

COMMUNITY REGENERATION COLLABORATORY

We know that a better future is possible.

The *Community Regeneration Collaboratory* is an expression of hope for new possibilities to reimagine and regenerate our communities across this beautiful region.

From different parts of Northern California, a small group of us have come into relationship, “through the fires.” We have had many conversations where we have openly shared our experiences, our concerns, and our hopes. We have dreamed together about what might be possible if hundreds of us, from across the region, started to learn from each other’s experience and to discover new ways to build healthy and resilient communities.

As a region, we are at a point of new possibilities. The past is gone. We will not be returning to the times we used to think of as normal. We must find new ways forward into an uncertain future and we believe that we will do that best together.

We invite you to explore some ideas with us.

Disasters in Northern California are a given and will continue to be a fundamental aspect of life in our region. For some, these cascading disasters are shocking. For others—people barely making ends meet, many people of color, undocumented community members, farm workers—they are also catastrophic. In Northern California, we’re perpetually in a “recovery phase” from the fires that batter our region, each year with greater severity. In 2020 we thought it couldn’t get worse. Then came 2021.

The people and communities experiencing and responding to disasters are exhausted. It’s clear that our communities need to do more than just recover. All of our communities had big challenges and deep inequities before our big fires. Trying to go back to the way it was before fires ravaged us isn’t possible and it also isn’t good enough. We need new solutions; we need to do things differently. Our experience and awareness of disaster creates the opportunity and necessity of working together in new ways.



While we are likely more aware and prepared after each successive disaster, our attention is constantly drawn to what was lost. We must see beyond the past and look at what might be, to what else is possible in our communities. New approaches need to insist on creative, deeply equitable, and long term and long-lasting approaches. When we look hard enough, it is time to truly connect and to move from disaster recovery to regenerating community.

A New Approach – More than Just Recovery

With the severity and frequency of disasters in our region increasing, recovery at the individual community level just is not possible. It’s time for citizens and communities in Northern California to be better connected and collaborate to:

- determine how we can better prepare for the next disasters,
- provide needed services when disaster strikes,
- share resources across communities, and most importantly,
- use the experience of disaster as a springboard to reimagine, reinvent, and regenerate healthy and resilient communities.

This resolve is hard earned from the series of disasters we have endured and the lessons we've learned as we have cared for our recovering communities. We've tried the models of the past. And we have discovered a shift of awareness in the midst of disaster that gives us new ways of working together.

The capacities to recover from disaster are intrinsically connected to prevailing social, economic, political, and environmental conditions. After each new disaster, we find ourselves having to "start over." We often lose momentum from past individual efforts, memory of what we've learned, and the collective power of a community focused on next steps. These times call for a regenerative approach, trying new things, being bold and creative and more strategic about leveraging capacity and resources. Our efforts must result in the practical expressions of disaster recovery, and the true nature of the work is about community.

Communities hit by disasters have, themselves, the greatest ability to identify needs and determine solutions. Whatever the question, the community itself lives with the answers. Lasting outcomes are created by effective partnerships that provide greater access to resources and enlarge the scope of regenerative possibilities. This requires new structures that give rise to local solutions as well as balanced relationships that cultivate mutual trust and respect with such entities as



- The California Office of Emergency Services (Cal OES) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
- National and international aid organizations
- Philanthropy (How funds are raised and distributed)
- Community-based organizations
- Other external agencies
- Community members

Our intent with this Collaboratory is to grow the web of people who are ready to imagine and frame new pathways for regenerating communities in a new and uncertain future. With regeneration as the overarching fundamental approach, the framework we propose has four elements:

1. **Start at Year Three on Day One**
2. **Advocate With a Collective Voice**
3. **Create A Collaborative Funding Model**
4. **Learn More - Act Wiser**

Start at Year Three on Day One

Many of us have been through more than one disaster now. We learn from these experiences. When constantly responding, it can be difficult to contextualize the wisdom gained and convey it in a meaningful way. Our current paradigm of disaster response is one of scarcity. Recovery work is intense and ongoing.

It's common to get disillusioned and even feel like quitting. But it doesn't have to be this way. Our work can be invigorating and inspiring. When we share the stories and embody knowledge of our real experiences, communities in the wake of disaster benefit.



We can no longer afford to lose the expertise of the lived experiences of those who have already faced disaster. There are approaches to recovery that preserve both the lessons of previous disasters and sustain the people doing the work of helping communities heal and



rebuild. We must support communities that are facing recovery from a disaster for the first time. Together we can create a relational infrastructure in Northern California to resource communities with “year three” expertise from day one. All of our experiences are unique, and they are also collective. When communities working on similar issues connect, they can learn from each other’s successes and failures and band together to negotiate with government, foundations, and other well-meaning entities.

By engaging with one another in this way, newly impacted communities gain insight into the months and years ahead and those already engaged in recovery remember the ground they

have taken. We need to find ways to retain what was learned and share the stories that help us all remember our past to shape our future. We need to change the way we think about disaster; we need to move our focus to regenerating communities by building relationships and collaborating with each other. Building strong regional connections can prepare individual communities to start at Year 3 on Day 1.

Advocate With a Collective Voice

We are not victims. We’re informed survivors and community members. It is time to connect and tune-in to the ways in which our communities want to recover and regenerate. We must do this together as community members while staying connected to policy makers, funders, and others who want to support the work of recovering, rebuilding, and regenerating after disasters.

We need multiple levels of dialogue. It is time to extend an invitation to allies who are willing and ready to explore whole new processes for community engagement. This starts most naturally from the “bottom-up” and extends into the whole system. We’re insisting on creating a new paradigm to guide our work. The old ones are woefully insufficient.

Doing this takes time, in a climate of urgency. We need to spend the time necessary to build trusting relationships, identify our concerns and the inequities experienced in our communities. We need to connect with each other so that we can speak with a diverse and collective voice as we engage with state and federal agencies and jurisdictions.

Create A Collaborative Funding Model

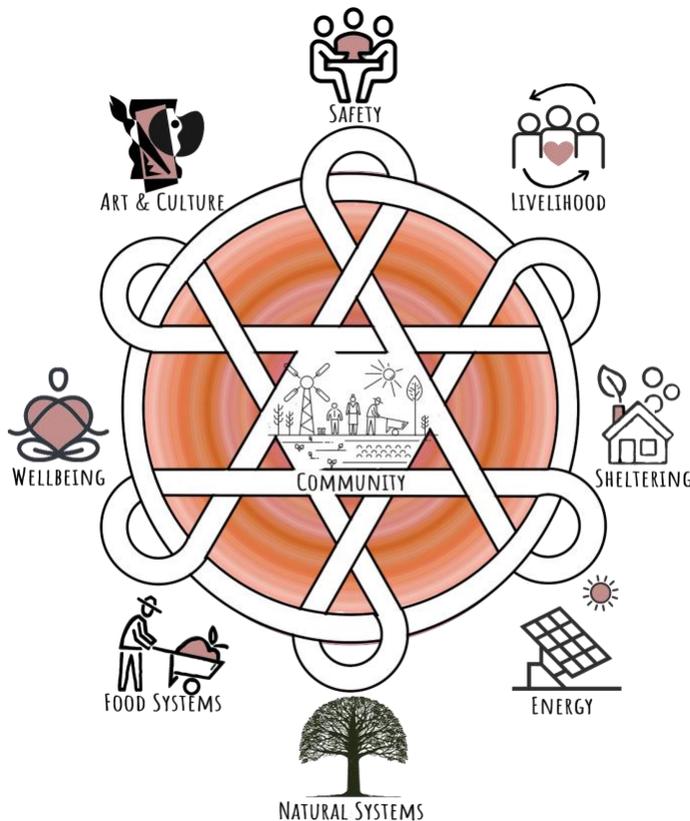
A regenerative approach to community reminds us that we actually are surrounded by abundance and it recognizes that access to this abundance is hidden, elusive and inaccessible for many. We need to change that. We need to draw resources together in new ways—not to replace a broken system, but to build something new and better. By doing so we strengthen our communities to face the big disasters like wildfires and COVID, and to overcome the many daily challenges of poverty, discrimination, trauma, and loss.

Just as new kinds of advocacy are needed with government, new partnerships are needed with philanthropy. There are an amazing number of people who are able and willing to provide financial

support for efforts to regenerate fire-affected communities. When disaster strikes, there is a powerful surge of financial support. People, foundations, businesses, are deeply moved and want to help. Well-meaning financial transactions with existing service organizations often support a return to the status quo in an effort to get back to “the way things were.” Creating a Collaborative Funding Model would mean stepping out of transactional relationships and into transformational relationships that not only replenish our communities but also strengthen all stakeholders and nurture regenerative opportunities.

Learn More - Act Wiser

Pooling our collective insights and experience allows us to recover and regenerate with more wisdom in all



our communities. This can be done across communities as well as within a community. In the context of regenerating community, this means working with what we have to build what we want. It means paying as much attention to *how* we are doing things as we do to *what* we are doing. It also means being intentional about learning, sharing and paying close attention to the long-term consequence of every decision.

Paradise is one of our communities which has been modeling what this actually means. After the devastation of the Camp Fire on November 8, 2018, a new nonprofit - [RegeneratingParadise](#) - has been creating a framework to connect community efforts and the people behind them. This image illustrates where learning and wise action are needed, making the whole system of work needed visible to the community.

In the case of Paradise, the interconnectedness of needs and initiatives has been represented in the map above. It provides a framework to name the “domains” in which regenerative work is being done. While the domains may differ according to community, this kind of map of

the whole system is essential to nurturing interconnection and synergy.

We need to cultivate spaces for learning and wise action, including

- Local Knowledge Spaces where people come together to share local practice—challenges, innovations, breakthroughs—in their work on particular topics like evacuation, food security, rebuilding, health care access, jobs.
- Teaching and Healing Spaces where experts bring in knowledge on critical issues like trauma healing, adverse childhood experiences, community organizing strategies.
- Action Spaces where we agree on a direction and plan our next steps together.

What's Next

