

CHOICES for a VITAL COMMUNITY



*Which way
do we go?*

**A guide for community issues forums
on quality of life in California**

CHOICES FOR A VITAL COMMUNITY: *Which Way Do We Go?*

A guide for community issues forums
on quality of life in California

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Preface

What is your vision of a vital community? What quality of life do you hope California will have in the future? The purpose of this guide is to engage people in a discussion about the quality of life they want for their community, their state and their future. You can participate in that discussion in public forums that use this guide and include participants from diverse parts of the community.

You can explore your vision of a vital community, and learn about and understand the vision of others in your community by discussing the issues presented in this guide. A variety of choices for achieving vital communities is presented, one that is intended to reach across the spectrum of values community members hold. The goal of the discussion is not necessarily to select one of the four choices described in this book, but to understand the choices and the values they represent.

The guide and the forums it accompanies are part of the League of Women Voters of California Education Fund *Civic Education Project*, funded by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The goal of the forums is to increase the participation of diverse citizens in public deliberation about quality of life in California and help them to determine for themselves the common ground among major perspectives in their community.

The League of Women Voters, a nonpartisan political organization, encourages the informed and active participation of citizens in government and influences public policy through education and advocacy. Any citizen of voting age, male or female, may become a League member.

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Acknowledgments

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Choices for a Vital Community: Which Way Do We Go?

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Our quality of life depends on our community's vitality, that is, our community's strength, its capacity to adapt, and its power to endure. But the loss of control by Californians over the changes in their communities is threatening community vitality across the state.

This book presents four different perspectives on creating a blueprint for building a vital community. The perspectives are presented as distinct choices to promote discussion. While you may find more to agree with in one particular choice, you may not agree with everything that choice proposes. You may find that none of the choices expresses your perspective, or that there are parts of each choice that are appealing. In each case, however, the choices offer fundamentally different tools for building vital communities.

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Build a Strong Economy: Create a Climate that Contributes to Economic Vitality

A vital community depends on a strong economy. California is a prosperous state with a variety of successful industries and a prominent place in the global marketplace. But those communities with languishing economies are missing out on the prosperity. No community can survive if the people living in it don't have jobs.

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Introduction: Communities Building Their Future

Our quality of life depends on our community's vitality, that is, its strength, its capacity to adapt, and its power to endure.

In 1850 Old Elk Grove was just a hotel for stage coach stops 15 miles south of Sutter's Fort. Although it quickly grew into a bustling community supporting business, entertainment, agriculture and the needs of miners in nearby gold fields, it remained a quiet and independent rural community on the outskirts of a growing Sacramento.

In July of 2000, Elk Grove became California's 476th city, and the third largest in Sacramento County. After a few unsuccessful bids for independence since the 1970s, residents decided to take their future into their own hands, and passed a measure incorporating Elk Grove and electing five city council members. Some residents' support for the measure was driven by the view that poor planning decisions by county government were threatening Elk Grove's rural feeling and small town character.

Elk Grove residents have given themselves the opportunity to shape the future of their community. How will they use that opportunity? The city faces a variety of challenges. Although taxes from new businesses are keeping its budget healthy, it will be paying Sacramento County for the county's lost property tax revenue over the next 25 years. How will it keep its economy strong to pay off the debt? The city has numerous bids from developers for housing expansion. How will it match expensive new homes with affordable housing and public transporta-

tion? The city is bordered on the east by the Cosumnes River, one of only a handful of rivers in California without a dam along its course and home to protected natural habitat. How will it preserve its natural landscape and rural character?

Elk Grove will be weighing many choices over the next few years, choices about quality of life for its residents now and in the future. The challenges this city faces are not unique; they are found in towns, cities, counties and regions throughout the state.

Across California, people are feeling a threat to quality of life in their communities. Some communities grow so fast that they lose their identity and drown in their own success; housing prices soar and traffic becomes unbearable. Other communities deteriorate until they lose their social core and their existence is threatened; schools fail to teach and neighborhoods become unsafe. Even communities that have a high quality of life now are in danger of losing it as circumstances change.

How can Californians create and preserve a high quality of life for their community? Our quality of life depends on our community's vitality, that is, its strength, its capacity to adapt, and its power to endure. But when we lose control of the changes in our community, our community's vitality is threatened. To gain control as times change and challenges arise, we need to make choices about our community's quality of life.

Making choices for a community's quality of life can be difficult and daunting. People have different values that drive their choices. Just defining where a community begins and ends can present challenges. Elk Grove is part of the larger community of the Sacramento Valley, and its choices will affect people living in the sur-

One challenge to quality of life: increasing population

Now home to about 34 million people, studies project that over the next 25 years California is expected to increase in population anywhere from 20 to 60 percent. A child born here in the year 2000 is likely to share the physical, financial and human resources of the state with 50 million other Californians by the time he or she is 30 years old.

rounding county and in neighboring cities. And communities don't always have all the tools they need to determine their own quality of life. Local governments have little control over property taxes and other financial resources that support community services such as roads, sewers and schools. All these realities mean that communities will have to look beyond their boundaries as they consider how to create and maintain a high quality of life.

Whatever its boundaries, a community is a group of people living in a particular place and linked by common interests. This book presents four different perspectives on creating a blueprint for building a vital community. The perspectives are presented as distinct choices to promote discussion. While you may find more to agree with in one particular choice, you may not agree with everything that choice proposes. You may find that none of the choices expresses your perspective, or that parts of each choice are appealing. In each case, however, the choices offer fundamentally different tools for building vital communities.

Choice One supporters say that a vital community depends on a strong economy. We need to create a climate that attracts businesses and provides the financial resources that support everyone in a community. The starting point for a high quality of life must be the creation of a thriving economy.

Choice Two supporters maintain that equity is the foundation for a vital community. We need to break down the barriers that prevent some people from achieving their greatest potential. If everyone in the community has an opportunity for success, everyone can attain a higher quality of life.

Choice Three supporters say that traditional institutions foster the unifying values that support a vital community. We need to

A high quality of life: How to get it? How to keep it?

The town of Parlier, in Fresno County, has a population of 11,000. One of the poorest towns in California, it has a chronically high unemployment rate of 25-30 percent. Its residents are heavily reliant on agriculture for seasonal employment. Weather events like the 1998 El Niño and the 1999 winter freeze drastically reduce income for most workers in the region and contribute to persistent poverty. Like many Central Valley towns struggling to improve quality of life, Parlier must cope with an uneducated labor pool and inadequate water, sewer and transportation services. Manufacturing industries pass the town by, and most new jobs are low wage or part-time retail work. "It's a very sweet little town in a lot of ways," says city manager Michael Swigart. "But our citizens don't have a lot of money."

The city of San Jose is in Santa Clara County, one of the wealthiest counties in the state. High technology millionaires are made there every day, and the median family income is \$82,000. But wealth has its costs: the median price of a home in the region is \$410,000, twice the median price in the rest of the nation. Teachers, police officers and firefighters can't afford to live there, and more than a third of the homeless population is made up of full-time workers. Traffic congestion and poor air quality are driving people away. Successful high-tech companies like Galil Motion Control are leaving the region. "We're moving basically because we'd like to offer our employees a better quality of life," says company president Jacob Tal.

eliminate the "me first" atmosphere in our society and work to recreate shared commitment to the community through traditional institutions. High quality of life for everyone depends on the social values and community services that are created by these traditional institutions.

Choice Four supporters contend that without a healthy environment, no community can achieve vitality. Clean air to breathe and clean water to drink are indispensable in order for communities to survive. Protection of the environment, including the natural resources we rely on every day, must be the top priority for high quality of life in our community.



CHOICE ONE

Build a Strong Economy: Create a Climate that Contributes to Economic Vitality

California is the land of prosperity. It has the eighth largest economy in the world, with a gross state product exceeding the gross national product of countries like Canada and Brazil. Our state has a diversity of flourishing industries, from aerospace and computer technology to entertainment and tourism. The crown jewel of California's economy is agriculture. For over 50 years our state has been the largest food and agricultural producer in the nation; California grows more than half the fruits, nuts and vegetables consumed in the United States.

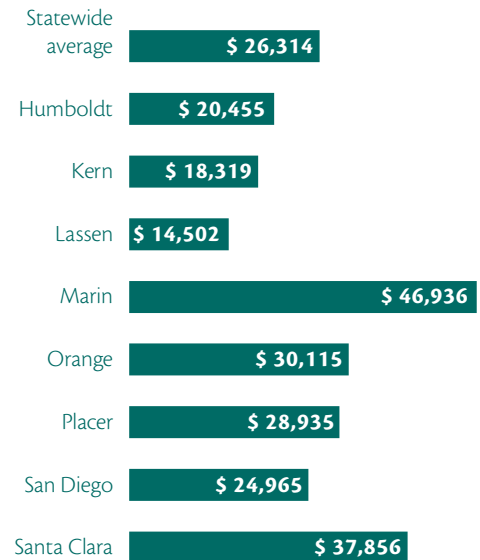
California is an incubator for bright ideas and entrepreneurial success. In 1998 California received more than 40 percent of the nation's venture capital money, almost \$6 billion worth of investments. Continuous industry growth is creating jobs: in 1999, California's job growth rate of 2.8 percent exceeded the national growth rate of 2.2 percent. And, as an active participant in the global economy, California is perennially the nation's largest exporter of goods and services, accounting for more than 15 percent of U.S. exports. Californians reap the benefits of this engagement in global commerce; we enjoy a better selection of products at reasonable prices than ever before.

But not everyone in California has been able to take advantage of this economic success. In some parts of the state, unemployment is high and communities have fragile economies. Some Central Valley counties have unemployment rates of more than 10 percent compared to the statewide average of about 5 percent. Per capita income in Lassen county (\$14,502) is only one-third the income in Marin County (\$46,936). California's middle class (the population in the middle three-fifths of the income distribution) is

not experiencing the state's economic success; their income is only 3 percent higher than it was in 1969, adjusted for inflation. And compared to 1969, more of these families have two working parents.

In much of California, cities are losing their once bustling downtowns, urban areas are becoming more and more economically depressed, and many Californians can't afford to live where they work. Farmers are finding it harder to stay in business due to encroaching suburban areas and competition for resources such as water. A strong economy is the cornerstone for building a vital community. How can each community lay that cornerstone?

1997 Per capita income
selected California counties



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce,
Bureau of Economic Analysis

Consumer power

To improve our community's vitality, we have to participate in our community's economy. An economy is strong when people make money and spend money. Most of us have the ability to take charge of our own financial gain by finding a job and working hard. When our hard work pays off in the form of income, we can add value to each dollar by infusing it into our local community.

We can promote a competitive marketplace in our community by making good consumer choices. Shopping at the neighborhood grocery store with the best prices, buying insurance from the most reliable agent in town, and hiring the electrician with the highest quality workmanship help our local economy flourish.

Attract and support business

Our communities can do a lot to make themselves business friendly. Starting a new business can be an expensive proposition, and the prospect of dealing with local regulations, fees and taxes can be a deterrent for an aspiring business owner. To encourage expansion of existing retail stores or attract new retail ventures to a downtown area, towns can offer waivers on development fees. To attract new types of industry to a region, such as biotechnology or manufacturing ventures, cities can create industrial neighborhoods; these are areas where companies can build with fewer restrictive building codes, and where the regulatory process is streamlined by reducing to a minimum the number of permits and inspections.

To attract and support businesses we need to provide the support structure new companies will need to succeed. For example, businesses are attracted to areas with good transportation service. San Jose opened a new light rail line in 1999 that connects the city to the nearby Silicon Valley towns of Santa Clara, Sunnyvale and

Mountain View. The line, called Tasman West, provided the needed incentive for some companies to stay in the area and for others to relocate there.

High technology firms like Hewlett-Packard, Cisco Systems and Lockheed Martin all make their homes along the transit line.

Strengthen the regional economy

Creating a strong economy is a regional process. Communities within a region are highly dependent on one another for economic stability. Not everyone lives where they work, and people have different preferences for where they like to live. We need to consider regional efforts toward economic success. Economic development efforts can provide incentives that attract larger businesses or new types of business to a region. One way to provide these kinds of incentives is through "enterprise" or "empowerment" zones. These are organized programs run by counties or states that provide any combination of tax breaks, low-interest loans, and financial and technical services. The goal of enterprise zones is to lower unemployment in areas where it is chronically high and promote investment where it has chronically lagged.

Kings County is an example of a region following Choice One supporters' principles. In 1993 it developed an enterprise zone with the help of the state that has attracted and retained major businesses such as Del Monte Foods and International Paper. Companies locating or operating within the zone enjoy federal and state business tax credits, city development fee reductions and waivers, special financing programs and business development services such as market research, site location assistance and job training. The development of the enterprise zone has allowed Kings County to expand beyond its traditional agriculture and food

Cities are losing their once-bustling downtowns, urban areas are becoming more and more economically depressed, and many Californians can't afford to live where they work.

processing economic base to include other types of manufacturing and service industries.

Choice One supporters point out that a region like Kings County needed support from the state

to set up its enterprise zone.

The state can also be instrumental in helping businesses connect to the global marketplace. Some enterprise zones include duty and customs fee reduction programs that benefit companies involved in foreign trade. In addition to organizing trade shows and trade missions, the state can

also provide the financial backing needed to help businesses enter export markets. For example, the California Trade and Commerce Agency has an Export Finance Office that issues guarantees to banks making export loans to small and mid-sized California companies.

Preserve the agricultural industry

Statewide policies can also support many of the industries that have historically formed our economic base, particularly our farming heritage. Agriculture is an important part of our economy: it provides for nearly 1 in 10 jobs, and more than \$100 billion in production and related economic activity.

The keys to agricultural preservation are a consistent water supply and protection of farmland. As competing urban, environmental and agricultural needs increase, the state and federal agencies managing water in California need to ensure an adequate water supply for farming, especially in dry years. These supplies can be achieved by the increased development of water storage projects, including surface and underground storage. Farming communities

should also be protected from the negative effects of developing water markets, which allow water for new growth to be purchased away from agricultural use and threaten the supply for farmers.

The state can keep acreage in farmland by providing incentives through its tax system. One incentive that has been in place since 1965 was initiated by the California Land Conservation (Williamson) Act. That act allows local governments to enter into contracts with private landowners to restrict use of the land to agricultural or related open space use. In return, landowners receive lower than normal property tax assessments. The state government compensates local governments for lost tax revenues. Although the program has successfully retained farmland, state lawmakers should protect the integrity of the act as development pressures increase and encourage greater participation in the program.

Security through economic success

Choice One supporters say that community vitality is impossible without economic security. We can achieve that security by developing and ensuring a thriving business community. Businesses and industries grow where they are welcome. We need to take responsibility for attracting the variety of businesses to our community that can provide goods and services and that offer jobs in retail, research and development, or manufacturing. In a successful economic environment, everyone has the opportunity to earn the financial resources they need to improve their quality of life.

We need to attract the variety of businesses to our communities that can provide goods and services and that offer jobs in retail, research and development and manufacturing.



CHOICE ONE SUMMARY

Build a Strong Economy: Create a Climate that Contributes to Economic Vitality

Supporters of Choice One generally favor the following measures:

- Individual efforts by consumers to promote a competitive marketplace in their community.
- Reduced restrictions on business and industry through fewer regulations, permits and fees, and incentives to attract business such as improvements in transportation services and the creation of enterprise zones.
- Support for businesses to expand into international markets, such as loans guaranteed by the state.
- Support of the agricultural and food processing industries by ensuring an adequate water supply for agriculture and protecting farmland from development.

In favor of Choice One:

- When businesses thrive, the entire community benefits in the form of jobs, a strong tax base, and consumer choices.
- A strong economy encourages innovation and supports improvements in quality of life.
- Successful businesses contribute to social and cultural programs in the community that everyone can enjoy.
- Supporting farmers supports our place in the nation's agricultural economy and sustains agriculturally related jobs.

In opposition to Choice One:

- Putting economic growth as the top priority can cause other factors in quality of life to suffer; lifting restrictions on business and industry can threaten environmental protection.
- This solution only yields a short-term gain; economies cycle, and inevitably the emphasis on it will be wasted when it takes a downturn.
- Businesses moving into an economically disadvantaged area often are not connected to the community at all, and just rely on it for low wage labor and cheap land.
- Agricultural jobs are seasonal, low skill and low wage; it's time to diversify and focus our attention on other industries in California.



CHOICE TWO

Achieve Fairness: Provide Equity in Access to Opportunities and Resources

California is the land of opportunity. In the last century it was the last best hope for political and economic freedom for thousands of Americans and Europeans who migrated to the West. These eastern influences were added to a rich cultural history created by Native Americans, Mexicans, Spaniards, Russians, Pacific Islanders and other Asians. As we enter the new millennium, we are becoming more diverse, and soon will have no ethnic majority in the state's population. Our diverse community has many ways to thrive; the state boasts world-class colleges and universities, innovative health research and delivery systems, and job opportunities provided by a broad spectrum of commerce and industry.

But not everyone has the opportunity to reap the benefits that California has to offer. Despite a booming economy, wages for the poorest 10 percent of Californians fell 6 percent from 1989 to 1998, after adjusting for inflation. While access to resources is plentiful for some, others face barriers. Even getting a home loan can be a challenge for ethnic minority groups. In three Sacramento area counties, while white applicants were rejected for conventional home loans at a rate of about 11 percent in 1998, Latinos were rejected at nearly twice that rate (20 percent), and African Americans were rejected at nearly three times that rate (31 percent).

Sometimes discrimination can take more serious forms. In 1998, more than 1,700 incidents of hate crimes were reported in California. These are crimes committed against someone simply because of a bias against a person's race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin or disability. Some cite the legal system itself as a major source of injustice in California. A recent study found that African American, Latino and

Asian American youths in Los Angeles County are significantly more likely to be transferred to adult court and sentenced to incarceration than white youths who commit comparable crimes.

Human rights and equality of opportunity are the hallmarks of a civilized society. For a community to achieve a high quality of life, these values must be part of its identifying traits. How can we achieve those hallmarks for every community?

Celebrate difference, eliminate bias

It is part of human nature to be attracted to those who are like us, but it is our differences that enrich our lives. Each of us can contribute to that richness by making efforts to eliminate prejudice in our community. We can start with ourselves, by assessing our own beliefs and awareness of diversity. While personally we may be tolerant of different cultures, lifestyles, and preferences, we can also take an active role in celebrating diversity and promoting social justice within our community.

Community access

Everyone in a community can be sensitive about people's differences. But sometimes that isn't enough to achieve equity in a community. Society often presents challenges to groups of individuals based on nothing more than their age or how wealthy their parents are. A community has to break down barriers and equalize access to resources for everyone.

Individual communities need to take a close look at how well everyone's basic needs are met. Does everyone have access to adequate health services? Can everyone afford to feed their children properly? Who keeps an eye on the elderly? Without these basic needs available to everyone, no village, town or city is truly a community. Free health clinics, food banks and

transportation services for seniors are all programs a community can establish to contribute to everyone's health and well being.

Sometimes all that's needed to meet basic needs is to provide people with a decent wage. Since the mid-90s, cities throughout California have been enacting "living wage" legislation. Typically an ordinance is approved to raise the required minimum wage provided to employees of firms with large contracts with the city. The cities of Los Angeles, West Hollywood, Oakland, Pasadena, San Jose and Hayward have set living wages that range from \$7.25 to \$10.75 per hour. Last year, Los Angeles County became the largest governmental entity in the nation to adopt a living wage law. By adjusting minimum wages for the cost of living in a region, cities can help people live where they work and diversify their community.

But meeting basic needs isn't always enough to achieve equity. Many individuals struggle to

advance, only to find they don't have the tools they need to succeed. Our communities can provide those tools by offering job training and placement services. Especially with the huge growth in the information technology industry, training in computer technology can be a powerful tool. The California Wellness Foundation is the sponsor of a statewide project to increase access to computer user training, job training and job placement for young people in low-income communities. The project, called *Computers in Our Future*, supports community computer centers that help a range of low-income populations, from the Karuk Tribe in rural Northern California, to young at-risk women in Oakland, to Spanish-speaking youth in Santa Barbara.

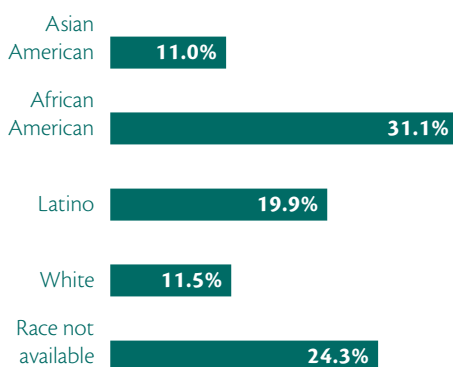
Justice for all

Choice Two supporters say that providing equal access to educational, health and employment resources creates a community with a high quality of life. But proponents of equity also say that insuring that our legal system is free of discriminatory practices is essential.

Law enforcement agencies in cities and counties can implement monitoring practices to evaluate themselves for possible bias. Since 1999, over 50 law enforcement agencies in California, including the California Highway Patrol, have voluntarily begun to collect data to monitor the incidence of racial profiling in traffic stops, the practice of pulling over motorists because they are people of color. The trend was spurred by numerous incidents in California and nationwide of motorists alleging that they were pulled over and often harassed by police simply because they were African American, Hispanic or Asian. By collecting basic information about the race and gender of individuals questioned, and whether or not they are cited, police agencies can deter-

Not everyone has the opportunity to reap the benefits that California has to offer . . . while access to resources is plentiful for some, others face barriers.

1998 Denial rates by race for conventional home loans
Sacramento, Placer & El Dorado counties



Source: Association of Community Organizations for Reform (ACORN), Sacramento CA

mine if racial bias, intentional or not, exists in their actions.

If self-scrutiny of legal agencies is inadequate, the public can play a role in legal oversight.

Civilian boards for oversight of police activity are becoming more common in California and offer a public process for monitoring law enforcement. Their role in the review process varies widely from place to place. In Richmond, Oakland and Berkeley, for example, complaints are investigated by

civilians, while in other jurisdictions the police department conducts the investigation and a civilian board reviews the complaints and makes recommendations. One of the most powerful civilian review boards is the Office of Citizen Complaints in San Francisco; it prosecutes complaints against police officers in an administrative hearing before a commission that has the power to fire officers. Such public involvement in police activities can effectively increase the accountability of law enforcement agencies.

Educate all Californians

Different regions of our state may have different issues to grapple with when it comes to social and legal justice, but throughout our state equity can be improved through providing access to a quality education. Education is critical for people of all ages, not just those looking for jobs. Education can be the way up and the way out for anyone limited by social or economic status. U.S. Census Bureau data show that more education leads to higher income. For male full-time workers over 15 years old, median income for high school graduates is double that for ninth grade drop outs. The difference in annual income

of a bachelor's degree earner and a high school graduate is nearly \$20,000.

With such a clear link between education and income, California should focus attention on improving our public schools. We need to find ways to improve our public school system so that every child, regardless of ethnicity, economic background or learning ability, can get the best education possible. To improve educational quality, we need to increase the quality and skill of teachers, and improve schools' physical resources. These actions require financial investment, but California historically ranks below the national average on spending per pupil.

Many Choice Two supporters believe state funding for public schools should be increased and should be distributed differently by the state. Most of a school's revenue is determined by the state, and as of 1997, more than one-third of the money was restricted to specific programs. This leaves little flexibility for local school districts in deciding how to spend money. The state should provide more unrestricted funds so that school districts needing major improvements can focus on their individual needs.

Foster true communities

Choice Two supporters say that a community, by definition, welcomes everyone and offers its resources to all. A community is a peaceful, tolerant, supportive place where no one feels alone or shut out. Everyone must work to insure that opportunities and resources for advancement are accessible to all in practice, not just in principle. Communities cannot thrive if they can't create a climate where everyone can meet their basic needs and no one faces barriers to achieving a high quality of life.

Everyone must work to ensure that opportunities and resources for advancement are accessible to all in practice, not just in principle.



CHOICE TWO SUMMARY

Achieve Fairness: Provide Equity in Access to Opportunities and Resources

Supporters of Choice Two generally favor the following measures:

- Individual efforts to accept and promote diversity in the community.
- Community assessment of the needs of everyone, and implementation of local programs to support basic needs and provide training opportunities.
- Analysis of trends in the justice system and action to eliminate bias; civilian review boards to monitor equitable application of law enforcement.
- Improvement of the public education system by increasing the funding for public schools and reducing the proportion of restricted funds that school districts receive.

In favor of Choice Two:

- The opportunities and resources for quality of life already exist throughout California—all we need to do is provide equitable access to them.
- A place is not truly a community if it doesn't embrace diversity and meet everyone's basic needs.
- Disparities in access to resources lead to social and economic instability and prevent a community from achieving a high quality of life.
- Certain groups have historically been subject to discrimination; we need to be proactive in remedying past discrimination by setting up programs that specifically help these groups.

In opposition to Choice Two:

- This choice requires too much government involvement and is too costly.
- Having special programs for certain groups is essentially reverse discrimination; we already have laws in place to prevent discrimination.
- Entitlement programs undercut personal responsibility and self-determination; people should take control of their own lives and take advantage of the opportunities already there.
- Who defines what is fair, and what people's basic needs really are?



CHOICE THREE

Traditional Institutions: Promote Shared Responsibility for Our Community's Good

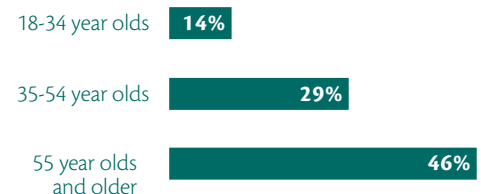
Californians have a long tradition of participation in community organizations that combine social activities with a commitment to improving community life. Growing up, many of our families belonged to a church, and we were encouraged as children to join groups like the Girl Scouts or to play a team sport. Our parents were likely to be involved in social organizations as well, from business groups and garden clubs to hospital auxiliaries and soup kitchens. Participating in these traditional institutions was not just entertaining; they helped us develop the unifying social values that connected people in the community.

Nowadays, children and their parents engage less in activities that connect them with other people. Many kids get home from school and install themselves in front of the television. Adults spend less time involved with social organizations and more time on the Internet. Other social dynamics are changing, too. More and more, children grow up and move away from their hometown, so people lack extended families nearby. Many people simply have less time for socializing than they used to; those who don't work close to home often spend a good part of their day driving alone in their cars. And people are working longer hours; over the last ten years, average overtime hours in California manufacturing jobs has increased by 24 percent. As a result, next door neighbors often go for days without seeing each other long enough to even exchange greetings. A recent nationwide study by Robert Putnam of Harvard University focused on "social capital," that is, the degree to which people engage in communal social activity and civic participation. Social capital has declined nationwide over the last twenty-five years, and California ranks 27th among the states in its social capital.

Californians don't just lack connection with their neighbors or their community: they are not connected to the political world that shapes their community. A 1999 survey showed that nearly one-third (30 percent) of Californians infrequently or never follow government and public affairs. Interest is lowest among younger people; only 14 percent of adults ages 18 to 34 follow public affairs most of the time. This disinterest is reflected in voting statistics. Over the last few years, the number of registered voters in California has been about 70 percent of eligible voters; only about 50 to 60 percent of registered voters actually vote. These numbers mean that less than half of the Californians who could vote actually do.

Traditional social, civic and religious institutions used to provide the venue for people to interact and connect with each other; their decline has weakened the social fabric of the community. High quality of life for each person in the community depends on shared social

1999 Survey showing percent of Californians in different age groups that say they follow public affairs most of the time



Source: Public Policy Institute of California, Statewide survey: Californians and their government, 1999

values and shared community efforts. How can we repair the holes in our community's fabric?

Get involved

A true community isn't just a collection of people living and working in buildings, parks, farms and schools. It is built from the people who meet, talk and work with each other to better their life together. The way for a community to thrive is for people to take the time to help it grow. We all need to take time from our personal responsibilities and interests to contribute to the greater good of our community. Volunteering to run the church clothing drive, fundraising for the local library, and organizing the Youth Day parade are all essential contributions to the vitality of the community. By getting involved, we not only make a personal social contribution; we set an example for our community's children.

Time-honored traditions of service

The social fabric of a community is woven from core associations that have existed in our communities for generations. Schools and libraries, religious organizations and service clubs, athletic leagues and cultural associations provide an educational, moral and social foundation that connects and binds individuals in a community.

In many communities, religious institutions are the thread of the social fabric; historically, neighborhoods have often been defined by the borders of church parishes. Many Californians turn to their faith for the moral values that define their lives. And religious institutions have a long tradition of providing education and social services to a community, especially when public agencies fall short. We can all honor and respect the faith-based values that have fostered those services for our community.

There are many other kinds of institutions besides religious organizations that serve our

communities—for example, parent-teacher associations, historical societies and Red Cross chapters. Many business groups such as the Soroptimists, the Rotary Club or the Lions Club, focus their attention on bettering the lives of people close to them. The Lions Club was founded in 1917 by businessmen with the motto "We Serve" to be expressly applied to a club's local community. The Lions Clubs make their special mission to attend to the needs of visually or hearing impaired people. The Southern California Lions Eye Institute in Santa Monica is a charitable eye clinic administrated completely by volunteers. The Institute provides comprehensive eye care and treatment regardless of ability of the patient to pay, and is primarily funded by Lions Club members.

Community governments can support all these groups in their efforts to help the community. Building a community center provides a place where groups can hold events. Expanding library hours promotes learning in a community environment. Offering small grants for community projects helps groups to expand their programs. Even simple actions, such as promoting social events that showcase local groups, encourage participation in community traditions.

Teach youth to serve

Choice Three supporters say that children need to learn the social value of service. Youth throughout California need to become more aware of the obligations and rewards of helping their community. We need to weave this process into the public school curriculum. If we integrate societal concerns into their education in principle and practice, our youth will grow up seeing themselves as a key part of their community.

A program called CalServe tries to accomplish that integration in California public schools. The

Social, civic and religious institutions used to provide the venue for people to connect with each other; their decline has weakened the social fabric of the community.

Each of us can seek out ways to meet, talk and work with each other to better our community.

Department of Education provides funding to school-community partnerships for student “service learning.” The kinds of service activities vary by region: students at Fallbrook Union High School District in San Diego County are involved in a program to meet literacy needs of Native American families on the nearby Pala Indian reservation. Students in the Chico Union School District in Butte County focus on providing services through community gardens, bilingual literacy programs and tutoring in nutrition and health education. A 1998 evaluation report on the program showed its positive impact: students had improved attitudes toward personal and social responsibility and community service leadership.

Unify values statewide

Sometimes troubled teens need more than community service participation to become or stay part of society. The values fostered by our traditional institutions can provide the foundation needed to change the lives of many youths who otherwise are condemned to the consequences of delinquency. One such program is the National Guard’s Grizzly Youth Academy for at-risk 16- to 18-year-olds. This intervention program has four key characteristics: a residential school, strict discipline, structured long-term follow-up, and a diversity of participants. Graduates receive a General Equivalency Diploma and the advantage of a one-year mentorship program. The academy is supported by both state and federal funds.

Restore civic pride

Choice Three supporters say that we must foster pride in our community and our country to encourage young people to be future partici-

pants in a vital community. Every community should make a special effort to celebrate its history, and to honor those who made that history—Native Americans, pioneers, missionaries and entrepreneurs. Our veterans, past and present, should be remembered—those who risked their lives to give us the freedom to build communities across America.

In schools, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and singing our national anthem are simple rituals that show our children they are part of a national community. We should encourage civic education to be a part of every school’s curriculum; it should teach children the principle and practice of democracy, how our government works, and the importance of voting. The Secretary of State’s office has developed a program to engage students in the civic life of their communities. The program, called Community Involvement and Voting Information in Classroom Studies (CIVICS), includes a teacher’s guide with civics resources, classroom lessons, and school and community activities. By involving students in civic participation early, the program can instill youth with a sense of confidence in their government and the election process, and an interest in participating in that process.

Reconnect the community

Choice Three supporters say that restoring the central role that social, religious and service organizations play in the community will help Californians reconnect with each other. Each of us can seek out more ways to meet, talk and work with each other to better our community. Our neighborhoods should be like an extended family, full of people who share good times and bad and help each other to better our lives. By connecting with each other we strengthen the unifying values that make us a community and that help us attain a high quality of life.



CHOICE THREE SUMMARY

Traditional Institutions: Promote Shared Responsibility for Our Community's Good

Supporters of Choice Three generally favor the following measures:

- Individual efforts to volunteer for community service.
- Honoring and encouraging religious and cultural traditions that promote unifying social values.
- Support, through space, publicity and dollars, of local organizations that traditionally provide community services.
- Teaching youth civic pride, civic responsibility, and the value of community service.

In favor of Choice Three:

- The “me first” attitude in our society is a result of the decline of social institutions that provide unifying values. We need to restore those institutions to restore a civil society.
- Communities are only as strong as the sum of their parts: individuals need to participate through organized efforts.
- Supporting service organizations takes pressure off of already strapped government agencies trying to meet social needs.
- Religious and social organizations are the backbone of the community; they look for ways to support the community as it changes.

In opposition to Choice Three:

- Many traditional institutions do not adapt to current reality; some are elitist or intolerant even while providing a social service.
- Doing anything that offers special favors to religious organizations violates the principle of separation of church and state.
- Who decides what supports the community? This choice gives power to certain groups instead of to the people who elect local government.
- Voluntary, individual and institutional actions are not substitutes for public programs.



CHOICE FOUR

Safeguard Our Environment: Conserve Natural Resources and Guard Against Pollution

California is a land of rare natural beauty. From skiing in the Sierra to surfing in San Diego, Californians and visitors take full advantage of the outdoor recreational opportunities afforded throughout the state. Its mountains and valleys, coastal wetlands and shorelines provide a rich variety of habitats for thousands of birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, flowers and trees. It is home to a multitude of plant and animal species—one of the most biologically diverse places in North America.

But as the number of Californians has increased, so has the pressure on natural resources and open space. What seemed like unlimited abundance 150 years ago is now subject to the competing needs of farming, urban development, and industrial production.

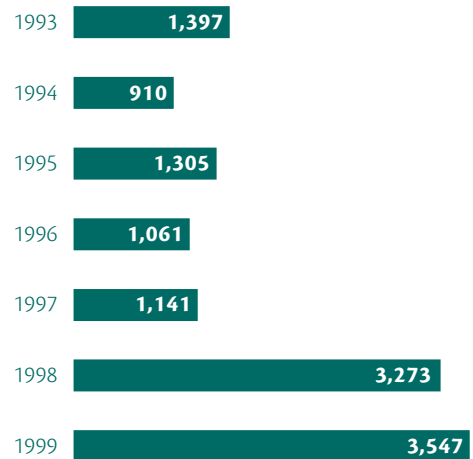
The quality of our most basic resources—air and water—is threatened. Poor air quality is a problem throughout California. All metropolitan areas have unhealthy levels of the smog-inducing air pollutant ozone. The problem is not just in cities; the air in most of the state has levels of particulate matter that exceed state air quality standards. The safety of our recreational water is also at risk; from 1995 to 1999 California had over 1,000 beach closings each year due to unsanitary water conditions. More and more, the primary cause of water and air pollution is the collective result of each person’s routine actions. Motor vehicles are the leading cause of air pollution, especially their use in heavily congested traffic. Runoff from roads, homes, and agriculture is the largest source of water pollution.

As human population and consumption rise, we need more living space. When we invade areas that were once unoccupied, we take over space that was once habitat for other creatures.

Most wild animals and plants cannot rapidly adapt to human-created conditions, so they gradually diminish in numbers or disappear altogether.

Most of California’s original natural habitat has been lost. Most of its native grasslands are gone, and only 10 percent of its wetlands still exist: both are under threat of conversion to development or agriculture. Loss of habitat has caused some native species, including the grizzly bear, to become extinct in our state. Overall, California has over 250 endangered animal and plant species, more than any other state but Hawaii. The collective impact of each person taking a “little bit” can completely destroy an area forever.

Number of daily beach closings or advisories in California, 1993-1999



Source: National Resources Defense Council

Communities are part of a web of life that connects everything on the planet. They cannot exist without a healthy natural environment. How can communities repair and preserve their place in nature's web?

Resource conservation—everybody's job

Each person has the ability to contribute to the environmental quality of our communities, our state and our nation. One of the most significant environmental choices we make is where to live and what kind of home we live in. What is the distance between home and work? Is public transportation possible, or must a private vehicle be used? Our purchasing decisions also have a significant impact on the environment. The product variety and disposability we enjoy now leads to a cost—greater generation of waste.

Our impact on the environment can be minimized or even eliminated if we make environmentally sensitive choices. Buying energy efficient cars or taking the bus curbs air pollution. Choosing low-flush toilets or low-flow showerheads conserves water. Recycling newspapers, cans and bottles reduces the amount of garbage we send to our landfill. When enough individuals take personal responsibility for environmental quality, the collective effect can be enormous.

A key to environmental protection, Choice Four supporters say, is educating the next generation about the principles of environmental stewardship, and showing them how their choices affect others and the environment around them.

Green towns

If the individuals within a community work together, sharing the responsibility for preserving and protecting environmental quality, then everyone can benefit. Organizing some of these efforts can occur at the public level, such as providing municipal recycling programs, hazard-

ous waste education and disposal programs, and water and energy conservation tools. Our local governments can demonstrate environmental leadership by purchasing “green products,” those that have a low impact on the environment in their production and use.

The City of Los Angeles has successfully created a “buy recycled” program. The city council passed a recycled products purchasing ordinance that requires city agencies to purchase recycled products, like paper and plastic office products and carpet. The city council later built on this policy by requiring all its agencies to close the loop on recyclable materials. Vendors, suppliers and distributors contracting with the city must purchase the paper, glass, aluminum and plastic collected for recycling by the city and use these as raw materials in the manufacture of office products sold to the city.

A vital community is one with a rich physical environment. Whether we live in an urban landscape filled with trees and parks or a rural landscape with farmland and natural habitat, we need lots of options for recreation and outdoor activities; even the urban environment can be a home to a variety of animal and plant species. We need to include a structured program for maintaining and developing open space and parks in our community's general plan. Development that expands the boundaries of built areas into rural areas should be discouraged in favor of redeveloping land that is already within urban limits.

Unlimited growth degrades the natural environment and diminishes quality of life. Our communities can discourage sprawling development by setting urban growth boundaries, official borders that separate an urban area from its surrounding open space of farmland, parks or watersheds. Throughout the nineties, California

As the number of Californians has increased, so has the pressure on natural resources. . . . What seemed like unlimited abundance 150 years ago is now subject to competing needs.

communities have been initiating urban growth boundaries, either by voter approval or by city council action. These actions may be too recent to see the long-term effect on these regions, but

Portland, Oregon has had urban growth boundaries since the 1970s. The boundary has helped to prevent the loss of large areas of forest and farmland. Meanwhile, Portland has increased housing density within the boundary and revitalized its downtown area.

Every Californian is a steward of the land, and individuals and communities should take that responsibility seriously.

Save open space regionally

But Choice Four supporters say that local efforts are not enough. Regional and state action must take place in order to develop, implement and enforce a cohesive system that preserves ecosystems and maintains biodiversity through natural habitat preservation. Regional governments can identify natural areas that are relatively undisturbed and that should be set aside and left as critical habitat for animals and plants.

In 1989 the County of San Diego and five cities in the county created a Joint Powers Authority to create the San Dieguito River Park. The goal of the agency is to preserve open space along a 55-mile corridor formed by the San Dieguito River, from its mountain source to its ocean mouth at Del Mar. The park includes natural habitat, recreational areas and an agricultural preserve. Although most of the land included in the project is public, some private land is included by owner agreement. By combining and coordinating decision-making for this region, the six agencies involved can achieve multiple goals: preservation of open space and the natural floodplain, conservation of sensitive habitats,

protection of water resources, retention of agricultural uses, and creation of recreational and educational opportunities.

Preserve the ecosystem for everyone

Beyond preserving open space, we need to protect endangered species on both public and private land from the risks imposed by human activity, such as overfishing, exposure to agricultural pesticides or destruction of nesting sites. The California Endangered Species Act and the California Environmental Quality Act must be affirmed and enforcement supported by increasing funding for monitoring of compliance.

What's good for plants and animals is good for us. The state can also take a stronger role in protecting us from unreliable or polluted water supplies. State and regional agencies should develop and enforce water distribution practices that guarantee adequate flows for aquatic life in major streams and rivers before allowing water to be removed for other purposes. Such guarantees for in-stream flow help preserve water quality for us as well as for other species.

Stewards of the land

Choice Four supporters say every community depends on California's environment for its existence. Every Californian is a steward of the land, and individuals and communities should take that responsibility seriously. Preserving and protecting California requires a fundamental change in the way we think about our environment. We need to acknowledge the fact that we are part of an ecosystem that has been evolving since long before we were here. By preserving that ecosystem, we preserve the foundation we need to build our quality of life.



CHOICE FOUR SUMMARY

Safeguard Our Environment: Conserve Natural Resources and Guard Against Pollution

Supporters of Choice Four generally favor the following measures:

- Individual efforts to conserve natural resources, clean up the environment, and make consumer choices that reduce air and water pollution and waste generation.
- Community tools that help people help the environment, such as recycling and hazardous waste disposal programs, and government leadership in environmentally responsible purchasing.
- Protection from unwanted community growth through general plans that preserve open space and set limits on urban expansion.
- State enforcement of environmental protection legislation, the California Endangered Species Act and the California Environmental Quality Act, and state programs to preserve open space and habitat.

In favor of Choice Four:

- The limit to our natural resources is a reality; by learning to live within our means and make responsible choices that protect and preserve resources, we can leave a healthy environment for future generations.
- Public health is essential to the vitality of a community, and it relies on clean air, water and soil.
- By leading the way through environmentally responsible purchasing, governments can show corporations and businesses that “buying green” is economically feasible.
- Preserving open space in a community makes it a more appealing place to live; communities can do better at attracting desirable businesses if their physical environment is attractive.

In opposition to Choice Four:

- This choice is too expensive and intrusive; regulations and land use restrictions imposed by environmental legislation suppress the economy and threaten private property rights.
- Dire warnings about environmental depletion have come and gone—the effect of humans on the environment is overstated. It is improbable that we could really use up the earth’s resources.
- We are the beneficiaries of escalating progress in science and technology—we come ever closer to technological solutions to environmental problems.
- This choice is unrealistic—how can we expect to avoid an impact on our environment? Our priorities should be elsewhere and should focus on things we can really change.

Comparing the Choices

Quality of life is important to Californians. But as times change and new problems appear, many California communities can't get a high quality of life, while others are losing theirs.

To have a high quality of life, we need a vital community. A vital community is one that is lively, healthy, and stable. It has the ability to stay a nice place to live for a long time.



CHOICE ONE

Build a Strong Economy: Create a Climate that Contributes to Economic Vitality

California has many successful industries, and our state plays a big role in the international economy. But in some communities the quality of life is low because the economy is poor. No community can survive if the people living in it don't have jobs. We need to attract businesses to our communities; once they move there, we must make it easier for them to grow and succeed. If a community has a strong economy, a high quality of life for all will follow.

Choice One supporters generally favor these measures:

- Cut down on the rules businesses have to follow and the fees they have to pay if they want to grow or if they want to move into a community.
- Attract businesses to a community by offering them services like good transportation for their workers.
- Support farming and industries that depend on farming by making sure farmers have enough water and protecting farmland from being turned into housing.

In favor of Choice One:

- When businesses in a community succeed, they pay more taxes and there is a better variety of stores and services.
- A strong economy means more money and opportunities in the community for improving quality of life.
- Successful businesses give back to the community by supporting sports, the arts and charities.

In opposition to Choice One:

- If businesses don't have to follow rules when they build, they do things that hurt the community's environment.
- This choice only works for awhile. The economy is always changing, and when it is weak again these efforts will have been wasted.
- Often businesses don't help their community at all, they just move in because land and labor are cheap.

A possible trade-off:

If we make successful businesses more important than anything else, we lose our protection of the environment and use up too many natural resources.



CHOICE TWO

Achieve Fairness: Provide Equity in Access to Opportunities and Resources

California offers a lot of freedom, and many opportunities for people to better their lives. But in some communities quality of life is low because people face barriers to success. No community can be strong when people are not treated fairly. We need to provide ways for people to get what they need to live and ways for people to make their lives better. If a community offers opportunities for everyone, everyone can find ways to have a high quality of life.

Choice Two supporters generally favor these measures:

- Start programs that provide everyone with their basic needs, and that help people learn new skills and get jobs.
- Look carefully at the justice system to make sure everyone is treated fairly; get citizens involved in monitoring police actions.
- Improve public education by increasing money from the state for schools and by letting each school decide the best way to spend it.

In favor of Choice Two:

- California already has lots of opportunities for people; we just need to make sure everyone can take advantage of them.
- When a lot of people don't have access to what they need to succeed, the community is not socially or economically stable.
- In the past, many groups of people have been treated unfairly; we have to change that and make it easier for them to succeed.

In opposition to Choice Two:

- This choice costs too much money and makes the government too involved in people's lives.
- Having special programs for some people just makes it unfair for other people; we already have laws in place to make sure everyone is treated the same.
- Instead of waiting for someone else to fix their problems, people should take responsibility for their own lives and take advantage of the opportunities already there.

A possible trade-off:

If we spend money to make sure everyone has access to opportunities, we take tax dollars away from other government commitments, such as fixing our highways or keeping our streets safe.

for a Vital Community



CHOICE THREE

Traditional Institutions: Promote Shared Responsibility for Our Community's Good

Social, religious and civic groups have the social values that connect everyone in a community. But in some communities quality of life is low because those groups are disappearing. No community can be stable if people don't work together and help each other. We need to help traditional institutions grow. If a community shares social values and works together, everyone can help each other to have a high quality of life.

Choice Three supporters generally favor these measures:

- Honoring religious and cultural traditions that provide the community with shared social values.
- Support of local groups that traditionally provide community services by helping them advertise, giving them money to grow, and giving them public spaces where they can do their work.
- Teaching youth to be proud of our country, to be good citizens and to volunteer to help in the community.

In favor of Choice Three:

- Communities only work when everyone helps; people need to join groups that provide services for the community.
- Supporting service groups takes the pressure off of government social service agencies that already have more work than they can handle.
- Religious and social groups are what make communities strong; they look for ways to support the community as it changes.

In opposition to Choice Three:

- Many traditional institutions only allow certain people to be members and cause division in the community.
- Doing anything that offers special favors to religious organizations is not allowed by our constitution; government and religion should be separate.
- Volunteers and social service groups should not have to take over what it is the responsibility of government to provide.

A possible trade-off:

If we encourage the return of traditional institutions, groups that have treated people unfairly in the past could become more powerful.



CHOICE FOUR

Safeguard Our Environment: Conserve Natural Resources and Guard Against Pollution

California is a beautiful place with a wealth of natural resources. But some communities are polluted or are rapidly using up their natural resources. No community can survive without clean air to breathe and clean water to drink. We need to make cleaning up our environment and protecting our resources our most important job. If a community is a healthy and attractive place to live, everyone in it will have a high quality of life.

Choice Four supporters generally favor these measures:

- Individual efforts to reduce, reuse and recycle waste, clean up the environment, and make choices that stop air and water pollution.
- Protection from communities becoming too big and spread out by keeping open spaces around cities and towns for parks, farming, or natural habitat.
- State efforts to make sure laws that protect air quality, water quality and natural habitat are obeyed.

In favor of Choice Four:

- Our natural resources won't last forever; if we can use them wisely they will still be there for our children.
- Good health is important to everyone, and people need clean air, water and soil to be healthy.
- Parks and other open space in a community make it a nice place to live; communities will attract more businesses if they are pleasant.

In opposition to Choice Four:

- This choice costs too much and interferes with people's rights to use their private property the way they want to use it.
- The earth is huge and the people living on it small; it is not likely we could really use up all the earth's resources.
- Science and technology are making more and more progress—we will soon be able to fix any problems we create.

A possible trade-off:

If we prevent land from being developed and slow down on the amount of resources we use, we could hurt the economy by cutting down on jobs.

This discussion guide presents four different ways to build a vital community. Each way is presented as a choice. The choices are very distinct from each other so that people can discuss the differences. While you may find more to agree with in one choice, you may not totally agree with everything described in that choice. You may find that you do not like any of the choices completely, but instead like some parts of each one. No matter what you like or dislike, each choice is a building block for a vital community.

Summary

The common interest of people in a community is achieving a high quality of life. This book presents four different perspectives on creating a blueprint for building

the vital communities that support a high quality of life. In each case the choices offer a fundamentally different set of tools for building vital communities. Here are a few key questions that the supporters of each choice answer differently.

What are the barriers to creating a vital community?

Choice One says that the possibilities for the future are diminished by a weak economy. Without a strong economy, we don't have the resources for quality of life. The problem according to **Choice Two** is that unequal access to opportunities and resources diminishes quality of life for everyone. **Choice Three** says that traditional institutions provide the unifying values and social connection that contribute to quality of life. Without those institutions, we don't have a solid foundation for quality of life. **Choice Four** believes that the environment is the basis for our existence. The community quality of life will be permanently degraded if we don't preserve our natural resources.

How would each choice create a vital community?

Choice One's approach is to create a favorable climate for business and industry and promote economic strength. **Choice Two's** approach is to eliminate bias and improve access to opportunities and resources for everyone. **Choice Three's**

approach calls for strengthening the role of traditional institutions and promoting civic responsibility. And **Choice Four's** approach is to make attention to the environment our number one priority.

What are some of the likely tradeoffs?

Choice One, in reducing restrictions on business and stimulating economic growth, could cause important safeguards for the environment to be lost and increase pressure on natural resources.

Choice Two, in committing government resources to distribute resources equitably, could funnel tax dollars away from other government commitments, such as improving our highways or keeping our streets safe. **Choice Three**, in calling for the return of traditional institutions, could reinstate the power of elite groups that historically practiced discrimination. **Choice Four**, by keeping land out of economic use and regulating natural resource consumption, could reduce the viability of some resource-based industries and cause job losses.

No matter what choice people make to create a vital community, the decisions don't stop there. To achieve a high quality of life now and maintain it for the future, each community will have to ask and answer these questions: how will the choice be implemented? Who will pay for implementing the choice, and who will take responsibility for implementing the choice? And how will we know if the choice we make is creating the quality of life for our community that we intended?

In turning their choices into actions, communities must decide how to allocate the land and resources within their boundaries to housing, business, or open space. In seeking financial sources for their choice, communities will have to decide on whether to make short-term needs or long-term investment a priority in seeking revenues. In assigning responsibility for implementing the choice, they must decide how to insure that their values are reflected in the decisions their governing officials make.

Reforming for a vital community

“California’s governance, public finance and land use policies create serious barriers to planning for the state’s growing population and protecting our quality of life. There is increasing recognition around the state about the need to change the dysfunctional relationship between state and local government. Fundamental reform is needed to ensure a governance system accountable to all citizens, long-term community investment, and integrated land use planning. . . . We have the opportunity to build a policy framework that supports vibrant and healthy communities.”

The California 2000 Project
www.c2kproject.net

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What Next?

If you were engaged by the discussion presented in this guide, you might be wondering: where do I go from here? Depending on what you learned, what new perspectives you understood, and what values you reaffirmed, you may want to:

- Take home a new vision of the world around you and carry it with you in your daily life and personal decision-making about public issues.
- Continue the discussion with other people, learn more about views other than your own, and share your views with others.
- Get involved in the community decision-making that would lead to some of the actions presented in this guide.
- Look for common ground between you and other people with different values.
- Begin new discussions about ways to evaluate tradeoffs and the hard decisions within each choice.
- Consider ways our government can work better to support a community's values.
- Find ways to communicate your perspective and values to your elected officials and other policymakers.

The League of Women Voters of California Education Fund is committed to helping citizens participate in all these activities. You can contact the League and find out more about arranging similar forums in your community, or find out about other kinds of public forums, discussion groups, workshops and information resources that the League has to assist Californians working to achieve a high quality of life in their communities.

If you would like to arrange one of these forums in your community, you can contact a moderator or convener by contacting the League of Women Voters of California at 888-870-8683.