

11 Things California Can Do Better

Thought leaders share ideas for building a better path forward and reviving the California Dream.

California has long been a beacon of culture and innovation, a place of invention and reinvention where people of every stratum come to live, work, build, and dream. We reached out to thought leaders across the spectrum to find out what they believe we can do better to preserve our communities, stay safe, support our businesses, and build better so we can survive and thrive.

1. Create Affordable, Inclusive Neighborhoods



“The California I was born in was a place where artists, CEOs, tradespeople, and teachers all lived in the same neighborhood. Sure, some people’s houses were bigger, but what made our neighborhoods great was that they were mixed-income and inclusive. My dream for California is that we get back to where most communities have plentiful housing at the full range of affordability—which leads to richer lives as we engage with our neighbors. Tragically, Altadena was a modern example of that ideal before so much of it was lost in the fires—mixed-income, mixed in race and culture, with very special enclaves of opportunity for artists, construction workers, and public service alike. Too many Californians must live too far from work or school and must make tough choices about surviving rather than thriving. Research shows that kids and the elderly are better served in mixed-income communities. When we look to recover, we must find ways to replace what we have lost over decades and to create mixed-income neighborhoods through zero- or low-interest investments and expedited construction and design from start to finish, with our North Star aimed at building strong communities.”

—Sarah Dusseault, Co-Chair LA County Blue Ribbon Commission on Homelessness

JON ENDOW

2. Draw a Bright Line



“The wildfires showed the best and the worst of Angelenos. On the best side, you had firefighters putting their lives on the line to save our lives and save our homes. You had law enforcement working literally 24 hours a day to keep us safe. You had over 200,000 people willing to cooperate in an unprecedented evacuation and trust that their homes would be there when they got back. And then you had the people who lost their homes now trusting the system to work to re-establish their lives. And you had the community really rallying around everyone in order to deal with an unprecedented crisis. On the other hand, it also brought out the worst of a small segment of Angelenos who looked at this crisis as a time to exploit the situation when people are literally at their lowest moment. It was important for myself as District Attorney to take a very strong and unequivocal line that if you want to engage in any crimes in connection with the wildfires, whether that’s looting, arson, impersonation of a first responder, whether that’s price gouging, charity scams, government benefit scams, or the like, the question wasn’t if, but when you would be arrested, prosecuted, and punished to the maximum extent of the law. The idea was not to fill our prisons to the breaking point. If anything, that’s when the criminal justice system is not working. The idea is to deter the criminals from committing the crimes in the first place because they know where the bright line is and they know there will be real consequences if they cross the line. So that was the goal. Will it eliminate all crime? Of course not. But will it make criminals who otherwise might have committed these crimes pause and decide otherwise? And will it let the public know that if someone does harm them, there will be justice for the harm they suffered? The answer to that is yes.”

—Nathan Hochman, Los Angeles County District Attorney

3. Expedite the Recovery



“Los Angeles is facing its greatest crisis. Amidst all the challenges and unknowns, the biggest concern I hear from people is a fear that these communities won’t come back the way they were before January 7th. I refuse to accept that. That’s why I founded Steadfast LA—a coalition committed to rebuilding faster and stronger by cutting through red tape and leveraging the private sector’s best minds, resources, and technology. The government can’t do this alone, so we’re acting. We’ve already outlined several key initiatives to expedite the rebuild that include: Using AI-driven construction planning and fire-resistant materials. Preventing future disasters by burying power lines and modernizing zoning regulations. Speeding up approvals to reduce permitting delays. Securing realistic options for families to return to their communities in the face of financial obstacles. Time is critical. If a particular initiative is supposed to take a year, we want to offer ideas to get it done in six months. The longer we wait, the harder it will be to preserve these communities. Together, we will show the rest of the country how we can come back stronger from this adversity and usher in a new era of optimism and prosperity for LA.”

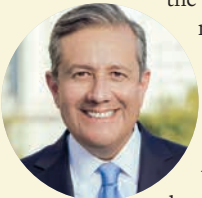
—Rick Caruso, real estate developer and Founder of Steadfast LA

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“The 2025 wildfires devastated thousands across Los Angeles County. As usually happens in times of crisis, the disaster also exposed and exacerbated deep inequities that could threaten our region’s recovery. As we move full speed ahead toward recovery, we need to ensure the most vulnerable are not left behind.

Rebuilding must prioritize those most at risk of falling through the cracks. People like underinsured homeowners who face massive

4. Rebuild for All



financial barriers and, in many cases, have larger shares of their family’s wealth tied to their homes. Renters who now must rebuild their lives while looking for a home in an already crowded market. And the thousands of service workers—nannies, housekeepers, gardeners, and hospitality staff—who lost their livelihoods with no formal safety net.

Immediate relief came from trusted community organizations, proving local leadership is the fastest, most effective way to reach those in need and ensure long-term, equitable recovery. That’s why the California Community Foundation has committed more than \$30 million in grants to more than 200 local organizations that are on the front lines, bridging the gaps for individuals who lack access to traditional aid. This is also why we advocate for a trust-based model of philanthropy that empowers those closest to the challenges or harms to tell us how best to meet their needs.

Recovery isn’t just about rebuilding homes—it’s about restoring stability, dignity, and opportunity for all Angelenos. We must invest in policies and programs that ensure every survivor can recover, rebuild, and reimagine a future where climate disasters don’t determine who gets to stay and who is forced to leave.”

—Miguel Santana, President & CEO California Community Foundation

5. Do Better By Our Restaurants

Born in Washington, D.C., Jay Luchs moved to LA to work in the entertainment industry only to become one of the city's most prolific real estate agents. Now Vice Chairman at Newmark, he's represented brands including Louis Vuitton, Christian Dior, Club Monaco, James Perse, Fred Segal, Craig's, and Madeo. Luchs regularly posts impassioned videos about his love for the city on Instagram and believes restaurants and other hospitality venues need our special attention because "they help define the culture and character of a city at street level for both locals and tourists. Places like the Troubadour, the Rainbow, Dan Tana's, The Roxy, The Chateau Marmont, The Tower Bar. These are the places that make people excited when they come to LA." He says that public officials need to create a more business-friendly environment for the legacy restaurants and to attract and retain new restaurant groups. "Restaurateurs are seeing much higher profits in more business-friendly markets like Miami. We need them in the mix. They're bigger, they bring in a lot of people, and that's good for the economy." Luchs sees expedited permitting, landlords that understand the cultural significance of elevated brands and see tenants as partners, and new development that's respectful of the neighborhood as an ideal to aim for. "Local politicians should know that restaurants are what get people out and make this great city so exciting and vibrant."

—Jay Luchs, Vice Chairman at Newmark

6. Practice Prescribed Burns

"In California, fire is as natural and necessary as rain, snow, or sunshine. Many of our most beloved ecosystems—our giant sequoias, oak woodlands and grasslands, the forests of the Sierra Nevada—actually need frequent fire in order to persist. For millennia, people have used fire to shape the landscapes around them, and even now, beneficial fire remains one of our most important tools for restoring biodiversity, creating resilient landscapes, and protecting our homes and communities. Prescribed fire—the planned use of fire under specific conditions—is one of the most ecologically appropriate and cost-effective strategies we have in California. We've made significant progress on these issues in recent years, passing key legislation and increasing state investments, but we need to maintain and grow that momentum. We know we have an increasingly fiery future ahead of us, but with prescribed fire, we get to decide what that future looks like. We can't control if our landscapes burn, but we do have some power over when and how they burn; let's use it."

—Lenya Quinn-Davidson, Director, University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Fire Network



7. Be Employer and Employee Friendly

Peter Garland is the owner of Porta Via Restaurants, with locations in Beverly Hills, Calabasas, and Palm Desert. At the time of this writing, the Pacific Palisades location, which employed 55 people, is closed as a result of the fires. A lifelong Angeleno, Garland is inspired by feeding his community. "It's the little things that keep our guests coming back. It's a relationship that our guests have with us and vice versa. It's really special to be a part of that on both sides. As an owner and as a server and

as a guest, it feels good when somebody comes that you recognize and have an exchange. It just feels good on both sides," he says. "California is an employee-friendly state, as it should be," says Garland, "but it's not an employer-friendly state. I love my employees and without them I'm nothing, but plaintiff attorney firms—which advertise during Lakers games!—have marked employers, and California law doesn't help us, so it's kind of left a bad taste in the mouth for many businesses." Garland also believes California should implement a tip credit, which allows employers to pay tipped employees less than the minimum wage, as long as the employees make up the difference in tips. "This would help operators pay back of the house staff a more equitable wage," says Garland. Nearly three years ago, Garland started working on a complicated build out of the Porta Via Palm Desert location. "The city is business-friendly, and they wanted to see us succeed, and they made themselves available, and we worked together. Los Angeles needs to ensure that they're working for us. We pay our taxes, and so they should be working with us in a timely manner so we can open up our businesses and put people to work."

—Peter Garland, Owner Porta Via Restaurants



8. Partner With the Police

Attorney David Hochman founded the Los Angeles Sheriff's Foundation in 2020 to help support the sheriff's departments serving the 88 cities in Los Angeles County during budget cuts to the Los Angeles Police Department. Since then, the foundation has raised more than \$2 million for training, resources, education, and equipment, including a thermal drone for rescuing lost hikers, motorbikes and other gear tailored to navigating mudslides, duffel bags of toys for children in emergency situations, as well as community outreach programs. "I think the private sector needs to engage with law enforcement, with public safety in any way that we can," says Hochman. "The five words to say to first responders, firefighters, and police is, 'Thank you for your service,' which is usually during disasters." With the Sheriff's Foundation, that support is around the clock, with "How can we help?" as Hochman's stated mantra. "We help fund the Sheriff's Department Youth Activity Leagues, which host spaces

where kids can go and do their homework on computers and exercise and have a meal and have a safe place. One station asked me about autistic sensory kits. These are kits deputies can have on hand so that if they come across a situation where someone might be on the spectrum and having some type of issue, they're trained on how to communicate better." In addition to heritage months, community partnerships include the Freddie Roach Youth Boxing Academy, which boasts a Sugar Ray Leonard ring. "Kids can come and have a place to box and be with their friends. And it's a perfect example of the Sheriff's Department engaging with the community with something that's very positive. The partnership between the department and the community is crucial. It needs to be fluid. It needs to be authentic. And if I'm able to help with that, it's a blessing."

—David Hochman, Founder and President Los Angeles Sheriff's Foundation



9. Invest in Sustainable Resilient Technology

Matt Petersen runs Los Angeles Cleantech Incubator, or LACI, which works with startups to accelerate the commercialization of clean technologies, transform markets through partnerships with policymakers and innovators in clean energy, and enhance communities through workforce development. One of LACI's startups, Delphire, specializes in remote wildfire detection using cameras and AI technology. "Why should we have to depend on visual sightings of wildfires?" asks Petersen. Among other critical questions: "How do we help homeowners understand the benefits of integrating solar storage and water storage systems that can provide more safety for them and their neighbors? We need technology

that captures stormwater and rainwater as we get more extreme precipitation, which can help with landscaping and provide backup water to douse rooftops, which are built atop homes that have less ventilation and that embers can't get into. How do we integrate engineered wood, which is less susceptible to fire?" Sound business acumen and smart policy are required to provide opportunities for homeowners, business owners, and real estate owners. "We can use this moment to help families rebuild better and more resiliently while keeping costs in mind and affordability at the core," says Petersen. "Not just in the construction costs, obviously, but also in the long-term operating costs."

—Matt Petersen, President and CEO Los Angeles Cleantech Incubator



10. Engage Californians

"Government works better when we build it together—and that means making it easier for everyone to be involved."

After years of development, we recently launched a new pilot program called Engaged California, designed to create a modern-day town hall where Californians can share their perspectives,

concerns, and ideas to find real solutions. Our first use case for this new tool is the Los Angeles fires. Engaged California allows us to involve Californians more directly in firestorm rebuilding and recovery, particularly survivors of the Palisades and Eaton fires. In California, we know that a strong democracy requires effort and direct connections with the people. Engaged California empowers Californians to engage in honest, meaningful discussions that shape more responsive, people-driven policies and programs. As we recover, reimagine, and rebuild Los Angeles, we will do it together—and California will be stronger for it."

—Gavin Newsom, Governor of California



11. Be Bolder

"To build a better Los Angeles, we must break with the old ways of doing things

while holding tight to what connects us as Angelenos. We will build back rapidly and more resiliently in the Palisades, and doing that requires bold innovation—from reforms to eliminate red tape, to embracing

new construction materials and methods for private homes and city utilities and infrastructure alike. There is no reason why the innovations spurred by the recovery effort cannot be applied across Los Angeles—and that's exactly what we are going to do."

—Karen Bass, Los Angeles Mayor



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