



**WELLBEING
ECONOMY
ALLIANCE**
CALIFORNIA

Local Guide to a Wellbeing Economy





Ways to Create a Local Wellbeing Economy

It may not be what you think

What is a Wellbeing Economy?

Is this an Economics Course?

No. We are not here to teach you about Economics. We are leaving that to the experts.

Our goal is to get all Americans thinking about an Economy. Questions like: What is an Economy? What is the purpose of an Economy? Who gets to decide what the purpose of an Economy is?

In our view, an economy is the system that allows us to exchange goods and services in order to accomplish things for the members of our community and people all around the planet.

This supports our everyday needs—such as food, work and housing. Many people also think of the economy as a way to build wealth. Lots of news outlets and politicians desire growth, measured through metrics like Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or the stock market.

GDP Growth has long been considered the way to build a better society. Today, we see how prioritizing nonstop growth has resulted in many unhealthy consequences.

Take a few minutes to think about the ideal future you want for yourself and your community. What values matter to you the most? What would give you and your family a healthier life? What would enhance the animals, plants and nature around you? Does your contribution to “the economy” enhance your wellbeing or detract from it?

Centering Wellbeing in your thinking is why we pursue the idea of a “Wellbeing Economy”.

Let’s reclaim some power right now:

When you see yourself in your optimal future in 10 years, what does it look like? What does the air smell like? How is it like walking around your neighborhood? Is your day full of deadlines and

stress? Or, are you enjoying yourself? What kind of work would be most fulfilling to you? What would an amazing neighborhood look like?

Is there a possibility that the future you envisioned could happen? How could you make that a reality? How could you work with others who share a similar vision?

To us, that is the purpose of collaborating towards A Wellbeing Economy.

What is Wellbeing Economy Alliance California?

Wellbeing Economy Alliance California (WEAll CA) has a mission to connect people interested in collaborating on visioning and co-creating a society based on Wellbeing. We host gatherings, education, strategy and action events.

We encourage you to [join our newsletter](#) today. It's free!

Our members (did we mention it is free to join?) participate in our activities (mostly online). As community leaders and experts share what works (and what doesn't), we can all learn from each other and accelerate the success of Wellbeing Economy tactics.

Intention of this Guide

Our Local Wellbeing Economy Guide was created by our team of volunteers to introduce you to a wide range of actions that can be utilized in your community to start creating a Local Wellbeing Economy right now.

This starter guide touches lightly on each subject, but we are eager to connect you to resources to learn more.

Future versions of this guide will include more details as we learn them in our community education sessions. You can watch several of them on our YouTube channel. Perhaps we missed a topic that you used to great effect in your community! If you have something you would like to see in future versions, please reach out to us at connect@weallcalifornia.org.

We are considering a much longer guide with links to organizations, case studies and essays by guest authors. Reach out if you have interest in this version.

Sections

- I. Business and Spending
- II. Finance
- III. Economic Policies
- IV. Democracy Reforms
- V. Economic Solidarity Practices
- VI. Build Community Power
- VII. Create Your Wellbeing Economy Action Plan

Businesses and Spending

A recurring theme throughout this guide is that you do not need to be an economist or a policy expert to affect your local economy or create wellbeing.

First, let's look at things you can do with local businesses. Changing where your community shops and how local businesses can improve the community's wellbeing.

Local Business Drives

Many studies have shown the tremendous impact that successful local business can have on the community. In contrast, large national or international companies "extract" potential good wages and other money from the community and send it to their corporate office. Keeping money in the community creates a positive feedback loop where the money can be spent locally again and again.

Supporting, promoting and keeping local businesses healthy can be done in a variety of ways. Groups can organize "Purchase Local" days, do public education on the benefits of buying local or promote individual businesses and identify them as "Locally Owned". Communities can sponsor local events such as farmers' markets, craft fairs, and festivals which support and promote local businesses and artisans. Local businesses can also increase their online presence and visibility. For example, business owners can register on local business directories to increase visibility and use social media platforms to promote their business as "Locally Owned". Also, stores can label products as locally made.

The "**Anchor Institution**" model scales this idea from a consumer oriented campaign to a business and institution level campaign. Large corporations often move to a new city; this, in turn, takes local jobs and money with them. Many institutions are "anchored" to the community—hospitals, museums, school districts and even the local government itself. The money spent by these institutions is a giant source of spending.

Question for you - In your community, how might you convince Anchor Institutions to buy locally as much as possible?

Boycotts

We talked about the positive effects of spending, now let's think about where we DON'T want to spend. How can we affect either business behavior or what businesses are in our community? To answer this, we can take an example from the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR), which has done a study on the negative effects that "Dollar Stores" have on the communities where they proliferate. Not just on low wages and no benefits, but also on the environment. Historically, communities have banded together to resist new stores being opened in their community that extract from their community. Successful boycotts are tools for social change that can encourage individual consumers or corporations to change their spending behavior or policies. Negative publicity is created against the organization being boycotted. Boycotts like the Montgomery Bus boycott led to major civil rights changes. What could boycotts accomplish in your community?

Anti-Monopoly Campaigns

Local, state or national laws exist to prevent monopolies. For example, the 2024 potential merger of supermarket chains Kroger and Albertsons would have reduced competition, raised prices and reduced wages. What can be done to reduce monopolies in your community? Perhaps combining a boycott and public awareness campaign?

Also, Monopony is another important form of a company having too much market control over the people they buy from. Meat packers, Amazon and big chain pharmacies have all been accused of using harsh tactics on their suppliers.

Support Unions

Unions help build worker power by improving worker wages and benefits, reducing economic inequality, and advancing middle-class interests, which supports local economies and community wellbeing. What organizations in your community are supporting Unions? How could your community support negotiations or creation of new employee unions? The decline of unions and union support has been directly correlated to the increase in inequality over the last 50 years.

Democratic Ownership

Another action to take is to support the adoption of business models where workers share ownership and decision-making power, such as Employee Stock Ownership Programs (ESOP) or Cooperatives (Co-ops). There are many education programs to help people learn about starting their own Co-op or how to foster more of them in your community. Another possibility is to seek out local business owners that are thinking of retiring or selling their business and educating them about the possibility of selling the business to their current employees. These types of businesses build wealth for multiple employees, not just a single individual or family.

“Wealth” is different from “income”. Income is what you receive in a given period. Wealth is your net worth and should hopefully increase over time. There is a community effect to wealth as well. As more people in your community have more wealth, they feel comfortable to spend more. If they spend it in your community, there is a positive ripple effect.

Form Alliances and Educate

Coming up with ideas to create positive changes in your community is an important step in leading change. Moving into successful action may require forming alliances with existing organizations and networks. There are many existing groups that are aligned with some of your ideas.

For example, Certified B Corporations (B Corps) are for-profit companies certified by B Lab that designates those businesses as meeting high standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency. B Lab also provides tools, programs, and advocacy to help certified businesses measure, manage, and improve their positive impact. There may already be a network of B corps working within your community which could connect natural allies together.

You might also find other allies in rotary clubs, local chapters working on the United Nation’s SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), local foundations, sustainability groups, pro-democracy groups and conscious capitalism chapters. Even your local chamber of commerce could be an ally to help ignite change.

Other possibilities to consider

- How can we encourage businesses to adopt fair practices, reinvest locally, and support worker rights?
- What strategies could we employ for strengthening local economies without relying on government policies or legislation?
- Are there existing policies that could be leveraged?

Finance

Finance is directly related to business, but deserves its own section and theory of change. As we go about our lives, we see everyday how we interact with businesses, but finance is less visible to us and requires different types of thinking and planning.

In this section, we will illustrate a few ways the finance industry has significant effects on our economy and how we can cause significant positive change in this realm.

Public Banks and Credit Unions

Community-driven financial institutions such as public banks and credit unions can be used to fund local economic initiatives.

Public banks are owned by the community through their representative government and can fund local projects and small businesses.

Credit unions are member-owned cooperatives that have a strong focus on supporting their local communities. They often invest in local projects and offer lower loan rates/fees to support small businesses and members of the community. Credit unions also often have more democratic structures because members have voting rights, which allows them to influence policies and decisions, making the financial environment “by the people.”

Community Ownership Models

Creating shared ownership structures for housing, businesses, and land to keep wealth within communities.

Community Land Trusts (CLT) are nonprofit organizations that hold land on behalf of a community that wishes to retain the land for specific interests, which may include protecting or conserving the land for its environmental value or creating affordable housing opportunities in the community. The value of community land trusts is that the land remains under community ownership in perpetuity.

An environmental land trust, or land conservancy, works to permanently conserve land and sometimes waters. Land trusts can own land outright or enter into conservation easements with landowners to determine terms to steward the land, protect natural resources, and limit land use to protect conservation values.

A Permanent Real Estate Cooperative (PREC) is a community-owned land and housing model that works to create affordable housing opportunities that often prioritizes racial, social, and environmental justice over profit maximization. The Co-op removes land and properties from speculative markets and retains it for the benefits of the community, thereby assisting in community wealth building.

Public Control of Utilities

Public powered utilities are a division of local government and are owned, run, and managed by the local community and elected officials. Cooperative utilities are utility companies that are owned by members or employees of the business, where voting status is equal among members.

Transitioning utilities from private, for profit companies to public or cooperative ownership has been shown to provide major benefits - keeping money in the community, keeping rates lower for local residents and better rates of safety compared to for profit utilities.

Debt Jubilee

Campaigning for the cancellation of unfair debts to provide economic relief and reset community wealth. Jubilees have a long history of success.

Pension Fund Investments

Universities, unions and other large institutions control huge pension funds and other types of investments. How can we effectively petition these organizations to be using these funds in a way that benefits the local community and supports sustainability?

Community Foundations

Community foundations are grantmaking public charities that are dedicated to improving communities. Foundations can be local or statewide. Community foundations vary widely in the amount of money they shepherd with some foundations control over 1 billion dollars.

In order to wisely shepherd the funds they manage, they also maintain contacts within their community and can provide resources or contacts in addition to the grants they issue.

Economic Policies / Local Policy Options

We could list hundreds of ways that State and Federal policies can create “Wellbeing Economies”. But this is a Local Guide, so let’s talk about what kinds of local policies could make a difference in our communities.

How can we get our local legislators to prioritize local interests and create safe, sustainable and connected communities?

Taxation

Using tax incentives or adjustments to support small businesses, coops, and sustainable practices.

Zoning

Regulating land use to protect local businesses, prevent displacement, and support community development. Zoning laws control how neighborhoods are designed and how walkable and livable residential areas are. Policies can be created to resist corporate monopolies and prevent gentrification.

Anti Displacement

Local businesses and residents sometimes get displaced by large, influential developments. Local governments and coalitions are fighting to keep legacy businesses. The Anti Displacement Network provides tools to prevent displacement. <https://antidisplacement.org/>

Supporting Backbones and Community Engagement Efforts

Local organizations that improve community need support. Funding key initiatives and personnel are one way to strengthen organizations. Local governments can also invite them into cooperation and help these organizations integrate into large local institutions.

Supporting Co-op and EO

Will local elected leaders and City Managers create support systems for Coops and Employee Owned businesses? There are a multitude of ways they can support these ideas. From funding backbones, helping to secure buildings for incubators or funding awareness programs to seed these ideas.

Housing and Urban Design

Housing is one of the biggest challenges we face. There are so many competing interests. Affordability, environment and who wants what where. Clearly, we need sufficient living spaces and people need to be able to afford to live there.

WEAll California isn’t able to recommend a specific program that works for all communities. Throughout 2025 and 2026 we will bring in groups working on this issue to explore potential solutions.

In general, we do recognize a need for community members to raise awareness, advocate for local policy changes, and support inclusive zoning and development plans. By attending city council meetings, joining neighborhood associations, and participating in public forums, residents can help amplify community voices and push for equitable housing solutions.

Collaborating on grassroots campaigns, sharing lived experiences, and volunteering for local housing initiatives also strengthens the push for lasting, community-driven change.

Regulating Businesses

Anti-Privatization, Anti-Venture Capital and Private Equity

Anti-privatization advocates argue against the transfer of public sector services and assets to private ownership, emphasizing the need for public control to ensure equitable access and accountability.

Anti-venture capital and private equity stances emphasize the drawbacks of profit-driven investment models that prioritize short-term gains over long-term sustainability and community wellbeing, pushing for alternative funding structures that prioritize social impact.

Issue a Wellbeing Economy Master Plan

If your elected officials reflect what is important to community members, perhaps a Master Plan to work towards a Wellbeing Economy is what is needed. Several countries are developing Wellbeing Economy Plans or Future Generations Plans. Leaving things to random chance could work, but let's get our local leaders to commit.

WEAll can help you create this process.

Support State Bills

The California Legislature passes bills through 2 houses - Senate and Assembly. Your local Senate and Assembly members propose bills and also endorse and vote for bills. You can track what bills are in progress. It is a tremendous amount of information and difficult to stay up to date. A good way to educate yourself and others is to partner with organizations that are active in this area. Indivisible and Climate Reality Project are great resources.

Democracy Policy Network has lots of information on current state bills and also provides details on what has and has not worked in other states.

BISC tracks Ballot Measures across the country and also provides training for people looking to learn how to create a Ballot Measure and how to get it passed.

Engage with Elected Officials

Many people have never contacted their local officials. There are many avenues to interact with them:

- Attend City Council Meetings

Attend Candidate Forums run by local groups
Call, write or email candidates about issues you care about
Ask people running for office what policies they are advocating

If doing it alone feels uncomfortable, consider joining a group that already does this. It can be via a political group or environmental group. You can learn a lot this way.

Democracy Reforms

People often ask why we talk about Democracy Reforms when talking about “Wellbeing Economies”, but investing in a healthy Democracy is vital for creating a Wellbeing Economy. Who we elect, how we elect them and how we keep them tethered to the needs of their constituents has dramatic impacts on what laws are passed and enforced.

Our goal with any reform is to elect officials that best represent the public's interests and keep them aligned with those interests while in office. Our current system has many weaknesses and loopholes that are easily exploited and lead to elected officials representing special interests and donors instead of their constituents.

Election Reforms

Several reforms are gaining traction and could be implemented in your local elections. Each of these have their drawbacks and may not be right for your community.

Open Primaries - Some elections only allow people to vote in their party's primary. Places are experimenting with open primaries which do not require voters to declare a party affiliation.

Multichoice voting - We are used to only casting one vote per office. Multichoice voting has shown many benefits over single choice voting. Ranked-choice voting (RCV) and Score Then Automatic Runoff (STAR) voting are methods designed to ensure more fair elections by allowing voters to rank candidates or score them, thus better capturing voter preferences and potentially increasing the likelihood of majority support. STAR has some fun [videos](#) explaining how this benefits the public.

Democracy Vouchers - are a form of public campaign financing where citizens are given vouchers to donate to political candidates, aiming to amplify the voices of everyday people in politics and reduce the influence of big money.

Eliminating voter suppression - Election fraud is rare, but it is not uncommon for voting rules to be manipulated to reduce or restrict the participation of certain groups. It is important to fight back against these measures to ensure all eligible citizens can vote without undue barriers, such as strict ID laws, limited polling places, or irregular voter roll purges.

Public Engagement

Promoting a culture of participation involves encouraging and enabling all community members to engage in civic activities and decisions, fostering a more democratic and empowered society. While voting is an important form of engagement, it is only one way for people to participate. Let's look at some other ways to help people feel empowered and connected to their local government.

Participatory Budgeting Processes - PBP allows citizens to vote on budgetary choices allowing them more direct influence over how public money is spent. Experiments with PBP are

happening all over the world. Taiwan, New York City, Los Angeles and some well known ones. You can check out <https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/>

Citizens Assemblies - is a process that brings a small panel of randomly selected citizens in for an education series and then asks them to vote on recommendations to the elected officials. Assemblies are popular in Europe and beginning to catch on in the US. They have been used for things as complex as a new constitution or decisions on how much solar and wind power to build. They are sometimes known as Civic Assemblies.

Community Assemblies

“World Cafe”, “Future Search”, and “Appreciative Inquiry” are among the many techniques for bringing together large groups of people for a process that is equal parts bonding, tapping into collective wisdom, setting collective goals and an internal healing opportunity.

Groups as large as 300 people have gathered to address violence, homelessness or sustainability. There are a variety of ways to organize this process, but it usually works better as a 2 or 3 day event.

A skilled facilitator is important to set the right tone and keep proceedings on track.

This process can be a great leaping off point for future working groups. We will be having a learning event on this in the near future, make sure you are on our mailing list.

Civic Training - Civic education and training programs are critical in teaching citizens about their rights, responsibilities, and the workings of government, thus empowering them to participate more effectively.

Meeting Elected Representatives - Creating a Culture where people know who their representatives are and how to engage with them.

Journalism

The role of journalism is to provide accurate, unbiased information to the public, holding those in power accountable, and fostering an informed citizenry that can engage in democratic processes.

How is your community supporting local journalism that holds power to account?

Economic Solidarity Practices

Your community doesn't need to wait for your government to make everything happen. Here are opportunities to share resources.

These practices also have the benefit of building connectivity and creating networks of groups that can hold the government accountable to the needs and desires of the community.

Tool Library

Communities have created a program for borrowing tools and equipment. This reduces the waste of everyone owning their own drill or lawnmower, reduces costs and increases the social benefits of being in community.

Offers and Needs Events

There are multiple ways for a community to share resources outside of tools. Sometimes needs are for services or a specific thing. People have multiple things to offer as a way to give back. An Offers and Needs event is more than just an online market that pairs people up. These events are structured in a way to create bonding between community members. Post Growth Institute trains people to lead these events.

Community Farming

Community Gardens and Farms can be organized in a variety of ways. Perhaps to provide people their own plot or as a local source of produce. Some programs involve K12 schools and universities. Creating local produce can help people who are food insecure and it is a great way to create community bonding across a wide range of ages.

Mutual Aid Programs

Mutual aid programs are locally run projects where people decide to help out their neighbors. Unlike charity where help flows one-way from givers to receivers, mutual aid creates horizontal relationships where everyone participates as equals. There's no hierarchy - just neighbors pooling resources, skills, and time to take care of each other. When neighbors help neighbors this way, we build stronger communities where everyone's wellbeing matters. People often give out food, hygiene kits, and other essentials. Some mutual aid gives out cash.

There are websites that list existing Mutual Aid Programs and also help people create new ones.

Other Ideas

Buy Nothing Circles - Groups have formed where people list items they might otherwise donate to a charity or throw away and give them away for free to their neighbors.

Gift Economy - In Robin Wall Kimmerer's lovely book *The Serviceberry*, she promotes the idea of the "gift economy". Gifts are given without any expectation of reciprocity. This is like Mutual Aid, but less organized. In her words, a gift economy nurtures community bonds that enhance mutual wellbeing.

Build Community Power

This last section may be the real heart of building a Local Wellbeing Economy. Many of the action items discussed above rely on having the power to make the changes.

Allies working together is an essential check on other forms of power - Legal, Political, Big Business and resistance to change.

Forming and keeping Community Power going over a lengthy period of time is hard to do and easy to fracture.

This section is a series of ideas on how to build and keep those alliances going.

Building Alliances

Many natural allies exist within a community. Yet, there still are so many barriers to coming together - time constraints, allowing room for disagreement and competing for resources are some typical challenges. We recommend creating some ground rules and a consistent and predictable rhythm to meetings. Finding a facilitator who is good at creating space for good enough consensus and continue to expand the alliance over time.

Building a Backbone Organization

Moving from a loose alliance to formal alliance is a great way to strengthen a local alliance and build capacities. Forming and funding a “Backbone” organization can help centralize a few key roles and provide technical specialization that most organizations, coops and companies require to be successful without needing those specializations in house. Some examples of this include:

The leader of the Backbone can be the organizer of a coalition
Specialties like Marketing or Accounting can be housed at the Backbone and
offered at a discount to Alliance members

Co-Create A Shared Vision of the Future

Alliances are difficult to hold for a long time and focusing on finding ways to bring people together to participate in the ideation of what a shared future can look like can help remind everyone of why they want to participate. Even a 1 or 2 hour exercise can be a good start to see where there is alignment between 10 or 20 allies.

See the next section for ideas on how to do Visioning with 100s of locals.

Community Engagement Techniques

World Cafe, Future Search, Appreciative Inquiry are among the many techniques for bringing together large groups of people for a process that is equal parts bonding, tapping into collective wisdom, setting collective goals and an internal healing opportunity.

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Conflict Resolution

Acknowledging from the beginning that collective action and collaborative projects will encounter resistance and disagreements allows you to prepare for and even leverage these challenges.

As humans, we struggle to work well collectively and getting better at these processes are key to solving all of our major problems - economic, political and ecological.

There are many group techniques to heal old wounds and divides. ABCD and Process Works are two great methods. Finding Leaders and Facilitators who have done a lot of Inner Work helps set the conditions for group healing. The newly released IDGs also set conditions for an individual to evolve into healthier Leadership.

ABCD - Asset Based Community Development - John McKnight and Peter Block

Process Works - Arnold Mindell

IDGs - Inner Development Goals

Public Education

In this specific context, we are more advocating for specific types of education that can be utilized in K-12 and college level courses, but also for the general public that has already graduated.

Public education can be about democracy and how to be an active citizen or it could be about topics like cooperative economics, sustainability, and community empowerment. This could be as simple as a reading circle or more formal like a class offered for free through the city, community college or a local non profit.

There are also many opportunities to partner with local schools and universities to teach engaged civics, community farming or more advanced political mechanics.

Funding

A strong backbone is more likely to succeed when a staff can be supported by long term funding for collaboration. This is an area WEAll California is eager to learn more about and may be our theme for 2026. Stay tuned to our events and please share successes so we can assist our local partners in this.

There are several successful models out there.

Washington State has funded a long term commitment to collective action to reduce poverty. You can learn more on our YouTube channel.

Mondragon Cooperative is world famous for the longevity of their cooperative system. The coops within the system fund the backbone organizations which support the overall collaborative.

Creating a Path for New Leaders

For your local wellbeing economy it is important to have multiple leaders and to give them the training and support to learn the ins and outs of their projects and the “soft skills” of leadership. Skills such as building trust, authenticity, deep listening and facilitation.

Finding and cultivating leadership takes time and a plan.

If connecting with the local community is important to your effort, how can you find and lift up people who are naturally talented at connecting with their neighbors?

Create Your Wellbeing Economy Action Plan

Okay. That was a lot of information.

You can't do all of that at once.

So, what comes first?

What is right for your community? Your talents and connections?

Leverage Existing Organizations and Structures

Find Allies with Common Interests

Create a Plan for Learning

Build wider community

Leverage WEAll California

Our goal is to help Local Wellbeing Economies flourish.

We do that by hosting events, mostly online and free.

Connection events where you can meet other people doing similar work.

Education events where we dig into specific topics. Like many of the ones in this guide.

Action programs - supporting specific policies and....

Participating in Local Wellbeing Economy programs.

To learn more about how we might participate in your local program, reach out to us at connect@weallcalifornia.org

Our upcoming events are all listed at www.weallcalifornia.org/events

Come and get support, give support or help build up our educational materials.

You can watch our past Education events on our [YouTube channel](#).

We also run two ongoing Leadership Forums:

People leading Local Wellbeing Economy Projects

Professors and Student bringing Wellbeing Economy Learning into Education

You can apply for these programs on our website.

And we wish you and your community WELLBEING as you build a Wellbeing Economy!



Scan for a connection to www.weallcalifornia.org

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V1.0 May 2025