



SURDNA FOUNDATION

STRONG LOCAL ECONOMIES

The goal of the Strong Local Economies Program is to support the development of robust and sustainable economies that include a wide range of businesses and access to quality jobs. We aim to create opportunities for upward economic mobility among communities that have experienced historical economic barriers, including low-income people, communities of color, women, and immigrants. Our work is guided by a strong commitment to social justice and equity.

The Strong Local Economies Program seeks to create just and sustainable economies in three ways:

- **Business Development and Acceleration**

We seek to: (1) encourage the growth of local businesses and increase the number of those businesses that are owned by people of color, women, and immigrants; (2) spur the modeling, development and replication of employee-owned cooperatives, social enterprises, and other alternative business models, and (3) reform procurement systems to increase opportunities for local businesses to secure larger contracts.

[View guidelines below.](#)

- **Equitable Economic Development**

We aim to update economic development practices and policies to increase beneficial outcomes for local businesses and communities that have been historically shortchanged by development decisions.

[View guidelines below.](#)

- **Job Quality and Career Pathways**

We strive to improve job quality in low wage sectors and expand access to higher-paying jobs and promising career paths in emerging industries.

[View guidelines below.](#)

We seek organizations that:

- Prioritize and engage low-income individuals, communities of color, women, and immigrants;
- Utilize policy advocacy, organizing, and capacity building as approaches;
- Use both research and demonstration projects/programs to prove the benefits of equitable economic development and quality jobs;
- Leverage the buying power of anchor institutions (universities, hospitals, local/regional government, schools, sports teams, etc.) to drive local economic growth;
- Increase leadership capacity among populations who have been historically excluded from decision-making processes (low income, immigrant, and communities of color);
- Utilize strategic communications to make the case for including equity and sustainability in development decisions;
- Work in urban areas and in a regional context.

We also believe that the Foundation's three programs are strongly interrelated and necessary to create just and sustainable communities. We therefore encourage cross-cutting proposals that connect to the work of the Foundation's Sustainable Environments and Thriving Cultures programs.

The Surdna Foundation is committed to continuous learning through our grantmaking. We view grant guidelines as living documents and will update them periodically to better target resources and increase our impact.

Generally, the Strong Local Economies Program does not fund:

- Affordable housing development;
- Community development projects unconnected to workforce or economic development strategies;
- Capital projects;
- Purchasing of equipment;
- Neighborhood-based asset-building;
- Micro-enterprises, micro-lending or workforce development efforts that are disconnected from a regional economic development strategy;
- Supportive, homeless and reentry/transition employment programs;
- Education programs targeting K-12 students;
- Conference scholarships;
- Individuals or academic fellowships.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND ACCELERATION

Many businesses owned by people of color, women, and immigrants face hurdles in securing access to start-up and growth capital, contracting opportunities, and business networks. These barriers limit a business' ability to thrive and grow. Alternative business models like employee-owned cooperatives, benefit corporations, and social enterprises offer a promising alternative that can counter this trend. In the right policy and business environment, sustainable businesses, employee owned cooperatives and social enterprises can create positive economic, environmental and social benefit. Anchor institutions like hospitals, universities, sports franchises, and state and local governments have tremendous purchasing power. If leveraged correctly, through procurement policy reforms that make contracts more accessible, anchors can significantly benefit local and alternative businesses.

The Strong Local Economies Program supports local job creation by spreading these alternative business models, increasing the growth of businesses owned by people of color, women, and immigrants, and promoting other strategies benefitting communities that have been most impacted by inequitable economic policy.

- **Accelerate the growth of local businesses poised to create new quality jobs, and increase the number of those businesses owned by people of color, women, and immigrants.** Specifically, we seek grantees that will enhance the conditions necessary for local businesses to thrive. This may include accelerator programs, policy solutions, access to growth capital, business planning and support services, and networking opportunities between business owners and other experts.
- **Support the development and expansion of social enterprises, employee-owned cooperatives, and other alternative business models.** We are seeking grantees that can help replicate and build successful models, shape best practices, and expand these models through incubators, technical assistance, networks, and capacity building.
- **Reform public and private procurement systems so that local businesses gain increased access to contracts.** These activities might include supply chain reforms, public and private procurement policy changes, and advocacy that increases the number of private sector entities committed to supplier diversity and fair procurement policies.
- **Develop ways to jumpstart a local or regional economy and thereby increase its competitiveness.** Activities might include regional economic development planning and technical assistance that helps cities and metropolitan areas to rethink their economic futures.

We give preference to the following types of efforts:

- Business incubator and accelerator programs that emphasize minority businesses growth with a goal of tangible job creation;
- Organizations that advocate for policy reforms that make new contracting opportunities available to local businesses and alternative business models;
- Cooperative business development programs and strategies that seed or replicate the creation of viable enterprises with growth potential;
- Local or regional Chambers of Commerce or business affinity groups that create inclusive policies and programs that support business growth, and promote equity and sustainability;
- Nonprofit organizations that connect businesses owned by people of color, women, and immigrants to midsize and large firm subcontracting opportunities;
- Community Development Financial Institutions and organizations that provide access to start-up and growth capital for businesses owned by people of color, women, and immigrants;
- Intermediary organizations that develop regional and national networks connecting local businesses to industry specific supply chains;
- Private sector partnerships that increase contracting opportunities for local and/or minority businesses;
- Organizations that help develop and social enterprises or work on policy conditions for these businesses to thrive;
- Research and data collection efforts that document innovative business development strategies that create economic opportunities for people of color, women and immigrants.

EQUITABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Historically, economic development projects have not benefited all populations, and have particularly shortchanged some, including people of color, immigrants and low-income communities. Many development decisions have resulted in projects that exclude these same communities from shared benefits generated in the economy. Today, cities and states are developing new and creative strategies to jumpstart their economies and re-imagine their futures. They are collaborating in innovative ways to produce beneficial outcomes for these historically shortchanged communities. The Strong Local Economies Program aims to influence economic development planning and practice so that equity, transparency, sustainability, and community engagement become driving forces on any project.

What we fund:

We seek funding opportunities that:

- **Integrate equity and sustainability into economic development practices by transforming the training of professionals, developers, and planners.** Examples may include curriculum redesign, shifts in ongoing professional development opportunities, and research that demonstrates the impact of these changes.
- **Establish and replicate successful local and regional policies that promote equitable economic development outcomes.** These policies may include community benefits agreements, local hire policies, sustainable land-use planning practices, and transit equity measures. We seek best practices and implementation models, as well as ways to share knowledge and promote collaboration through networking and partnerships.
- **Encourage equitable and sustainable outcomes for large publicly subsidized development projects.** These opportunities will be very limited. Applicants should convey a thorough overall picture of a specific development project, its economic impact, and potential to create positive community benefits, as well as the full array of organizations collaborating to influence the project's outcomes. We seek to support activities such as: coalition development, community organizing and policy advocacy that leads to accountability measures, community benefits agreements, and first source hiring agreements.
- **Use strategic communications to highlight cases where economic development resulted in equitable outcomes and benefits for our priority communities.** We also seek ways to communicate cases of missed opportunities, where residents and local businesses could have benefited if equity considerations were driving decision-making.

We give preference to the following types of efforts:

- Community organizing campaigns that advocate for specific community benefits related to large, publicly subsidized economic development projects;
- Organizations that seek to create and implement community benefits agreements, local hire, and local sourcing policies;
- New curriculum and leadership trainings for economic development professionals that emphasize equity and sustainability in economic planning decisions, practice, and policy;
- Research and communications projects that highlight best practices in equitable economic development. Alternatively, we seek critiques of publicly subsidized projects that failed to produce equitable outcomes;
- Regional economic development planning that activates local economies and creates new opportunities for historically shortchanged communities;
- Organizations addressing policy issues and contracting opportunities within a next generation infrastructure framework (as described by our Sustainable Environments Program).

JOB QUALITY AND CAREER PATHWAYS

In too many communities, low quality jobs and the lack of career pathways limit the ability of workers to achieve financial stability and upward economic mobility. However, some businesses and organizations are already proving that providing employees with fair wages, benefits, and career training can have positive impacts on their bottom line, employees' economic well-being, and a community's prosperity. At the same time, government, the private sector, organized labor, worker centers, community-based organizations, and other sectors are collaborating more than ever before. The Strong Local Economies Program aims to capitalize on this collaboration to improve the quality of jobs in the lower wage sectors of our economy while at the same time creating access to career pathways to good jobs in emerging industries (e.g., advanced manufacturing, clean tech, biotech).

What we fund:

We seek funding opportunities that:

- **Transform industries and improve the quality of jobs in low wage growth sectors through organizing, policy advocacy, and research.** We will prioritize efforts that help improve conditions for workers in an industry and also improve or create career mobility opportunities. We support activities that directly engage employers to improve job quality as a means to benefit both employer and employees.
- **Improve existing career pathways in growth sectors that lead to upward economic mobility for workers and positive outcomes for businesses.** Specifically, we will support organizations that develop new training opportunities, Federal, State or Local career-pathway policies and programs, and partnerships with the private sector that help workers navigate established career pathways.
- **Increase access to career pathways in emerging sectors of the economy (e.g., advanced manufacturing, clean tech, biomedical, etc.) such that these higher wage jobs are more accessible to low income workers, and people of color.** We seek policy reform and development, as well as innovative demonstration projects.
- **Promote the concept that companies who commit to improved job quality and opportunities for career advancement can positively impact their bottom line.** We seek research opportunities that make this case, but also case studies of policy change efforts that include both a strong business and worker perspective.

We give preference to the following types of efforts:

- National, state, and local advocacy and organizing campaigns that support policies (e.g., paid sick days and increased minimum wage) that will improve low wage jobs across sectors;
- The development of training curricula or models that offer higher quality jobs in partnership with a major corporation, community college, worker center, industry trade association, or other appropriate institution, aimed at creating new opportunities for Surdna's priority communities to access jobs in emerging industries;
- Organizations that work with local businesses to promote "high road" business practices such as paying family sustaining wages, providing paid sick days, etc.;
- Partnerships with industry trade associations that create new career pathways or strategies for employee mobility.