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Fresno Makes Significant Gains in Inclusive Growth, Climbing 33 Spots in Economic Inclusion and 62 Spots in Racial Inclusion

Twelve years after ranking in the bottom 2% nationally for economic inclusion, Fresno is making measurable progress in reversing decades of exclusion, though significant gaps remain.

Fresno, California - October 7, 2025 - The Central Valley Community Foundation (CVCF) today announced new data, released on the five-year anniversary of its flagship initiative Fresno DRIVE (Developing the Region's Inclusive and Vibrant Economy), showing that Fresno is making measurable progress toward economic and racial inclusion. Since 2013, the city has climbed 33 places nationally in Economic Inclusion Index rankings, moving from 268 to 235 out of 274 large U.S. cities. Fresno advanced even further in the Racial Inclusion Index rankings, improving by 62 places, from 225 to 163.

The Inclusion Indices, developed as part of the Urban Institute's [Inclusive Recovery Project](#), reflect the ability of lower-income residents and people of color to benefit from economic growth, tracking key indicators including neighborhood segregation, rental burden, high school dropout rates, working poor, and racial gaps in homeownership, poverty, and education. An [Urban Institute report](#) found that cities that improved in the rankings had common strategies – developing a shared vision, inspiring bold public leadership, recruiting partners across sectors, and broad engagement—the same approach used by the Fresno DRIVE coalition.

Ashley Swearengin, CEO and President of the Central Valley Community Foundation:

“When we launched Fresno DRIVE, we set our sights on a big vision—an economy that created opportunity for everyone. Three hundred Frenshans came together, pledging to reverse poverty and, in the process, created a multi-billion-dollar, community-led investment plan. With no existing model to follow, we built one - bringing residents, employers, and organizations together to reimagine what's possible for our community. As the economy continues to squeeze too many people here in Fresno and across the country, it's encouraging to see this progress and to recognize the role community-led coalitions like Fresno DRIVE can play in pushing for systemic change.”



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Jerry Dyer, Mayor of Fresno:

“As the largest city in Fresno County, we’re proud to see our region making real progress toward inclusive growth. The latest data confirms what many of us already feel: momentum is building behind our One Fresno vision — to be an inclusive, prosperous, and beautiful city where people take pride in their neighborhoods and their community. At the core of One Fresno is a simple but powerful idea: when everyone has the chance to succeed, the whole community rises. That’s why we’re investing in workforce development, supporting small businesses, and creating pathways to opportunity through programs like the Mayor’s Youth Jobs Corps. These results show progress — but they’re just the beginning. There’s still more to do to ensure that residents in every neighborhood have access to a future full of possibility. And we’re committed to getting there together.”

Governor Gavin Newsom:

“Fresno’s progress proves that an economy that uplifts working families is achievable. California leads the world in innovation, and we’re making sure that promise reaches the Central Valley - investing so that Fresno is at the heart of the state’s growth. As inequality grows nationwide, California is proving that growth and inclusion go hand in hand when communities come first.”

The new data shows household incomes and employment are rising across Fresno County. Median household income has grown by 55 percent, from \$44,472 in 2014 to \$68,889 in 2023, beating inflation. Employment rates have improved as well, increasing from 68 percent in 2014 to 74 percent in 2023, nearly reaching the statewide average. Still, major disparities remain. Households at the 20th percentile earn \$111,000 less than those at the 80th percentile, and employment gaps persist, with Hispanic and Black adults less likely to be employed than their White peers.

Fresno DRIVE was launched more than five years ago, when community, civic, and business leaders came together to respond to deep inequities in the local economy. Through an intensive planning process, more than 300 leaders developed a 10-year economic blueprint rooted in community feedback, which was presented to Governor Newsom in 2019 and later featured at the California Economic Summit. By 2020, Fresno DRIVE had adopted a theory of change and racial equity plan and secured the early financial support needed to begin implementation.



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Over the past five years, local and regional initiatives, including Fresno DRIVE, have helped shape new approaches to inclusive growth. While no single program can claim responsibility for Fresno's improved standing, community-led models like DRIVE have contributed to a broader movement to advance economic and racial inclusion. Lessons from this work have informed statewide initiatives such as Regions Rise and ultimately the \$600 million California Jobs First program, demonstrating how local experimentation can influence larger systems of investment and reform.

This progress is reflected not just in the data but also in the lived experiences of residents and community leaders across the region.

"Investing in people is the cornerstone of building a stronger, more resilient Fresno," said **Kurt Madden, CEO of Career Nexus**. "Our mission is to open doors to opportunity - and graduating more than 1,000 interns from our program is a powerful testament to what's possible when we connect talent with pathways to meaningful careers. Each internship is more than a job experience; it's a steppingstone toward economic mobility, community growth, and a future where everyone has the chance to succeed."

"Being part of the Fresno DRIVE Executive Committee has been such a rewarding experience," said **Dr. Cassandra Little, CEO of the Fresno Metro Black Chamber of Commerce**. "What means the most to me is how we've come together - lifting each other up, sharing resources, and staying deeply connected to create meaningful change in people's lives and open doors to a more inclusive future for our community. Through our incubator, we've supported and graduated 140 entrepreneurs with an 82 percent completion rate. An overwhelming 92 percent of these businesses are Black-owned, 5 percent are Latinx-owned, and more than half are women-owned. Each of these numbers tells a story of resilience, empowerment, and collective progress - proof of what's possible when we invest in our people and believe in the potential of our community."

"Creating neighborhood hubs is essential to fostering community connection and civic engagement - the foundation of a prosperous economy that works for everyone," said **Richard Burrell, Founder of Live Again Fresno**. "Each contribution plays a vital role in empowering our most vulnerable neighbors to shape a vibrant and inclusive future. Through our neighborhood hubs and other place-based initiatives, we've engaged and served more than 10,000 residents, helping people not only find their voice but also take part in building a stronger, more inclusive Fresno for generations to come."



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“Seeing the transformative change that Fresno DRIVE and its local partners have made in the past five years, increasing equity in education, housing, and job opportunities for people in the greater Fresno region, has given me incredible hope for what the future of Fresno holds,” said **Fresno DRIVE Director Artie Padilla**. “The DRIVE initiative is excited to work with others to chart the next five years ahead and further our work of connecting people through their neighborhoods to economic opportunities.”

Today’s data is being released at Creating Our Economy, the Fresno DRIVE five-year anniversary event, where community members, civic leaders, and partners are gathering to reflect on progress, highlight key accomplishments, and set priorities for the next five years of inclusive growth. As Fresno DRIVE marks this milestone, the coalition is doubling down on resident engagement and shifting the narrative about the economy, calling on partners and the broader community to stay at the table, help shape future progress, and ensure that Fresno’s economy works for everyone.

- [Access the new data here](#): The Central Valley Community Foundation and Fresno DRIVE have released new findings showing Fresno’s progress toward creating an economy for everyone.



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About the Central Valley Community Foundation

The Central Valley Community Foundation connects capital and communities for a just and thriving Central Valley. As the only nationally accredited community foundation serving Fresno, Madera, Tulare, Kings, Merced, and Mariposa counties, CVCF has nearly six decades of experience driving strategic investments, supporting local nonprofits, and maximizing the impact of charitable giving. Today, more than 260 donor funds fuel CVCF's work to advance equity and opportunity throughout the Central Valley.

CVCF is leading the way in philanthropic systems change through impact programs that scale up investment by leveraging public and private grants. Its flagship initiatives, including F3, Fresno DRIVE, and S2J2, mobilize residents and local partners, strengthen cross-sector partnerships, and create community-guided plans and investments. Together, these efforts are building pathways toward economic inclusion and shared prosperity in the Central Valley.

About Fresno DRIVE

Fresno DRIVE is a coalition of community, civic, and business leaders working together to create an economy for everyone in Fresno County. Launched more than five years ago in response to significant economic disparities, Fresno DRIVE brings residents and partners together to build a more inclusive future. Guided by a 10-year, community-led, multi-billion-dollar plan and a racial equity framework, the coalition has secured more than \$630 million to advance 14 initiatives, engaged over 10,000 residents, and hosted dozens of events that bring the economy into people's imaginations - transforming systems, expanding opportunity, and ensuring every resident can share in the region's growth.