



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Bi-County Partnership Looks to Boost Regional Economic Vitality** *Riverside and San Diego Counties request community input on new strategies*

Reducing commute times, addressing housing issues, creating jobs and a good business environment - - these are some of the critical issues that the I-15 Interregional Partnership (I-15 IRP) are tackling, in hopes of bringing more economic vitality to Western Riverside and San Diego counties. The collaborative group's most recent undertaking is the design of bi-county economic development strategies in selected high growth industry clusters.

"Regional economic development is just smart business," said Program Manager Kevin Viera, Western Riverside Council of Governments (WRCOG) and I-15 IRP partner. "Our team has been building on previous studies that uncovered issues causing the housing/job imbalances between Riverside and San Diego Counties."

Based on these studies, the I-15 IRP held a series of planning forums that identified the regional economic industry clusters that have potential for creating new job opportunities and alleviate commute times, as well as those that pose solid retention and growth opportunities for existing regional businesses. These clusters include 1) Renewable Power Generation, 2) Biotechnology & Medical Devices Manufacturing, and 3) Travel, Tourism, Entertainment and Wineries. The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), an integral I-15 IRP partner, provides some insights into these selections. SANDAG Senior Analyst Carolyn Alkire states, "There are multiple economic drivers in our two-county region, but our team felt that there was the most potential within these three categories. Given our most recent analysis, we're focusing on those clusters that can have the greatest impact across the most industries."

**Renewable Power Generation** includes the design, building and operations of wind, solar, hydroelectric, geothermal, biomass, and other emerging renewable energies. According to SANDAG's latest study, total employment between the two counties is 5,800 persons, with an

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average wage of \$70,600 per year, or 178% of the two-county average of wages in all industries. Don Christiansen, owner of Christiansen Consulting, said, “Renewable energy is one of the key components of the clean and green technologies that will play a valuable role in our economic recovery and put us on the path to a more sustainable economy. It is also worth nothing that demand for this industry will only increase, as the Governor recently mandated that 33% of California’s electrical power come from renewable energy by 2020.”

The second category of **Biotechnology & Medical Devices Manufacturing** is a combined industry cluster and includes firms that are engaged in the life sciences such as biotechnology research and the manufacture of pharmaceuticals, as well as those firms that are manufacturing biomedical products and surgical and medical devices. According to SANDAG’s latest study, Surgical and Medical Instruments and Supplies had two-thirds of employment located in San Diego County. The largest industry is Surgical and Medical Instrument Manufacturing (53%), followed by Surgical Appliance and Supplies Manufacturing (18%), and Ophthalmic Goods Manufacturing and Optical Instrument and Lens Manufacturing (16%). Total employment in the cluster is 8,600 persons, with an average wage of \$54,700 per year, or 138% of the two-county average. Timothy R. Gerrity, Ph.D, director, Office of Technology Transfer and Commercialization and the Alliance for Commercialization of Technology at California State University, San Bernardino, states, “This is a high wage cluster with relatively large economic multipliers, and includes some of the strongest industries for job growth in manufacturing and pharmaceuticals.”

**Tourism, Entertainment & Wineries** round out the selection and combines those firms that are focused on serving tourists in the region. According to SANDAG’s latest study, this cluster employed more than 110,000 in 2008. President and CEO Kimberly Adams, Temecula Valley Convention & Visitors Bureau states, “The current economic downturn provides us an opportunity to increase regional travel and tourism among residents that would drive rather than fly to Riverside and San Diego. And, the two counties have several unique and world class resources related to tourism, entertainment and wineries, and bundling and promoting our unique attributes as a single destination may provide an economic boost.”

If you are a business or a community partner, and would like to weigh in on the I-15 IRP’s potential economic development strategies within these clusters, take the online survey by 10/5/09 at <http://www.bwresearch.com/survey/?s=29>. More information on this initiative can be found at [www.i15IRP.com](http://www.i15IRP.com)

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