's priority sectors by promoting the growth of local startups. It focuses on enhancing regional competitiveness by leveraging the resources of local universities and research institutions, while also attracting larger firms to build a strong and interconnected supply chain. Through this, the region can foster innovation and create a thriving ecosystem for emerging industries.

Clean Energy Strategy 1: Net Zero Facilities

Ensure that all major energy facilities in the region achieve net zero emissions by optimizing energy efficiency, increasing the use of renewable energy, and implementing carbon capture solutions. This strategy aims to make every major facility in the region carbon neutral.

Clean Energy Strategy 2: Zero-Emission Vehicles

Promote the rapid adoption of zero-emission vehicles, particularly hydrogen and biofuel commercial fleets, to boost local demand and reduce emissions.

Clean Energy Strategy 3: Green Hydrogen Infrastructure

Identify strategic locations for green hydrogen refueling stations and ensure the region's readiness for infrastructure supporting this emerging technology.

Clean Energy Strategy 4: Solar and Land Availability

Market and leverage the region's solar potential and available land, while ensuring community benefits from clean energy investments.

Advanced Manufacturing Strategy 1: Translation Destination

Promote the NSJV as an advanced manufacturing hub for companies and research centers seeking to test, expand, or scale their production, with a focus on leveraging the NSJV's existing manufacturing strengths toward energy-efficient building materials and decarbonization technologies.

Advanced Manufacturing Strategy 2: Expand Markets

Help local manufacturers find new markets, particularly for energy-efficient products.

Advanced Manufacturing Strategy 3: Talent Development

Create a manufacturing talent development center to train workers in modern manufacturing technologies, supporting local workforce needs.

Carbon Management Strategy: Feedstock Marketplace

Support biofuel and carbon management by clarifying regulations around organic waste feedstocks and establishing a local feedstock marketplace to ease transaction processes for both sellers and buyers.

Bioeconomy Strategy 1: Nurture Innovation

Establish the NSJV as a leading region for circular bioeconomy R&D, strengthening regional innovation capacity while unlocking technologies and models that support the sustainable use of local resources.

Bioeconomy Strategy 2: Translate Innovation into Industry

Create an enabling environment for attracting, commercializing, and scaling sustainable bioindustrial manufacturing activities, including through supportive infrastructure, supply chain advancement, and resources that support local businesses by improving access to capital and innovation.

Bioeconomy Strategy 3: Build an Inclusive Bioeconomy Talent Pipeline

Develop an inclusive bioeconomy workforce ecosystem that raises awareness of high-quality jobs, inspires diverse STEM leaders, and creates equitable pathways to career opportunities, while empowering local talent and adapting to industry needs.

Bioeconomy Strategy 4: Grow a Community-Centered Sector Intermediary

Establish a sector-building intermediary that will serve as a "center of gravity" for regional bioeconomy activities to coordinate strategy delivery; facilitate collaboration across multiple sectors and regional institutions; inform public policy decisions; integrate local communities into bioeconomy sector development activities, policies, and decisions; and ensure that activities deliver direct economic and environmental benefits to local communities and advance community prosperity.



Cross-cutting Enabling Strategies

The competitiveness of the region’s priority sectors – and the ultimate realization of a broadly-shared inclusive and sustainable economy – is shaped by cross-cutting enablers – such as innovation, talent, infrastructure, and governance. Together, these seven issue areas will help North Valley THRIVE advance the region’s socio-economic development.

Strategy Area 1: Regional Innovation Ecosystem

The NSJV aims to establish a robust regional innovation ecosystem that accelerates the translation of research into economic opportunities. This includes creating a Regional Research Consortium to serve as a hub for collaboration, exploring opportunities to build a Regional Innovation System Alliance, and developing a plan to enhance the regional technology translation ecosystem.

Strategy Area 2: Small Business/Entrepreneurship

This strategy focuses on strengthening the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the NSJV by leveraging anchor institutions for procurement, supporting entrepreneurs at every stage, and removing barriers to business growth. The goal is to make it easier for small businesses to form, expand, and thrive in the region, with a particular emphasis on disinvested communities and underrepresented populations.

Strategy Area 3: Catalytic Skills/Talent Development

To foster an inclusive and equitable workforce, this strategy aligns regional training and skills development with industry needs, particularly in disinvested communities. It emphasizes the creation of an inclusive skills pipeline for high-quality jobs, the development of key skills for priority sectors such as advanced manufacturing and clean energy, and the removal of barriers to career pathways. Sustainable earn-and-learn models, such as apprenticeships, are also prioritized to equip individuals with practical skills for high-demand jobs.

Strategy Area 4: Climate-Smart Infrastructure

Investments in climate-smart infrastructure are essential to strengthen the NSJV's resilience. This includes expanding nature-based solutions to prepare for climate impacts, promoting sustainable land practices, advancing innovation in water management, and increasing accessible parks and outdoor spaces. These initiatives aim to address climate risks, support sustainable environmental management, and create jobs.

Strategy Area 5: Placemaking and Amenities

Enhancing the region's quality of life through the development of culturally relevant amenities, events, and programs is a key focus. This strategy includes developing an Arts, Culture, and Creative Economy Plan to promote sustainable growth, connectivity, and economic vitality while enhancing the experience economy across the region. Package and market the region's cultural and natural amenities to grow the experience economy.

Strategy Area 6: Generational Well-being

Providing care and support services across all ages, with a focus on health, behavioral health, and childcare/eldercare, is critical for the region's well-being. This strategy seeks to expand accessible childcare services, investigate eldercare needs, and facilitate culturally and linguistically appropriate healthcare in disinvested communities.

Strategy Area 7: Regional Coordination and Alignment

Improving the coordination and alignment of regional systems is essential for building the NSJV's inter-regional identity and leveraging its role as a gateway to diverse activities across Northern California. This strategy promotes better coordination in economic innovation, workforce development, and infrastructure, and seeks to strengthen ties with other regions within the Northern California Megaregion and beyond.



What Happens Next

This plan has been the first stage of this journey. As we transition from planning to implementation, our progress and ability to get to work in the community quickly means every dollar will benefit the region, our neighbors, and the State faster and more efficiently. We hope you'll join the residents, businesses, and community organizations invested in this work as we shape the future of the region. Together, we will transform challenges into opportunities and emerge as a leader in economic resilience.