# Summary of Public Comment: CERF Catalyst Program

The public comment period for the proposed CERF Catalyst Program opened on June 22, 2023, and closed on July 21, 2023. The CERF Interagency Team received over 40 written comments in addition to those from Catalyst Program webinars. This document highlights major themes that emerged from the public comment process.

## Administrative

* Provide standardized templates for reporting on workforce development projects versus construction projects.
* Applications should be short, and the Catalyst application deadline should be delayed.
* The state should improve contracting processes to reduce the six-month timeline for processing Catalyst contracts and payment processes to reduce payment times for grantees.
* Unexpended balances should be retained by the region to be applied towards HRTC-approved implementation projects.
* Contracts should include requirements for Catalyst funds to support High Road jobs in consulting services, not just for project expenditures.
* Track and share publicly each of the proposed projects identified by the Industry Collaboratives in each region. The state could then streamline the process for each HRTC and establish a consistent template for each region to use when identifying and tracking projects. This could also include applications and awards for additional funding from other funding sources.

## Equity and Disinvested Communities

* The current funding structure focuses on equality rather than equity, and funding should be distributed at least evenly given rural regions’ small populations and significant climate impacts.
* The proposed allocation does not adequately address the needs of disinvested communities in regions with larger, more diverse populations.
* The state needs to develop a shared understanding of and commitment to equity principles that all regions and actors within the regions can unite around. The state should consider adopting a set of equity indicators for use in Catalyst project selection.
* There is not currently a shared understanding of and commitment to equity principles among the diverse cultures and economic actors in our regions. It is vital for us to first define what equity is for our region and then to develop tangible means to access and disperse funding in an equitable way.
* Given entire CERF regions meet the state’s definition of “disinvested community**,**” Catalyst Program funds should not be allocated on a “use it or lose it” basis. This will negatively impact regions and communities with constrained capacity and highest need, and further exacerbate economic inequities CERF aims to rebalance.

## State Process and Communications

* The state should establish a transparent review process for submitted Catalyst project proposals so that community stakeholders can provide input before funds are awarded.
* The quick rollout and timeline for Catalyst applications risk undermining the trust Regional Conveners have built in the regions to engage traditionally marginalized groups in CERF.
* The state should find alignment within existing policies and budgets to fund the implementation of Catalyst projects. The “build it and hope for funds to become available” approach has set communities and projects up for failure and needs to be avoided with the Catalyst Program.
* Information related to CERF must be communicated and disseminated in a way that is understandable to the public, especially to marginalized, rural, and tribal communities.
* Clarify terms like “exploratory,” “last-mile,” and “ready-to-go” and provide a non-exhaustive list of examples for different project types.

## Catalyst Program Design

* Lower the amount of CERF funds available through Catalyst. The current amount takes too much funding away from the Implementation Phase.
* Provide more flexibility in the funding buckets. Allow regions to define buckets that make sense for them: the current buckets and specified amounts are too prescriptive and undermine CERF’s “regions-up” process.
* Some Catalyst funds should be directed towards capacity building and planning grants.
* The state has not made adequate technical assistance (TA) or support available to regions that could help accelerate or support planning phase activities. TA to help regions better understand relevant funding opportunities and aligned initiatives would be helpful, especially given overlapping timelines of federal and state funds.
* Catalyst funds should ensure disinvested regions and communities are supported to develop and access the technical knowledge, skills, planning and design expertise, and staff capacity.
* Catalyst program proposals need high levels of community input prior to submission, coordinated by conveners at the direction from the HRTCs.
* The request for regions to develop Industry Collaboratives and engage with local public agencies and tribes fill an enormous void in the ability for regions to develop and fund tangible, sustainable and impactful projects.
* Community stakeholders such as labor and CBOs should be allowed voice in Catalyst proposals.

## Catalyst Funding Buckets

* Regions should be able to apply Catalyst Program allocations to existing initiatives, processes, structures, projects, and investment strategies that align with CERF goals in addition to new activities outlined in the Catalyst framework.
* Allow region to identify and prioritize industry clusters during the contracting period.
* Provide more statewide infrastructure around research and industry cluster analysis. There is an opportunity for the state to support industry cluster development, especially in targeted industries that have a presence in multiple CERF regions.
* Allow more than three Industry Collaboratives: regions should be able to propose the appropriate number based on their subregional structure.
* The designation of the Industry Leads creates a clear pathway of the funding to create needed career pathways into new projects for residents of disinvested communities.