



Redwood Region RISE

Insights from Listening Session
Empathy Interviews

DRAFT FOR REVIEW December 2023



Cal Poly
Humboldt.

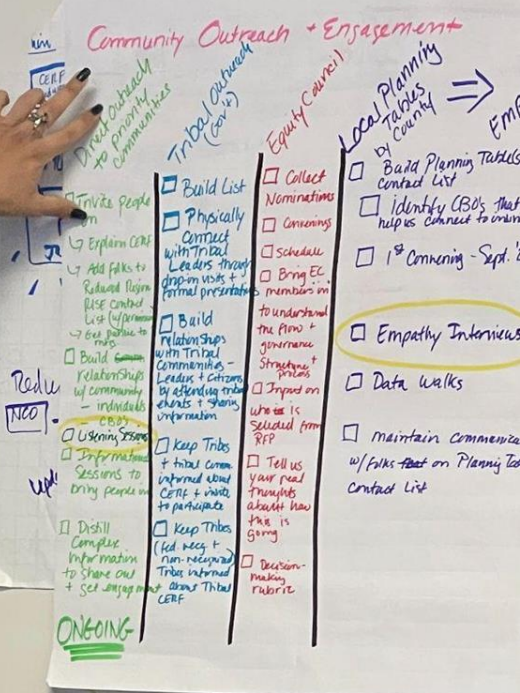


WiFi Password
Wireless!

- Feel heard
- Deep con
- Real p

open deeper con
synthesize & process

leaving someone at?
we asking right Q's
right set of Q's - leading
authenticity of results
small voice
& population
narrowing ppl trying to reach?
be uncomfortable
to get shared



(1A-PERSON is impactful)
(Questions MATTER)

ONGOING

Introduction

Purpose of this Document

Redwood Region RISE proposed to use a Human Centered Design approach to facilitating an inclusive and equitable planning process. ThinkPlace West is partnering with the Regional Convening Team and Outreach and Engagement Lead, North Coast Opportunities, Inc. to provide this support.

We launched our work with the Outreach and Engagement team conducting empathy interviews as part of a broader Listening Session campaign.

The purpose of this document is to capture insights from empathy interviews with young people aged 16-30 who are business owners, workers and job seekers representing Redwood Region Rise priority communities.

This document is intended for use by all planning tables in the RR RISE Collaborative to center the voices and lived experiences of priority communities in the Redwood Coast Region.

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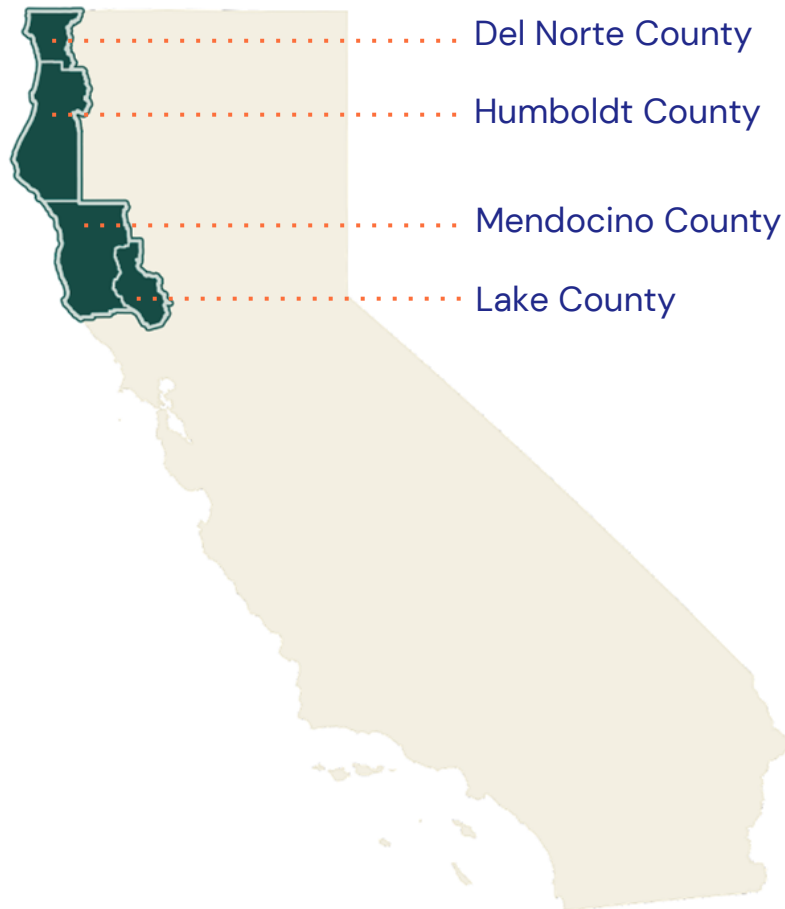


1

BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

Geographic scope

California's Redwood Coast Region



Redwood Region RISE (Resilient Inclusive Sustainable Economy) is a regional community coalition of 650+ members (and counting!) working together to bring good, sustainable jobs to Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Mendocino Counties and Tribal Lands through the California Jobs First (previously known as Community Economic Resilience Fund, CERF) initiative.

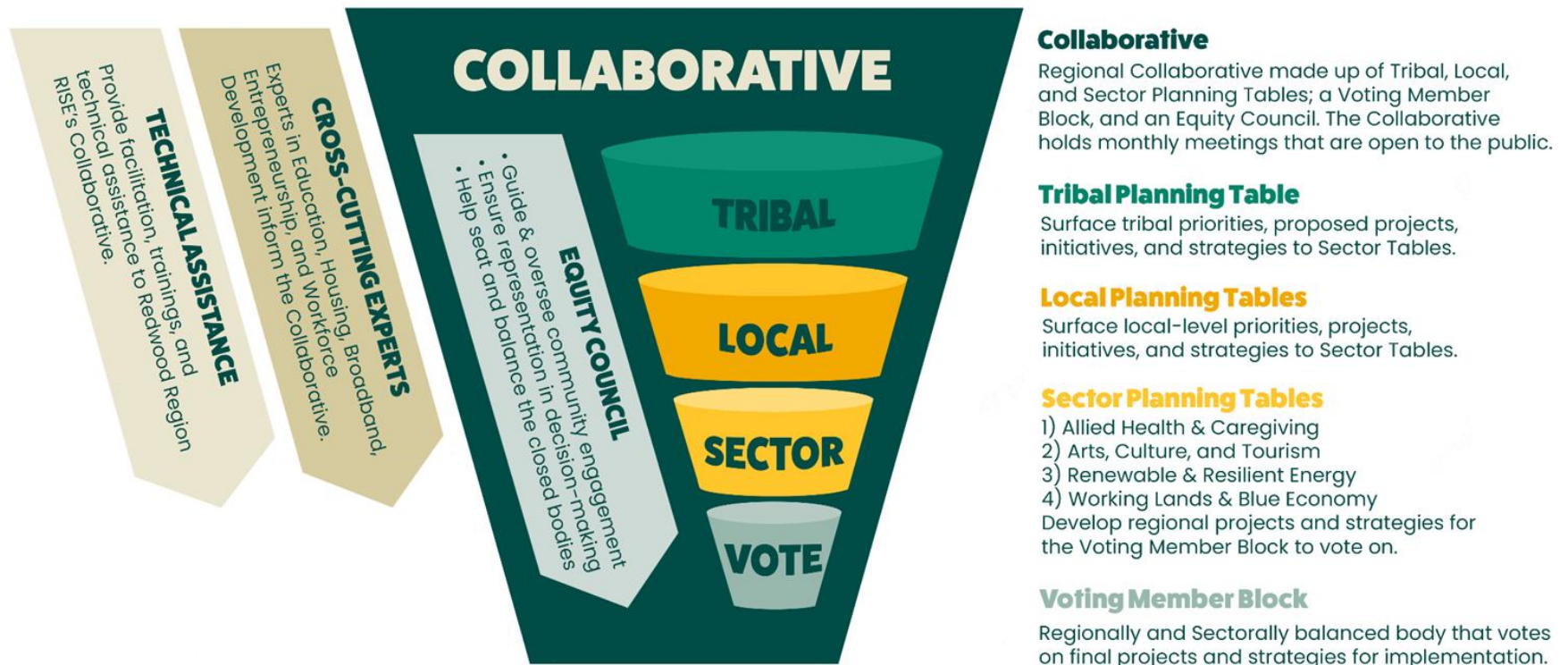
California Jobs First is a \$600 million statewide initiative designed to promote a sustainable and equitable recovery from the economic distress of COVID-19. Through Jobs First, Redwood Region RISE aims to:

1. Create thriving-wage opportunities for workers in our Region;
2. Pursue sustainable economic growth (diversifying economies);
3. Get us closer to California's goals for a carbon neutral future.

RR RISE Collaborative: Regional Governance

The Regional RR RISE Collaborative, through multiple planning tables, is developing a regional vision, strategies and projects leading to equitable, sustainable economic and climate resilience.

Redwood Region RISE: California Jobs First – Planning Phase Flow Chart:



The entire region suffers from historic disinvestment. RR RISE seeks to center the experience of these priority communities.

- Non-federally Recognized Tribal Nations
- Tribal Citizens & Tribal Governments
- Advocates for People of Color (e.g. Black Lives Matter, Asian Americans Advancing Justice, New Hmong Rising Association, etc.)
- Communities of Color
- Immigrants with Documentation (e.g., work visas)
- Individuals without Documentation
- Individuals living in extremely remote/rural areas of the Redwood Coast Region
- Individuals without Broadband Access
- Individuals who were Formerly Incarcerated
- Individuals with Intellectual Developmental Disabilities, Learning Disabilities, Physical Disabilities, Vision Impairment, Hearing Impairment
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Asexual, Intersex + (LGBTQAI+) Individuals
- Members of religious and ethnic minority communities
- Monolingual Hmong-Speakers
- Monolingual Spanish Speakers
- New Citizens
- Unions
- Workers
- Youth
- Seniors

Priority communities disproportionately experience these economic barriers in our region...

Median earnings for adults over 25 in every racial and ethnic group: significantly below state averages

Median earnings for adults over 25 by educational attainment: significantly below state averages and widely diverge at collegiate and graduate levels

Youth 16 – 19 years old: higher level of labor force participation than state average

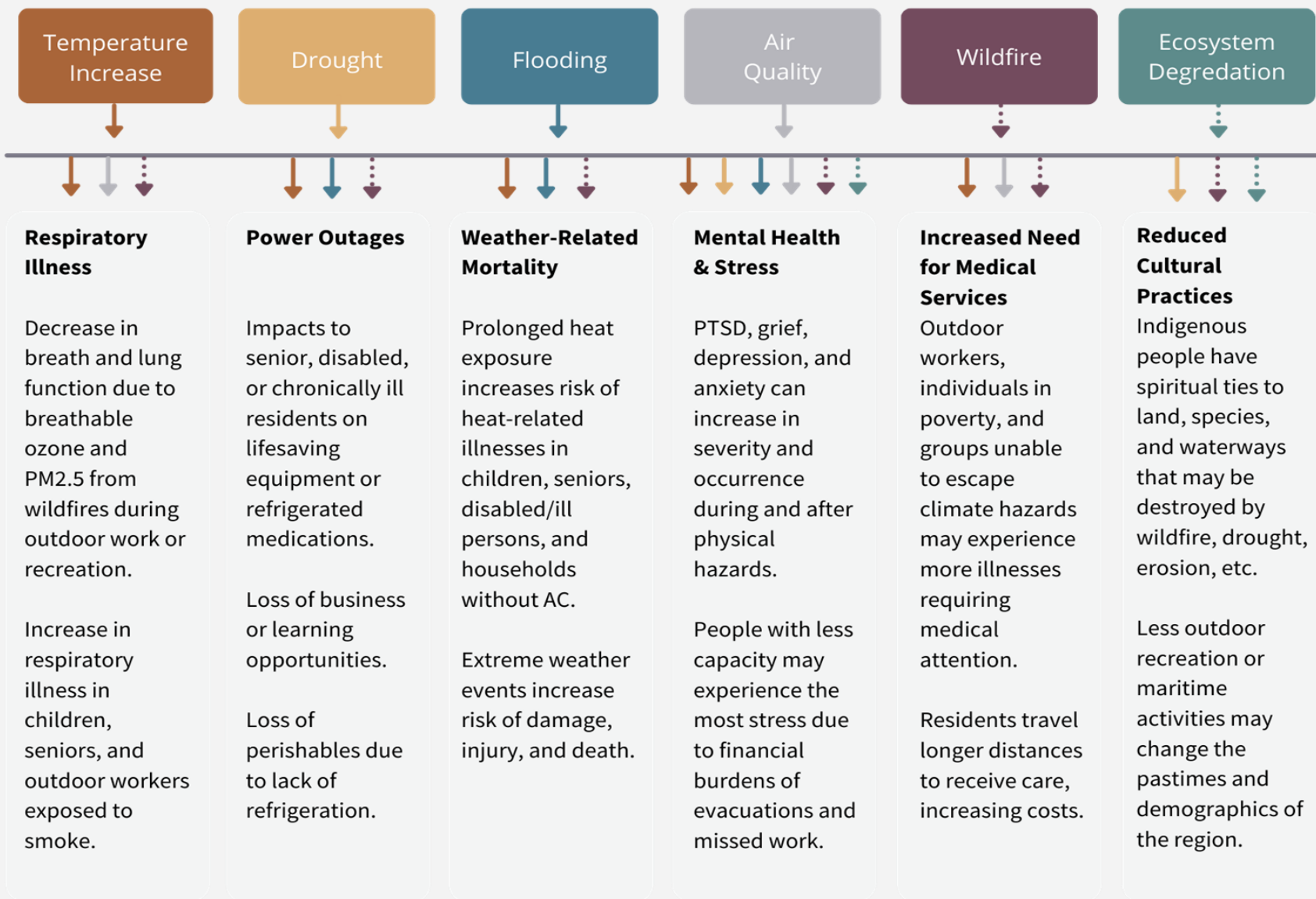
Adults 20 and older: significantly lower levels of labor force participation than state averages

Self-reported disability rates among adults: significantly higher than state averages, particularly for disabilities affecting cognitive ability and independent living

Poverty and unemployment rates exceed state averages: both are higher for all adults, and poverty is critically high for children under 18, American Indians and Alaskan Natives, Black or African Americans and Asians

Healthcare and housing costs as a share of household budget: exceed both CA rural county and state averages

...and are more vulnerable to climate impacts



Project context

ThinkPlace is supporting Redwood Region RISE with capacity building, facilitation & community engagement resources, working closely with the North Coast Opportunities outreach team convening the Local Planning Tables, Equity Council, and the Tribal Planning Table.

This work includes syntheses of listening session data and creating accessible ways to share other information across RR RISE planning tables as the community develops a sustainable, **equitable plan** for economic and climate resilience.



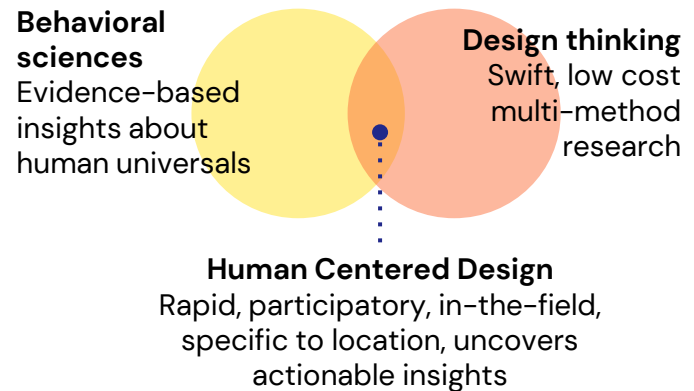


Photo description – Place

Approach

The human-centered design approach involves integrating the human perspective at every step of problem-solving. Empathy is the guiding skill, mindset, and heartset that centers experiences while respecting the stories and emotions of all involved.

Deep, non-judgmental understanding of others' experiences, their what, how, and why, is the essence of this approach. Listening to uncover people's priorities on their terms is pivotal to ensuring voices from priority communities are included in economic development planning.



The Four Voices of Design

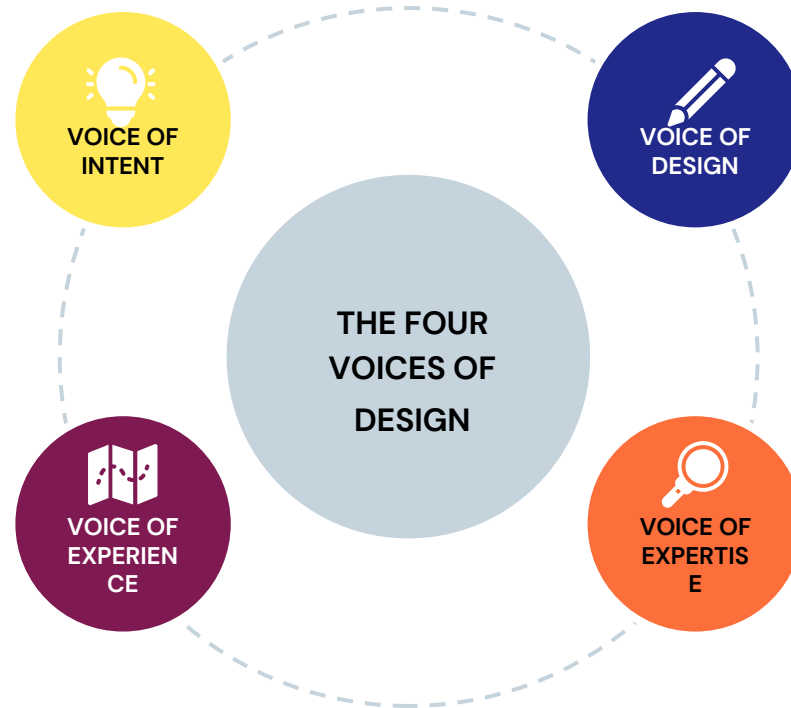
Whole-systems approach to collaboration

To help ensure a genuine human-centered approach to this project, ThinkPlace leverages its Four Voices of Design Model © that allows the necessary diversity of skills and experience to drive the design process.

This model aims to suspend the power that comes from rank and ensure that all participants have equal power and the opportunity to contribute.

Advocate for change and sponsor project to create an enabling environment for change.
Collaborative, Voting Block, State of California, Convening Team Leads

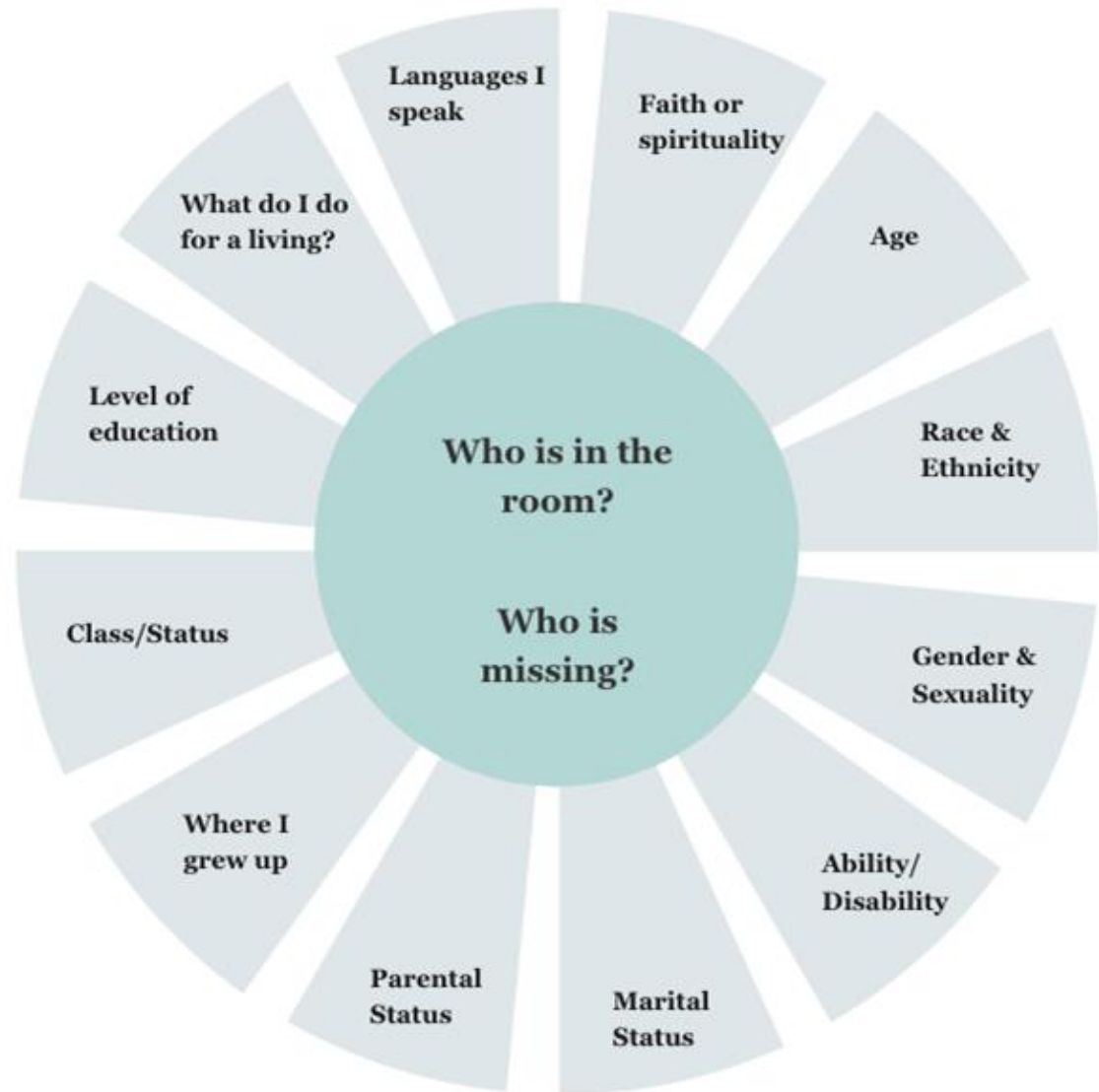
Broker all the other voices, help to navigate complexity through facilitating and synthesising conversations.
California Center for Rural Policy, North Coast Opportunities, ThinkPlace, True North Organizing



Share expertise based on their own experience as members of affected communities.
Equity Council, Priority Populations, Local Planning Tables, Tribal Planning Table*

Offer subject matter expertise supporting change. Work in the system we are seeking to change and understand what is possible and viable.
Sector Tables, Sector Coordinators, Advisors, Tribal Planning Table*

At every step of the design process it is important to ask, *“Who is missing at this table?”*



2

LISTENING SESSIONS: EMPATHY INTERVIEWS

Research Method: Empathy Interviews

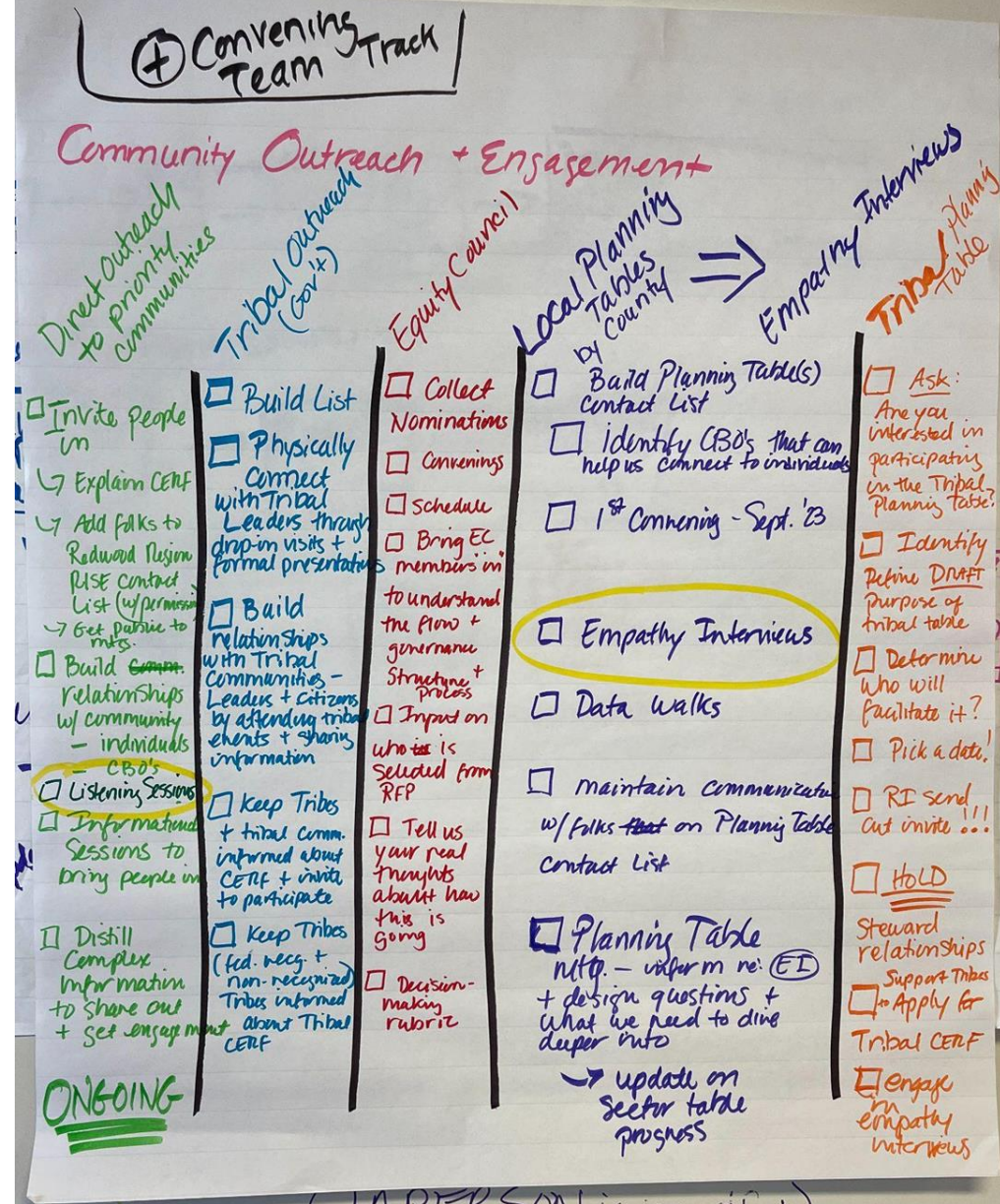
What are Empathy Interviews?

Empathy Interviews are semi-structured interviews that provide guidance on topics, but allow the focus to shift to follow the stories told by the participant.

Why did we conduct empathy interviews?

Empathy interviews allow the **Voice of Experience** to be heard in a **change-planning** space. ThinkPlace provided training to NCO coordinators and paired them with experienced practitioners for the first round of empathy interviews.

Empathy Interviews are just one step in the process to better understand and **co-create experience models** (diagrams that accurately represent social and behavioral interactions widely experienced across the region) with priority populations that shape information for future decisions & actions.



Why Empathy Interviews?

Franklin Covey's 5 Levels of Listening



Empathetic Listening

- The deepest level of listening: to understand, with curiosity, while being non-judgmental. This requires deferring your opinion, listening to the whole story, and understanding what is on the surface as well as the thoughts and feelings under the surface.
- To achieve empathetic listening, we have to slow down, be patient, talk less and listen more, repeat back key points of what was said and reflect and frame in terms your own understanding to ensure we don't overlook anything and that the person feels heard and understood.
- Empathetic listening requires discipline to see through the eyes of the speaker, and willingness to have an open, beginner's mind. Teach yourself to treat every interaction as though this is the first time you've ever heard this issue, even if you think you have heard it before. Set aside the temptation to jump to your own ideas or solutions and be curious!

We heard from...

Young Workers

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Asexual, Intersex + (LGBTQAI+)

Individuals with Intellectual Developmental Disabilities

Tribal Citizens

Individuals with Physical Disabilities

Communities of Color

Youth

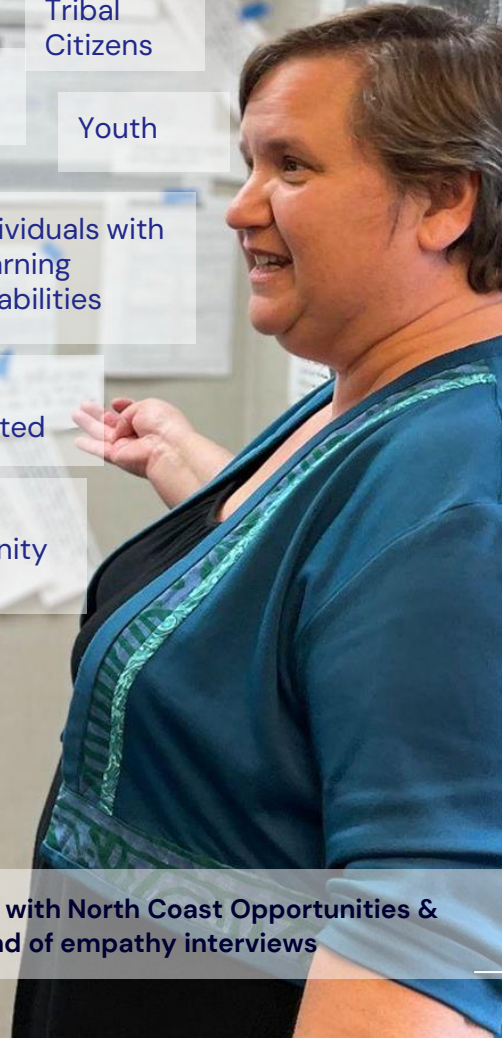
Immigrants with Documentation (e.g work visas)

Individuals with Learning Disabilities

Formerly Incarcerated

Individuals that live in extremely remote/rural areas of the Redwood Coast Region

Hmong Community Leaders



What we seek to understand

Lines of Inquiry

For these interviews, we asked young people aged 16–30 who are members of priority communities and business owners, workers and job seekers questions about:

- How people came to the job or career they have now
- Work history, including best and worst job experiences
- Challenges they face (or faced) in getting a job, working or running a business
- What they know about available jobs in their community or what it would take to grow their business or create jobs in the community

Ukiah Insight Gathering Session with North Coast Opportunities & ThinkPlace—synthesizing the first round of empathy interviews

Empathy Research Methods

Amplifying community voices in the regional planning process



Damien Newman

Empathy research **starts with divergence, gathering many perspectives on the same topic.** This is often depicted as a scribble. It can be hard to tease out clear information.

Through a **convergence process**, the research team first **identifies concepts** (repeated themes) and **then designs them as insights**, teasing out a clear statement of experience (straight line) from diverse perspectives.

From Empathy to Insight



Interviews

NCO and True North Organizing Coordinators and ThinkPlace West **conducted empathy interviews and deep relational 1:1 interviews** from late October to early December. Empathy interviews were recorded and transcribed and relational 1:1 interviews were documented with detailed notes.



Synthesis

Interview teams met in person on November 6th and virtually in early December to compare notes, **lift up meaningful quotes**, and **gather themes** they saw across the interviews. We used worksheets and a coding tool to clarify our thinking, to **go from the 'scribble' to the 'concept' phase of design.**



Insights

Working in pairs, we further clarified our thinking. We pulled quotes that illustrated the regional themes we identified. We wrote concise summaries that highlight the range of experiences people talked about in interviews. **We created insights.**

3

REGIONAL THEMES & INSIGHTS

Regional themes are illuminated by insights

The worker experience: I just want stability.

- 1 I need a job that lasts, and supports me
- 2 Employment is inflexible to my personal and family needs
- 3 If I am connected, I succeed

Skills: How can I grow and qualify and pursue my dreams?

- 4 I live remote, where is the support to work remote?
- 5 Generic support doesn't translate into useful help for me
- 6 I really need flexible education so I can get ahead

Basic Needs: I need things in my community so I can work.

- 7 Walking isn't cutting it... I spend half my day getting places
- 8 My lack of child and family care is paralyzing
- 9 My health is my wealth
- 10 By the time I pay my rent, there's no paycheck left

Purpose: What work means to me.

- 11 I'm here because...
- 12 I left because...
- 13 I know what I'd really love to do but I'm buried in the day-to-day
- 14 My work meets community needs, but is unrecognized

Regional theme

The worker experience: “I just want stability.”

Interview participants reported juggling multiple part-time jobs, school and other obligations while looking for stable full-time employment and pointed to the need for jobs across a wider range of skills, not just entry or professional levels of experience.

Insights connected to this theme

- 1 I need a job that lasts, and supports me
- 2 Employment is inflexible to my personal and family needs
- 3 If I am connected, I succeed



1

I need a job that lasts and supports me

Regional theme
The worker experience: I just want stability.

People hold multiple part-time, dead-end/temporary jobs and/or attend school and/or hold internships while looking for full-time, stable employment.

Job seekers see their choice as between low wage, low skill jobs or better-paying jobs requiring lots of experience, limiting their earnings and career advancement opportunities. Full-time jobs with benefits are few and far between for people without advanced skills. They are looking for jobs in the middle, that can support the cost of living.

"I'm in the under-employment tango."

"And so for several years, I was continuing with the [creative] business and also teaching and teaching, I would say, ultimately did fund my [creative] business for quite a while."

"He is supporting himself in his job. He's volunteering with organizations to build his skill set and to build his resume. So he doesn't have time to advance in his career."

"We don't really look for long-term employees. We like to work with a lot of college students because there's a lot more flexibility."

"So I am often found working in places like Walmart, Home Depot, Verizon, just different companies that need you know, techs or extra hands to do odd jobs."

"And then on top of that there's no, they don't have good benefits. Yeah, there's no benefits. It's just basically by the hour and nothing else."

"The local workforce, it's all the same jobs, same employers. I've already been down that road."



1

I need a job that lasts and supports me

What's the "so what?"

Name the observation: People hold multiple jobs while looking for permanent full-time work; None to limited "on the job" training opportunities; no clear next step.

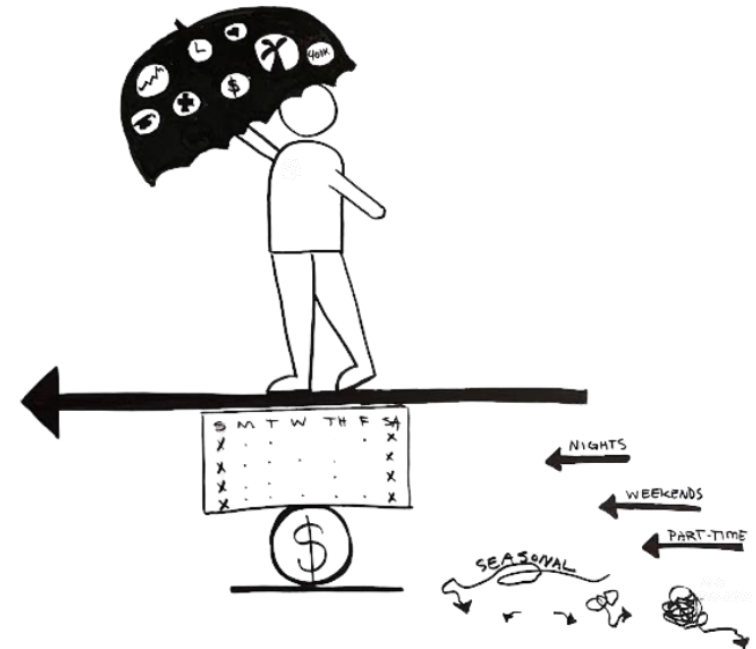
What is happening? People described holding multiple part-time and/or temporary jobs while being in school and/or looking for full-time work and/or trying to make a part-time job full-time; Job seekers see low-wage, low-skill job openings or higher-pay jobs that require experience, Limited opportunities for getting better jobs.

Why is this happening? Not many jobs in area of interest, not many jobs in areas where they live, seasonal work, trying to build skills and qualify for job they want, need to work, lots of unrewarding work environments.

What are the consequences? Lots of movement in and out of employment (churn), loss of productivity; job seekers are often stuck in lower paid/lower skill jobs.

What is surprising? Consistency of these reports from a wide variety of our priority populations.

Regional theme
The worker experience: I just want stability.



2

Employment is inflexible to my personal and family needs

Regional theme
The worker experience: I just want stability.

Employment conditions present challenges for many people, ranging from not “fitting in” due to neurodivergence or needing a flexible schedule due to caregiving responsibilities.

Systems and structures are not designed for the people who live here. Opportunities for priority populations don’t exist because jobs aren’t designed for their comfort or needs.

*“If I had a magic wand,] I would actually try to improve work conditions at a lot of places. A lot of people are treated like sh*t at work in this area.”*

“Sometimes there are days when she needs to be picked up early from school – my job right now, they’re really understanding with our situation.”

“I have expressed traits of autism way before I was diagnosed and that has always played a heavy role in employment. I got fired from multiple places.”

“I can’t see myself like be out of the house the 40 hours a week because I still have, you know, two younger kids, a three year old and a one year old and I just, you know, can’t miss those first days, like years, then they go to school and then they’re like eight hours at school, six hours at school. Yeah, that’s why I work part time.”

“At the end of the day, companies don’t care. We are a metric and a number. If they could just learn how to respect their employees.”



2

Employment is inflexible to my personal and family needs

Regional theme
The worker experience: I just want stability.

What's the "so what?"

Name the observation: People are feeling undervalued and unappreciated at work, employers are more focused on strict compliance with rules than helping people keep their jobs

Who is having this experience? many people, especially who express themselves creatively or differently who question why things are done one way, Non-native English speakers, new immigrants, migrant workers, students; Parents, families with children and youth.

What is happening? People are getting fired, Don't feel seen at jobs, feel like they are penalized when they need to adjust schedules to balance work and life.

Why is this happening? Small businesses don't need to provide certain worker benefits or protections; Not enough unions/work protection, not enough employers willing to adjust to help people make it work.

What are the consequences? People in region choose not to work instead of staying in jobs that keep them from meeting family obligations, or that stifle their creativity; missed opportunity for businesses to keep good workers; Parents want to move out of the area

What is surprising? We have talented, skilled workers who are struggling because of breakdowns in employer-worker relationships



3 If I am connected, I succeed

Regional theme
The worker experience: I just want stability.

People who feel connected and supported have more positive experiences with being seen and valued on their path to work, within work settings, and as part of the communities in which they strive to succeed as entrepreneurs.

Connections occur on multiple levels – by identity group (LGBTQAI+), shared lived experience (formerly incarcerated, Spanish speaker), community group (church, cultural group), geographic community, as clients, and as mentors and advocates within and outside of work settings.

People rely on these connections to find jobs, as well as to start and grow their business. They stay in jobs longer and have more success and positive employment experiences overall.

“I kind of had a realization that... I honestly could make a bigger splash where I was from because of all the connections I had.”

“What I enjoy most is to see the relationships that I’m building with a community – to see how I’m helping the community.”

“I have expressed traits of autism way before I was diagnosed and that has always played a heavy role in employment. I got fired from multiple places.”

“I want to see Native youth make it out and have a good life.”

“All the [employment] support came from people I know and less from any kind of system.”

“It’s healing to have work in Native organizations with Native people who understand you and relate to your cultural values.”



3

If I am connected, I succeed

What's the "so what?"

Name the observation: Supportive relationships and community connection help people feel seen and valued

What is happening? People foster pathways to work and like/grow in their jobs when they know others see their skills and value who they are

Why is this happening? Connections contribute to feeling supported, on their family/identity/geographic communities to find jobs

What are the consequences? Creating pathways to work, positive employment experiences, success in roles, longer times at jobs, supports small businesses through strengthened relationships with clients and affirming one's purpose, and plants seeds for community members to pursue their dreams

What is surprising? How many people refer to relationships with others in connecting them to jobs, building and sustaining their business, job satisfaction, and meeting community needs

Regional theme
The worker experience: I just want stability.



Regional theme

Skills: How can I grow and qualify and pursue my dreams?

Participants highlighted the kinds of support they need to succeed in starting or growing a business, finding a job and/or advancing in a career they would like to pursue. Barriers to success include unreliable information about existing job opportunities, high costs, distance, scheduling and lack of access to programs/services with content tailored to meet their needs.

Insights connected to this theme

- 4 I live remote, where is the support to work remote?
- 5 Generic support doesn't translate into useful help for me
- 6 I really need flexible education so I can get ahead



4

I live remote, where is the support to work remote?

Regional theme
Skills: How can I grow and qualify and pursue my dreams?

Remote work seems tailor-made for our remote region, but barriers make it difficult to sustain. Work labeled as “remote” is often really “work from home,” still requiring residency in or near a city.

Many learning and support opportunities are clustered in larger communities and inaccessible to those in remote corners, requiring lots of time and money to attend in person. Content in training isn’t geared toward those in very remote areas. Entrepreneurs can have difficulty getting supplies or selling their product in limited local markets.

“I live really rural, so it would require a lot of drive time to be in person [for training]. And so... you’re investing in the gas, you’re investing your time in that total drive time. I think that can really pose a challenge for some of our rural entrepreneurs.”

“So you kind of hit this point where you hit max saturation. Everybody who’s interested in purchasing has already purchased.”

“I want to be successful and persevere as an entrepreneur while raising my three girls.”

“I prefer to work alone. It improves my mental health as well as just being able to do what you want with your space with no one else to be like ‘you can’t do that.’”

“These websites that post these remote jobs they require you to pay money up front to submit applications.”

“You can Google ‘remote jobs,’ and a dozen boards will pop up. Half of them feel like scams.”



4

I live remote, where is the support to work remote?

What's the "so what?"

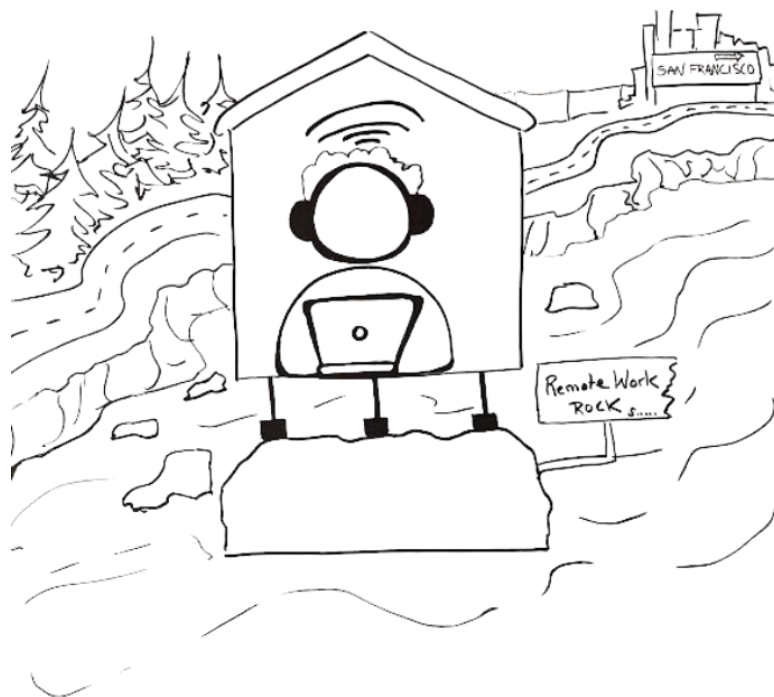
Name the observation: Entrepreneurs in remote rural areas have difficulty accessing business and marketing training and support services, child care, and job opportunities.

What is happening? Starting businesses, but long-distance and limited broadband make access to support services inconsistent and frustrating. Workers have to move to cities, away from their family and communities, to seek jobs.

Why is this happening? Services are often located in center towns/cities like Ukiah & Eureka (1.5 or more hours away).

What are the consequences? Missed professional development opportunities that can lead to business decisions in a vacuum, limited ability to be viable and expand, families lack choices to remain where they have housing and community.

Regional theme
Skills: How can I grow and qualify and pursue my dreams?



5

Generic support doesn't translate into useful help for me

Regional theme
Skills: How can I grow and qualify and pursue my dreams?

Those wanting to pursue a degree, credential, or certificate to enter the workforce or achieve their goals have different backgrounds, needs, and strengths.

People can't find or get to school/community programs that offer career guidance, opportunities to gain technical and people skills, mentorship and support, growing as a person, and learning to navigate education or employment systems, especially those tailored to fit their circumstances.

When people have help overcoming obstacles as they move through new life experiences and identify and make headway on a career path, many are optimistic and energized to move forward.

"I would hope for a community center with classes so people could learn...including life skills."

"I saw they were business majors (groups of friends) and I took some business classes and that kind of sparked that interest in business in me."

"Not having the knowledge costs you money."

"I've got a very difficult time identifying passions. I can tell you what I don't like to do once I've tried it."

"There needs to be more work readiness... A lot of high schools around here don't have those programs that really uplift kids to have trade skills that they want to go into."

"I think it's really common in people with my background that they grow up not really finding what their true gifts are, not really finding what their talents are."



5

Generic support doesn't translate into useful help for me

Regional theme
Skills: How can I grow and qualify and pursue my dreams?

What's the "so what?"

Name the observation: People are generally hopeful/optimistic about their future, but can't find meaningful supports that help them identify their purpose, gain work experience, qualify for higher paying jobs in their area of interest, and develop the skills required for jobs.

What is happening? Barriers include lack of money, time, or capacity to pursue longer-term goals, needing on-the-job training, lack of professional mentors who lead to more successful business decisions and career choices, and family responsibilities (pregnant, raising children). Employed Native youth cite support from Tribes, Tribal programs, and families and have hopes for entering careers of their choice, though need counselors who aren't focused on taking courses for transfer but on individualized passions.

Why is this happening? Few educational and work experience opportunities for youth, including formalized mentorship (vs. informal connections) to identify career interests and strengths, and imagine pathways and support systems that move them towards career success; mentors; may not be wishing to return to their communities.

What are the consequences? People face barriers in realizing their dreams, such as lacking knowledge and skills to access information in the language they speak, navigate complex systems, and acquire a degree/certificate to qualify for higher paying jobs. Students might not be able to go to 4-year universities and complete AAs with limited direction. Contributes to reduced capacity for pursuing dreams, and breakdowns in communication, isolation, and missed opportunities; parents want to move out of the area; businesses are not fully staffed; mental health and finances are affected

What is surprising? Hopefulness paired with lack of infrastructure to help advance careers or start/sustain businesses, many of which address community needs; lack of formal business/student mentors



6

I need more local and affordable education options so I can get ahead

Regional theme
Skills: How can I grow and qualify and pursue my dreams?

Young people and most adults in this region are constrained in their college/education choices by cost and local availability.

Many local jobs offering a career path require a four-year degree, which can feel unattainable due to distance and/or cost. Students end up choosing careers for which there is either training/education available locally or drifting between jobs without a clear career path. Jobs in the “middle” that pay well without requiring a degree are few and far between.

“A lot of jobs require degrees that require more education that people don’t have [access to] in the community.”

“Most good paying jobs require a degree or lots of work experience. Dad wanted to be a doctor, but didn’t finish schooling because he had to support his family.”

“Student debt is a big problem because you have to start working wherever right away. I’d like to see free education – at least for an Associate’s degree.”

“[Graduate school] would be out of reach for most people in my zip code. Educational grants to people would be helpful now more than ever, because people could do it online.”

[We need] “more job opportunities for people who don’t have an educational background or like a high school degree, but give them a chance to maybe learn on the job.”

“Associate’s degree should be free so they aren’t making career choices based on student debt.”



6

I need more local and affordable education options so I can get ahead

What's the "so what?"

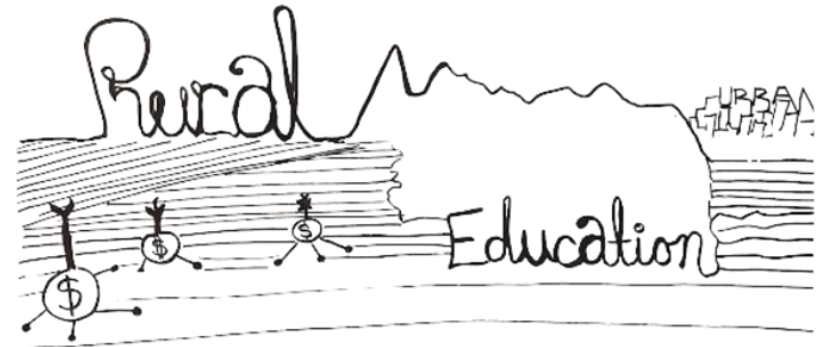
Name the observation: Costs of university education (and concerns about debt) are limiting choices students take in career paths

What is happening? People are pursuing local certification programs over 4+ year degrees in order to afford education but certificates don't stack and don't always help them qualify for a job

Why is this happening? Increasing tuition at UCs and CSUs, not many students graduate high school with A-G requirements needed to go to 4 year, even at community college, they are taking remedial classes—which cost more money for the same degree.

What are the consequences? Not getting required education for higher paying professions/jobs, unable to afford high housing and/or transportation costs

Regional theme
Skills: How can I grow and qualify and pursue my dreams?



Regional theme

Basic needs: I need things in my community so I can work.

People we interviewed cited a range of conditions like access to healthcare, child care, the high cost of housing and transportation that present barriers to economic sufficiency and mobility.

Insights connected to this theme

7

Walking isn't cutting it... I spend half my day getting places

8

My lack of child and family care is paralyzing

9

My health is my wealth

10

By the time I pay my rent, there's no paycheck left



7

Walking isn't cutting it... I spend half my day getting places

Regional theme
Basic Needs: I need things in my community so I can work

Long distances between communities and a lack of affordable, reliable transportation create barriers to opportunities.

Jobs, education, training, shopping, day care may all be out of reach for people without personal vehicles or money for gas. Limited public transit options don't serve the most remote parts of the region at all and often run infrequently everywhere else.

"I highly recommend [dual enrollment in community college] for students highly, highly recommended, so long as transportation is not an issue. That was the main challenge for me."

"I had to leave my home because there were no jobs. I had no transportation and needed to get away from the substance abuse to be healthy."

"Lack of transportation options as a disabled person is a major limitation to access employment."

"Even the roads to get here sometimes, depending on the weather, half of them are closed."

"If we are working on creating more equitable, accessible solutions to jobs and employment, transportation and public transportation are a huge part of that to me, because there are so many places I just don't get to go to."



7 Walking isn't cutting it... I spend half my day getting places

Regional theme
Basic Needs: I need things in my community so I can work

What's the "so what?"

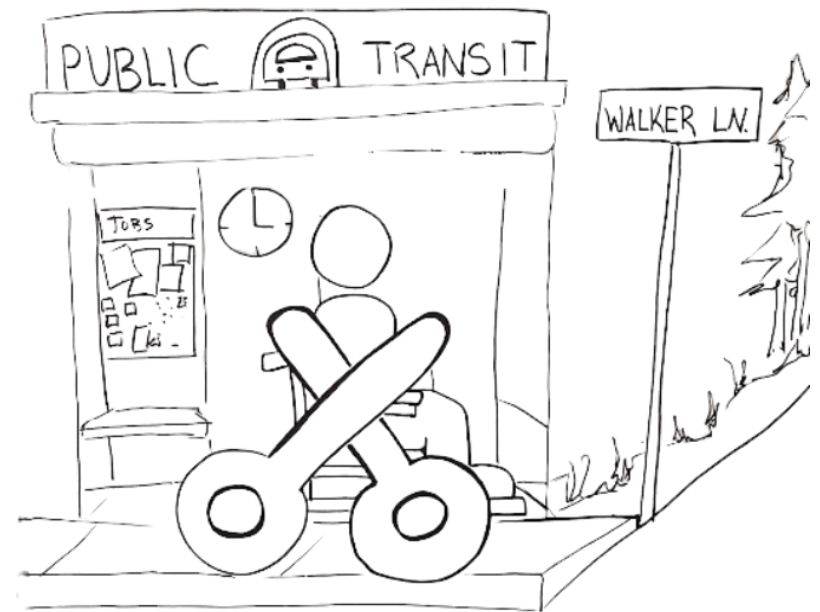
Name the observation: Transportation/Public transportation, access to a car.

What is happening? People can't get to places that are hiring and/or work; they can't get around their community easily so they can coordinate personal and work schedules; lack of access to public transportation, especially in rural/remote areas, lack of infrastructure, road closures, lack of affordable options; lack of options for people with disabilities.

Why is this happening? Infrastructure is still being built or is non-existent, people can't afford cars, or to maintain them, or gas; there are no bus routes or they are cancelled or unreliable. They are also often disconnected so it takes FOREVER to get from A to B on public transit (it's not like you can hop on bus 1 at place A which takes you to bus 6 to get to place Z).

What are the consequences? People not being able to get to places they need to go to either get food, get therapy, get employment, etc. Stress, anxiety, depression, fatigue; not being able to get to these places to/from work so they need to choose one or the other because there is no time for both.

What is surprising? How many barriers people face on a daily basis that impacts their livelihood and health



8

My lack of child and family care is paralyzing

Regional theme
Basic Needs: I need things in my community so I can work

It's not possible to work if you do not have care for children and loved ones. People leave the workforce or do not pursue opportunities for advancement because of limited affordable care. Even when children are school age, drop off and pick up times impact employability.

There is also a physical, emotional, and time impact of caregiving that is often under-recognized in economic development. Responsibility for care disproportionately impacts women, including low pay for care jobs. When employers do provide flexibility, it improves people's lives.

"If you don't have a relative, there is no childcare around here."

"Access to childcare and education would make a major difference in the amount of opportunities you have."

"When I got pregnant with my first daughter, I decided I wanted to just drop everything and raise a baby. I always meant to go back to grad school, but never quite did."

"Maybe I'll do preschool teaching and I went back to school to [community college] and got my 12 units and then I looked at like the price, you know, they were offering for like a starting preschool teacher and it was like, literally a \$10 an hour drop in pay."

"I'm pretty sure I'm breaking some type of rule or law somewhere. So don't tell nobody. But I bring my kids to work."

"It was literally impossible to find a daycare provider that was taking in a new child, let alone an infant child. We do not have enough childcare providers."



8 My lack of child and family care is paralyzing

Regional theme
Basic Needs: I need things in my community so I can work

What's the "so what?"

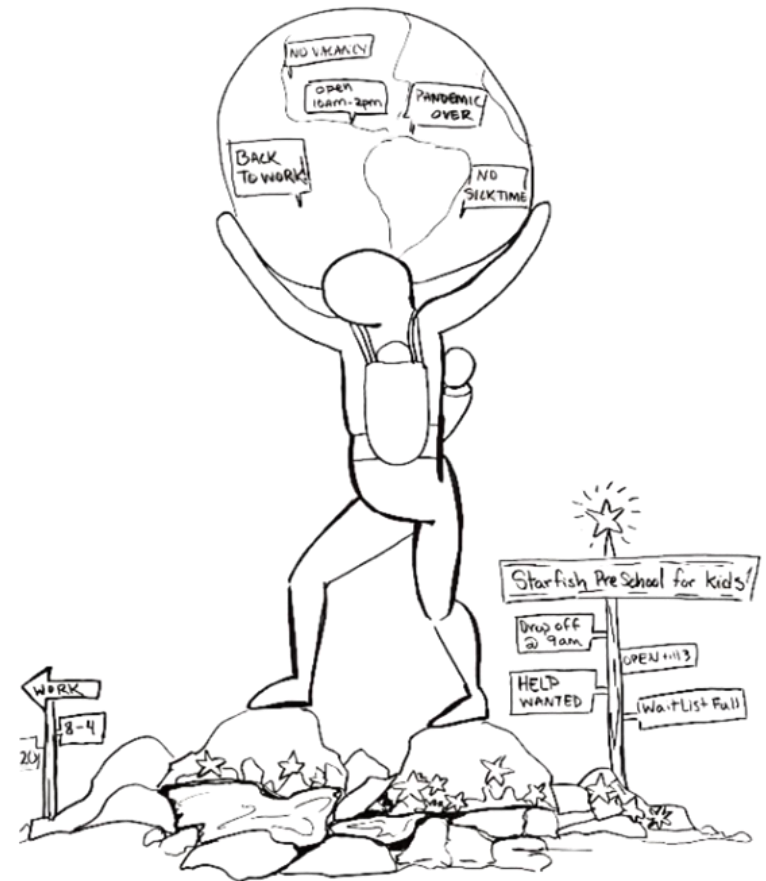
Name the observation: It's hard to balance work and family care

What is happening? Needing to adjust work hours to transport family members from/to school, care, etc.

Why is this happening? Working adults are primary caregivers for other dependent family members. Child care jobs don't pay, so there is a shortage of providers. Even if they can find a provider, it may be too far away from work, or too expensive relative to wages the person earns.

What are the consequences? People choose caring for their children over jobs they want or need. Jobs need to accommodate flexible work schedules if they want more people in the workforce

What is surprising? Workers who feel a sense of understanding and community at their job are able to make this work – some employers are very understanding



9 My health is my wealth

Regional theme
Basic Needs: I need things in my community so I can work

Mental and physical health are a foundation for being able to work and earn a living. Conversely, a job can contribute to physical and mental well-being.

Healthy foods aren't necessarily affordable and aren't accessible in remote parts of the region. Health services are often distant. It can be difficult to afford traveling for health services, especially if employers won't make accommodations for time off.

Many people feel deep connection to our region's natural beauty and find it healing.

"One field that is lacking in support is mental health. My studies were heavily impacted by mental health."

"I do maintain physical activity in my life as a priority and just health overall."

"CalFresh is relatively easy to sign up for but it's one of those things where if you're just over the mark, you can't get any."

"I feel like, the community needs more financial education and just overall, like health, health and wealth education."

"I think I'm just always wanting to work on making it a safer place for everyone to kind of find healing because it really is a healing environment."

"You know, if I can go to Jack In the Box and make \$19 an hour, why am I gonna go to work at rape crisis? You know, 7.50/hr and have to be traumatized every day."

"Lack of fresh food impacts wellness in a place where accessible medical treatment is already a challenge."



9 My health is my wealth

Regional theme
Basic Needs: I need things in my community so I can work

What's the "so what?"

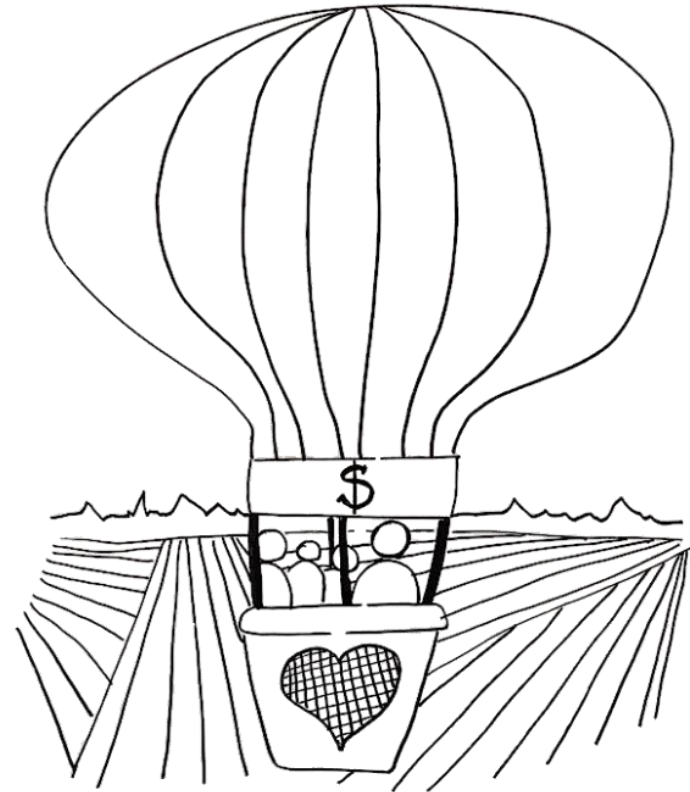
Name the observation: Access to affordable fresh produce; the accessibility of services are few and far between, Jobs that make adjustments for people who need them don't exist. Consequences of Native youth lacking healthy opportunities on ancestral lands are extreme: serious food/housing insecurity, rampant addiction struggles, high rates of suicide, missing people and mortality. .

What is happening? People resort to eating food that is not healthy or nutritious, Developing more health issues, Lack of opportunities to work because body is not physically able; There are few services available and people with disabilities have experienced getting fired or not getting hired because accommodations are not made

Why is this happening? Inability to keep medical personnel; rural health underfunded; Inflation; few orgs who know how to get fresh food? Not visible? People don't feel seen or heard. Large employers, corporations, government etc. policies are set by leadership outside of the region (lack of autonomy, power & influence)

What are the consequences? People getting health issues, people starving, people not able to work due to fatigue or lack of energy; Unemployment, Isolation

What is surprising? An entire class of people don't have supports or protection.



10

By the time I pay my rent, there's no paycheck left

Regional theme
Basic Needs: I need things in my community so I can work

Expensive, hard-to-find housing causes people to move out of the area, take a job they don't like, or live with family. Young people trying to move away for education find the cost of housing makes a four-year degree impossible. Even for businesses, the cost of renting space can be prohibitive. Many employers have struggled filling positions due to unavailability of housing.

This not only speaks to the high cost of housing, but that wages do not match the cost of living in the area. Thus, high housing cost and low pay means people are constantly struggling and financially stressed.

"This month I could really use an extra \$500. I am struggling and now I'm gonna struggle for the next three paychecks because I'm gonna have to put everything on a credit card, you know what I mean?"

"Housing has been really transient, had to bounce around a lot to friends, house-sitting/couch surfing. Rent has to be under \$500 to work."

"Buying a house seems unaffordable. Feels like I'll always be renting."

"I think the biggest reason [medical assistants aren't applying for jobs] is people can't find good housing. It's too expensive. I mean, right now rent is around \$1500 to \$1800 for a studio."

"When it comes to living expenses, we are definitely living paycheck to paycheck and honestly, just anything we get our hands on goes directly to bills"

"Most businesses out here can't afford a place to rent. It is the business owners running their own store because there aren't enough sales to hire anyone else."

"I am currently living with my parents and can't find affordable housing."



10

By the time I pay my rent, there's no paycheck left

What's the "so what?"

Name the observation: Housing/Affordable housing; Housing; Living at home due to high cost of housing in CA; high cost of housing paired with job pay that doesn't reflect the cost of living

What is happening? Not enough housing, not enough low-income housing, not enough \$\$ to buy a home; Not enough affordable housing options, too expensive and unattainable for most of the population, Forcing people to move to cities (outside the region); Would like to be able to go to university or work in other CA communities, but staying at home w/ family to afford [school]; financial stress makes people feel they need higher-paying jobs which they cannot find or access

Why is this happening? Low wages, lack of housing; Rental and home ownership costs are not balanced and affordable for entry-level job seekers and students; Inflation

What are the consequences? People want to move where they have more affordable homes; Improved education and increased job opportunities are being missed; People being left with no other options, either move in with family or move to other city/town; financial stress

Regional theme
Basic Needs: I need things in my community so I can work



Regional theme

Purpose: What work means to me

People choose to live and work in this region for many different reasons, many of which are influenced by deep relationships to places, people and lifeways. Sometimes the reasons are equally as compelling when they decide it's not possible for them to stay.

Work is connected to complex motivations and meaning in their lives and helps them meet important needs, not all of which are motivated by economics.

Insights connected to this theme

- 11 "I'm here because..."
- 12 My work meets community needs, but is unrecognized
- 13 I know what I'd really love to do but I'm buried in the day-to-day
- 14 My work meets community needs, but is unrecognized



I'm here because...

People spoke of many challenges to living in this region, from a shortage of jobs, opportunities, and child care to facing prejudice and trauma. Yet they are all still here. Why?

Some people spoke of this region as a healing place, about their connection to land and water. Others spoke about wanting to stay close to family or a network of support. For Indigenous people, this region has been their home since time immemorial.

"I fell in love with the place. I fell in love with the community, just the natural beauty, the slow pace."

"I think I love living in Humboldt County because being a tribal member, we've never relocated, we've always been where we are. And so that just really makes me feel like this is where I'm supposed to be."

"I often take like a longer two hour lunch. Another part of the quality of life thing. I love to go to the beach and just run with my dog."

"I love how walkable it is. I think my quality of life is so much better than if I was in a city. I don't, spend my day in a 40 hour, 40 minute commute twice a day. I walk three blocks to work. And then I know last night, yeah, last night I like, you know, went out and I walked a block to the rock climbing gym and then a block to get dinner."

"I like that people that are not professional farmers still farm and there's just more nature and more engagement and awareness of the land."

"I don't think I would want to live anywhere else."

Regional theme
Purpose: What work means to me



11 I'm here because...

Regional theme
Purpose: What work means to me

What's the "so what?"

Name the observation:

People brought up many challenges to living in this region, but everyone we talked to still lives here. Why? What keeps people here? Many people identified the region's natural beauty and healing qualities, family, or community connections as their reason for staying.

What is happening?

Even though people face challenges, they stay in this region for a reason. Almost none said their job is the reason they stay.

Why is this happening?

Different people had different reasons. The Indigenous peoples of this region have lived here since time immemorial and feel connected to place. Others are drawn to the clean air and outdoor recreation. Some called it a healing place. Some don't want to move away from family.

What are the consequences?

Some people take lower-paying jobs than they could get elsewhere because it's what lets them stay. Others give up on career options because they can't support themselves in this region in creative careers, for example.

What is surprising?

How many people talked about the challenges of staying, but still find the benefits outweigh the hurdles they face.



12 I left because...

Regional theme
Purpose: What work means to me

Even people who love this place sometimes leave. They leave to find better-paying jobs. Or to chase educational opportunities that aren't available in the region. Or to find more affordable housing and cost of living somewhere else.

Others leave to get away from something. Racism, homophobia, and other prejudices can make life difficult and cause trauma.

These issues came up in interviews, even though everyone interviewed currently lives in the region. Some have left and come back. Some moved from away and made comparisons. Others simply talked about things that have made them think about leaving.

"Like access to medical care, access to housing, you know, I mean, all those things are really, would make people leave if you have to drive to San Francisco once a month for an appointment and you can't get a day off a month."

"I feel the transphobia and homophobia daily. I know other folks, you know, in my close community feel a lot of racism and a lot of, you know, tough things living here."

"Another difficult thing is [expletive] dentist work with all the way down to [expletive] Sacramento for that because no one around here accepts Medicare for new patients unless you're under 18. And there isn't a solid dentist."

"I'm planning to go back home at some point and continuing my education [in music]. Here in Mendocino, I do understand that there's some music education. I don't think it's the best just because I just haven't met like the caliber of musicians in the area."

"More and more people have moved away. People that I grew up with are trying to find a cheaper place to live in like Oklahoma."



12 I left because...

Regional theme
Purpose: What work means to me

What's the "so what?"

Name the observation:

Many people brought up significant challenges to living in this area and talked about reasons they've considered leaving or about why people they know have left.

What is happening?

People often leave the region to move to less remote, larger communities with more opportunities for education or jobs. People leave because they experience violence, exclusion and/or a lack of acceptance of who they are..

Why is this happening?

People can't find meaningful work with a living wage. There's a shortage of housing in general, which means there's no affordable housing. People with specialized medical needs travel 3-7 hours to receive care. There are limited education and training opportunities. Members of minority groups, including LGBTQ folks, experience bullying, racism, and homophobia.

What are the consequences?

People who love this region aren't able to make a living or a life here. People move far from people and places they love.

What is surprising?

That more people don't leave. People talked about real day-to-day struggles living in the region. Many leave, but everyone we talked to still lives here.



I know what I'd really love to do but I'm buried in the day-to-day...

Regional theme
Purpose: What work means to me

People are juggling work, school, caregiving, and wearing many other hats. How can folks so buried in day-to-day challenges and survival dream about what will make a better future, build their capacity to develop their purpose and find and access quality jobs?

People described making hard choices to forgo their dreams simply to earn enough to cover basic needs for themselves and their families. Many have a "side hustle" or passion projects that feed creative outlets but don't bring in enough money to pay the bills. Some can't find teachers or mentor to help them take their creative talent to the next level and know others who have left the area for this reason.

"There is a sense of trust, this is her wanting to change how she looks and I got to be a part of that. Also watching another client go through their transformation being trans, and seeing... him through his journey and it was very heartwarming."

"I do often think about how if I'd gone, like, the community college route. And maybe done, more university, you know, perhaps being able to actually pursue that journalism career and stuff like that."

"I took a major pay cut because they were only hiring entry level.... I decided it was worth it because I had no other option besides leaving here. So I took a \$20,000 pay cut."

"X and X are probably two of the nicest bosses I've ever had. Every time I have to have a hard conversation with them, they're very understanding. It's not like they blow up and scream in my face."

"I love what I do, but I need to be able to support myself at the end of the day and living paycheck to paycheck is not great."



I know what I'd really love to do but I'm buried in the day-to-day...

Regional theme
Purpose: What work means to me

What's the "so what?"

Name the observation:

People don't have options or opportunities to pursue creative careers; missed opportunities; jobs need to pay people enough to support themselves so they have choices

What is happening? Despite being able to describe what they consider their purpose in life – and in work – people have trouble finding and accessing such jobs.

Why is this happening? Reasons may include lack of available quality jobs,, not having had the chance to identify their purpose early in their life as part of their educational and/or work experience,, not having capacity to search for a new job or pursue a new career path; regardless of these challenges, people want to stay because they love the beauty and sense of community

What are the consequences? People are not growing into their potential or feeling satisfied at work. People don't see possibilities to grow their own business or any possibilities that will change the way things are. The region is missing out on talent.

What is surprising? The number of people who can identify what they're passionate about, that those passions are often about creative pursuits and making their communities a better place –, and yet all the barriers that get in the way of living their purpose



My work meets community needs, but is unrecognized

Regional theme
Purpose: What work means to me

Some jobs are important to building community and are sources of rewards beyond monetary compensation. Some uncompensated work should be a paid job.

When people provide services like transportation, translation, family care and emotional support to help others that ultimately benefits employers and institutions, can their services be compensated?

What parts of community work are essential elements to building social networks and creative outlets outside the cash economy?

"So [name] came to me and was super honest from the get and she was like, 'Look, I am here undocumented, but I am amazing at people skills and I'm bilingual.' Helping her help herself is amazing."

"Once a year I donate 10 hours... that's part of giving back."

"I'm always bringing water advocacy and generating these conversations, like how can we advocate for water within our own home, within our families, within our classrooms?"

"We do a lot of organizing locally around like mutual aid, helping a lot of houseless folks access to food and different supplies, stuff like that. So that's kind of more of my community role."

"What I've been doing kind of just on my own, just out of the kindness of my heart, I've been working with people that are only Spanish speaking, They're trying to skip... businesses because it's hard [for them] to navigate the system."

"One of the things that always keeps arising in these communities is like there's a goal. We all came here for a reason."



My work meets community needs, but is unrecognized

Regional theme
Purpose: What work means to me

What's the "so what?"

Name the observation:

People do a lot to address the needs they see in the community, and they often engage in this service work in addition to running their business and engaging in their job. Some of this work could be paid work (e.g., translation, food delivery, etc)

Who is having this experience? Business owners and workers who are often struggling themselves to make ends meet; those who feel passionate about helping others; those who draw upon their own lived experience and challenges to help others in similar circumstances.

What is happening? Community members are responding to the needs of others in creative meaningful ways; inspired to act, they draw upon their experiences, skills, and knowledge to uplift others, often times providing such supports within the context of their own business, though these services go unpaid.

Why is this happening? Being able to help others in need is fulfilling in and of itself, yet comes at the cost of their own time and energy.

What are the consequences? Those who receive these acts of kindness are uplifted and supported; those who give feel pride and purpose and yet are unrecognized for these important services they provide.

What is surprising? That those who are already so overwhelmed by life and running their own businesses, give and give..



Now that we know, what will we do?

This report is being reviewed by our
community:

The people we interviewed

The RR RISE Equity Council

Local Planning Tables

In January 2024, the insights in this report and data gathered by the RR RISE team, will inform the work of Local and Sector Planning Tables as they craft a vision, strategies and projects leading to well paying jobs and a path to equitable economic and climate resilience for this region.



Thank you

Special thanks to all the staff and community members who contributed to this report:

Community Interviewees

Equity Council

North Coast Opportunities

ThinkPlace East

ThinkPlace West

True North Organizing Network

Contact

ThinkPlace West

Michelle Carillo

Executive Director

mcarrillo@thinkplaceus.com

North Coast Opportunities

RISEoutreach@ncoinc.org

