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## Irvine Foundation Gives \$750,000 in Leadership Grants

By Capitol Weekly Staff

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The James Irvine Foundation has tapped six organizations to receive Leadership Awards of \$125,000 each.

This is the third year the Irvine Foundation has handed out the leadership awards. Foundation president Jim Canales says the winners were selected for their focus on some of the biggest issues and problems facing California.

"We wanted to do the traditional 'let's celebrate people who are making a difference in California.' That's pretty straightforward," he said. "The other piece of our program is to use the awards to draw attention to these kinds of solutions so that others might see some merit in their approach. These groups were selected for taking a new approach to a problem that we really hadn't seen before."

The winners come from a variety of areas and issues across California, ranging from foster youth to climate change to helping young people escape gangs.

The winners of the awards include Homeboy Industries, which has created a string of five different businesses which are run and operated by former gang members; Bank on San Francisco, which has partnered with traditional financial institutions to give low-income workers alternative to check-cashing outlets; Latino Health Access, which has focused on improving access to and quality of health care in Santa Ana; California Youth Connection, a foster youth advocacy center in San Francisco; the Pacific Forest Trust, which has harnessed market forces as incentives to preserve state

forest land and the Environmental Health Coalition, aimed at improving air quality in low-income communities in the San Diego area.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger issued a statement celebrating the honorees. "We all can learn from their positive spirit and their successful approaches in their respective fields, and I thank them for their valuable contributions to our state," he said.

Every year, the Irvine Foundation gives away millions in grants in three main areas - fostering the arts, helping youth and their California Perspectives program, focused on a wide variety of issues specifically facing California.

Canales said for the leadership awards, the foundation looked beyond the scope of its normal grant program. "These were all people looking for big solutions to significant challenges facing California," he said.

Canales said a number of criteria motivated the selection committee as they reviewed award nominees. "First and foremost was effectiveness. This is not about up and comers or groups we think are going to be great."

Another key component was innovation. "We think all of these groups represent a new way of thinking about a particular problem, and the hope is that some of this thinking can be replicated, even in other areas."