



## KUNAL MERCHANT

Managing Director, Lotus Advisory

Kunal Merchant is Managing Director of Lotus Advisory. In this capacity, Kunal provides strategic advisory, project management, public affairs, and communications support to a select portfolio of clients in sports, technology, real estate, politics, nonprofit management, and philanthropy. Among Kunal's recent projects are:

- **Sacramento Kings, Golden 1 Center and Downtown Commons.** Central leadership role in the development and financing of the award-winning \$1.2B LEED Platinum certified Golden 1 Center and Downtown Commons project in downtown Sacramento that includes a state-of-the-art 17,500 seat NBA arena, 250-room Kimpton hotel, and 630,000 square feet of mixed-use retail, office and entertainment. Kunal continues to advise the Kings on their broader downtown real estate development portfolio. (2010 – 2016)
- **Nashville MLS bid and stadium.** Chief Strategist to Nashville Soccer Holdings on their successful 2017 bid to secure a Major League Soccer (MLS) expansion club and develop a \$275M MLS stadium, retail and entertainment district at the Fairgrounds Nashville. (2017)
- **Oakland A's ballpark district and Coliseum Redevelopment.** Senior Advisor to A's ownership and executive team on political, communications and community relations strategy for the development of a new Major League Baseball stadium, ancillary mixed use district, and adaptive reuse of the Oakland Coliseum site. (2018 – 2020)
- **Sacramento MLS bid and stadium.** Senior Advisor and Project Executive to Sacramento Republic FC's bid for an MLS expansion club, including overseeing the successful completion of all planning, entitlement, design, preconstruction, financing, and public relations activities for the proposed \$262M downtown MLS stadium, retail and entertainment district. (2015 – 2018)
- **MLS Training Center and Community Soccer Park.** Project Executive on a preliminary feasibility study for a \$60M public-private partnership for an MLS training facility and community soccer park. (2018)
- **Oak View Group.** Strategic advisory and public policy support to a portfolio of Oak View's venue business development initiatives nationwide. (2018)
- **CalOZ.** President and Co-Founder of nonprofit trade organization dedicated to supporting the success of quality opportunity zone investments in the State of California. Key initiatives include: (i) state policy development and advocacy; (ii) convenings and events for major OZ stakeholders in California; (iii) OZ-related



consulting services for funds, investors, projects, public agencies, philanthropies, and communities. (2019 – present)

- **Airbnb.** Kunal and Lotus have served in key strategic and project management capacities to Airbnb's Global Public Policy team, advising and executing on the company's public policy and communication strategy in priority markets across the US. (2015 – present)
- **Green Sports Alliance.** In his capacity as a Board Member for the Green Sports Alliance, Kunal has spearheaded development of a new initiative dedicated to integrating key environmental justice goals and issues into the broader green sports agenda. The initiative is currently launching partnerships with a range of teams, leagues, corporate partners, community advocates, and public agency officials. (2018 – present)
- **Chan Zuckerberg Initiative.** Provided strategic advisory, public policy and analytic support to inform the Chan Zuckerberg Institute's work to expand housing affordability in California. (2019)

Kunal previously served as Vice President of Strategic Initiatives for the Sacramento Kings, where he oversaw several strategic, political, media and community initiatives. He managed the Kings delegation to the 2014 NBA Global Games series in China, formulated the team's "Greenprint" sustainability agenda, and developed the acclaimed Sacramento First labor and community benefits package for the Golden 1 Center.

In his previous role as Executive Director of the nonprofit Think BIG Sacramento, Kunal served as Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson's chief advisor in efforts to develop a public-private finance plan for a new downtown arena, win NBA approval to keep the Kings in Sacramento, and facilitate sale of the franchise to a new ownership group.

From 2008 to 2012, he served as Chief of Staff to Mayor Johnson, where he oversaw the full range of the mayor's strategic, management, operational, media and external relations activities. Kunal also has previous work experience in management consulting, education, health care and economic development.

Kunal was an Adjunct Professor at the University of San Francisco Graduate School of Sport Management, where he taught coursework on the intersection of sports and politics. In 2015, Kunal was featured in the ESPN Films 30 for 30 documentary *Down in the Valley*, which chronicled Sacramento's historic fight to save the Kings from relocation.

Kunal graduated *magna cum laude* from Harvard University with an A.B. in Economics, and earned his M.B.A. from Harvard Business School.