

CALIFORNIA FORWARD

SPEAK UP CALIFORNIA

CAforward

“SPEAK UP CALIFORNIA” – A STATEWIDE CONVERSATION ABOUT THE REFORMS WE NEED

California Forward's goal is state government that works—for everyone. But we face many obstacles: Unemployment rates higher than they've been in 30 years, some of the lowest-performing schools and highest prison costs in the country, and a budget crippled by a massive structural deficit. (Just to name a few.)

We hear people calling for change, and that's what we want, too. *California Forward* was created in 2008 by five major foundations to seek broad-based, nonpartisan solutions to the challenges facing our state.

We spent our first two years working on budget reform and electoral reform, and we've achieved some major successes (see box on page 2). Now we turn to the next big puzzle—restructuring our government so it **EMPOWERS COMMUNITIES** to promote local innovation and improve results.



OUR PLAN:

STEP 1: *Get input from the public to build the solution*

STEP 2: *Build a coalition to support enactment*

STEP 3: *Prepare communities for a role in implementation*

WHAT IS CALIFORNIA FORWARD?

OUR GOAL: State government that works—for everyone.

OUR BACKGROUND: *California Forward* was launched in 2008 with the goal of increasing civic involvement to solve the most difficult problems facing California's government today. Our initial aims were improving voter confidence in the system through redistricting reform and instituting a top-two open primary. We also support comprehensive fiscal reform. In 2011, we want to move a more responsive government closer to the people.

OUR FUNDERS: We are supported by five foundations:

- The California Endowment
- The Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund
- The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
- The James Irvine Foundation
- The David and Lucile Packard Foundation

WHY EMPOWER COMMUNITIES?

All over the state, Californians are talking about the different parts of the public sector most in need of reform—from budget deficits and failing schools to crumbling roads and unaffordable housing. These are all challenges worthy of our attention. But the problem goes deeper than that: it is systemic.

At the root of our troubles lies an outdated, disjointed system of governance that continues to produce partisan gridlock, bigger deficits, public distrust, and a diminished future for every one of us. If we don't fix it, then the system—responsible for everything from our below-average schools to our byzantine revenue system—will continue to produce mediocre outcomes.

THE SOLUTION

We believe there is a way out of this mess. After studying the best practices of other states, consulting with hundreds of experts across California, and talking to thousands of Californians, we have come to the conclusion that the only way to get different results is to change the rules of the game. If we want to improve the performance of schools all over the state and drive better outcomes in public safety and social services, then our current governance system is not the answer.

Getting our state back on track will require empowering Californians locally. Only by bringing government closer to the people—giving local leaders and the voters they represent the authority and flexibility they need to connect local problems with local solutions—can we fix our state's problems.

THE CONVERSATION

How we get there is the subject of a statewide conversation we've begun across California. Over the next few months, *California Forward* is inviting civic leaders, business groups, non-profit advocates, elected officials, and other interested Californians to participate in a series of community and online gatherings to discuss how to fix our state. In these meetings, we hope to listen, learn, and gather feedback on a series of policy ideas being developed—in consultation with experts across the state—that we think will make our government more collaborative and more effective.

These gatherings will allow us to incorporate your input into a set of reform proposals the California Forward Action Fund will move toward the 2012 ballot. We believe these ideas, informed by the views of people all over California, can move us toward the best possible scenario for our state: A government that achieves positive social gains in a financially sustainable way.



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OUR APPROACH TO REFORM

California Forward has already opened the door for reforms that are part of California's long-range solution, pursuing these changes through the California Forward Action Fund:

REDISTRICTING—In 2008, voters approved the Voters FIRST Act, creating a citizen-based redistricting commission. *California Forward* and the California Forward Action Fund were strong supporters of this seminal reform and continue to be involved in assuring its successful implementation. The Commission will ensure that voters throughout the state control the process of drawing lines for state legislative districts, giving Californians a reason to start trusting our political system again. (Prop 20 on the November 2010 ballot required that Congressional districts also be drawn by the new commission.)

PRIMARY PROCESS REFORM—In 2010, *California Forward* and the California Forward Action Fund endorsed the top-two open-primary (Prop 14) on the June primary ballot. They are now working to ensure its successful implementation. Prior to the election, *California Forward* commissioned a non-partisan analysis of the primary process in California, which informed deliberations around this issue and rooted it in objective data. Starting in 2012, this new law will allow voters to choose among all candidates in primary elections, with the top two vote-getters advancing to the general election.

BUDGET PROCESS REFORM—*California Forward* has applied the best practices from other states and the private sector to a series of reforms that would streamline California's budget process. One element of this reform package—allowing the state budget to pass with a simple majority vote—was adopted in November 2010 by voters under Prop 25. *California Forward* and the California Forward Action Fund continue to advocate for additional reforms that would give lawmakers the tools they need to balance the budget, create stability, and improve results.