

Key Enablers

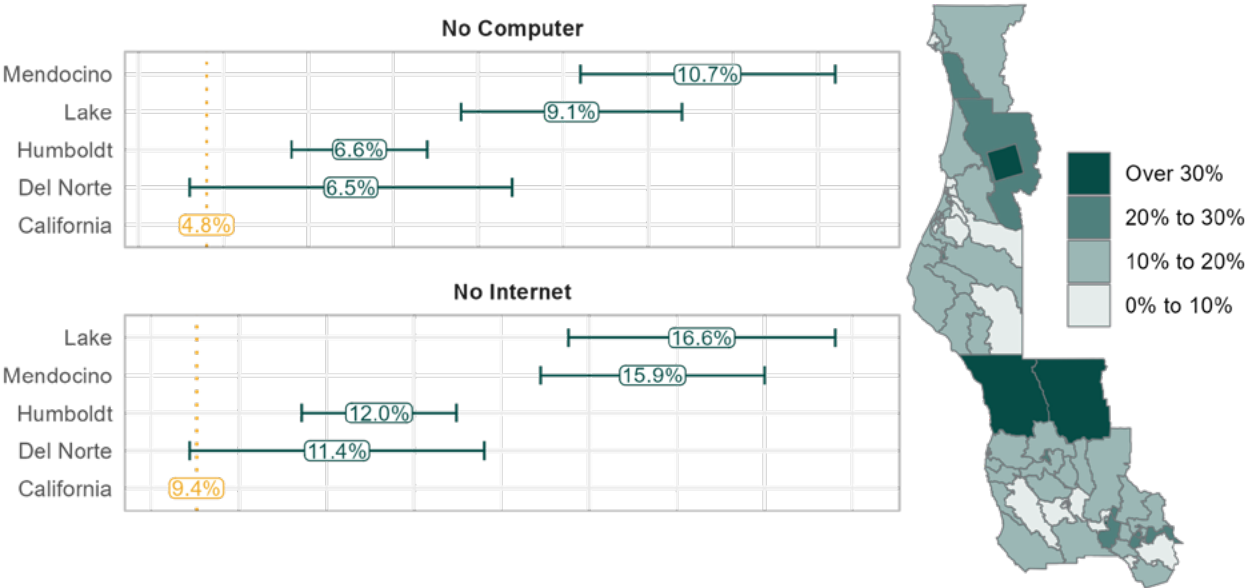
The success of target sector strategies will hinge on several key enablers of the economy at large. During listening sessions with community leaders, this theme was repeated over and over, with a particular emphasis on housing and broadband as key cross-cutting sectors which require investment in order to support the growth of target industries. In this section we provide an overview of these key enablers and strategies which may be employed to prepare the region for an inclusive, just transition.



Broadband

Rationale

Figure 27 Households Without Internet Access (2017 – 2021)



In remote areas of the region, approximately one-third of households lack any home internet access. This digital divide is even more pronounced in Tribal communities, where only 65% of the population has broadband access, compared to 98% in urban areas. These disparities highlight the urgent need for targeted intervention and support to ensure equitable access to digital resources and opportunities. Significantly more households in the Redwood Region lack internet access in the home compared to the rest of California.

“We need more accessible resources for historically underrepresented or repressed people. Affordable or free internet/broadband to rural areas.”

Broadband is a necessary infrastructure component for the region to utilize telehealth and remote employment and education opportunities, and to benefit from other emerging opportunities trends that build the health and wealth of all residents.

Background

The Redwood Region faces significant challenges in broadband access and adoption, hindering economic development, educational opportunities, and overall quality of life for residents.

Despite years of efforts from both federal and state governments to support rural broadband deployment, the region's geographic and geologic challenges, coupled with low population density, have resulted in a lack of investment by larger telecom and cable companies. This has left many communities underserved or entirely unserved.

However, recent developments present new opportunities for addressing these challenges. The State of California has funded a middle mile network that can serve as backhaul for many underserved and unserved remote communities. This infrastructure investment provides a crucial foundation for last-mile connectivity solutions. Additionally, there is growing recognition of broadband's critical role in supporting telemedicine, remote work, and educational access—all of which are particularly important in the Redwood Region's rural context. The COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the importance of reliable broadband access, as more aspects of daily life, including work, education, and healthcare, have shifted online. This increased reliance on digital connectivity has created a renewed sense of urgency and opened up new funding opportunities for broadband expansion in rural areas.

Key issues addressed by this strategy include:

- 1 A significant digital divide, with approximately one-third of households in remote areas lacking home internet access.
- 2 Pronounced disparities in Tribal communities, where only 65% of the population has broadband access, compared to 98% in urban areas.
- 3 The critical role of broadband in supporting telemedicine, remote work, and educational access.
- 4 Increased reliance on digital connectivity highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Broadband Strategies

The broadband expansion strategy comprises five key initiatives designed to improve connectivity, promote economic development, enhance climate resilience, and ensure digital equity:

**1****Regional Broadband Coalition Establishment**

This initiative focuses on forming a diverse, collaborative group to coordinate broadband efforts across the Redwood Region. The coalition will develop comprehensive strategies for both middle mile and last mile connectivity, with a particular emphasis on innovative solutions and digital equity. By ensuring representation from all counties and Tribal areas, this coalition will drive inclusive decision-making and advocate for equitable access at state and federal levels. It will also facilitate knowledge sharing and best practice dissemination among partners, coordinate funding applications, and resource allocation across the region.

2

“Dig Once” Policy Implementation

This policy will mandate the consideration of broadband conduit installation in all public works projects throughout the region. By integrating broadband infrastructure planning with other construction activities, this approach will significantly reduce costs and accelerate deployment. The policy will prioritize underserved areas and create opportunities for local and Tribal businesses in infrastructure development. It includes developing standardized procedures and specifications for broadband infrastructure installation, establishing a regional database of planned infrastructure projects to facilitate coordination, and providing training and resources to local governments for policy implementation.

3

Innovative Connectivity Solutions Deployment

This strategy focuses on assessing and piloting cutting-edge technologies to provide internet access in challenging areas. By exploring culturally appropriate ways to implement high-speed connectivity, especially in Tribal and remote areas, this initiative aims to bridge the digital divide while spurring job creation in technology deployment and maintenance. It includes establishing partnerships with technology providers to test and deploy innovative solutions, creating a regional innovation fund to support local broadband technology development, and developing case studies and sharing learnings from pilot projects across the region.

4

Digital Equity Fund Creation

This regional fund will be established to subsidize internet costs and provide digital literacy training for eligible households and businesses. By focusing on low-income, elderly, and historically underserved populations, including a significant allocation for Tribal communities, this fund will directly address affordability barriers and skill gaps that hinder broadband adoption. It includes developing partnerships with local organizations to deliver digital skills training, implementing a device access program to ensure households have necessary hardware, and creating a regional digital navigator program to provide one-on-one support.

5

Public-Private Partnerships for Broadband Development

This initiative will create a framework for collaboration between public entities and private sector partners in broadband deployment. These partnerships will leverage private sector resources and expertise while ensuring public interest goals are met, with a particular focus on including disinvested communities and Tribal enterprises in both infrastructure development and workforce opportunities. It includes developing risk-sharing models to incentivize private investment in underserved areas, establishing clear performance metrics and accountability measures for partnerships, and creating a regional broadband investment prospectus to attract private sector partners.

Regional Assets

The following organizations and initiatives have been identified as key assets for the broadband expansion strategy in the Redwood Region:

♦ Redwood Coast Connect (RCC): Regional consortium hosted by Cal Poly Humboldt, focusing on rural broadband accessibility
♦ Cal Poly Humboldt Regional Internet Exchange and Innovation Center
♦ North Coast Tribal Chairmen's Association: Represents Tribal interests in regional broadband initiatives
♦ Redwood Region Economic Development Commission (RREDC): Supports broadband as part of economic development efforts
♦ North Coast Small Business Development Center: Assists businesses in leveraging broadband for growth
♦ Local Internet Service Providers (ISPs): Experienced in deploying solutions in challenging rural environments
♦ California Emerging Technology Fund: Provides resources and advocacy for broadband adoption in underserved communities

Implementation

A Regional Broadband Coalition could serve as the primary coordinating entity for this broadband strategy, working with local and state government agencies for policy support and regulatory alignment. Private sector ISPs and technology companies will contribute to infrastructure deployment and innovation. Funding will be pursued through diversified sources, including federal programs (e.g., USDA ReConnect, NTIA's BEAD Program), state initiatives (e.g., California Advanced Services Fund), and innovative models such as public-private partnerships and community investment initiatives.

The implementation will follow a phased approach over a ten-year period:

- 1. Assessment and Engagement (Months 1–6):** Comprehensive needs assessment and community engagement.
- 2. Planning and Funding (Months 7–12):** Detailed technical planning and funding strategy development.
- 3. Initial Deployment (Months 13–24):** Infrastructure deployment and launch of digital literacy programs.
- 4. Expansion and Evaluation (Months 25–36):** Continued deployment, program refinement, and impact assessment.
- 5. Scaling and Sustainability (Years 4–10):** Widespread implementation and focus on long-term sustainability.

Risk mitigation measures include diversification of funding sources to ensure program sustainability, use of innovative last-mile solutions to address geographic challenges, robust digital literacy programs to address adoption barriers, partnerships with experienced providers to mitigate technical challenges, and proactive engagement with regulatory bodies to streamline permitting processes. By strategically leveraging its unique assets and implementing a comprehensive, collaborative approach to broadband expansion, the Redwood Region aims to bridge the digital divide and catalyze economic growth. This strategy represents a significant policy intervention aimed at enhancing connectivity, promoting digital equity, and fostering a more resilient and prosperous rural economy.

Possible Funding Sources

Funding for the strategy will come from a variety of sources. Federal programs such as the USDA ReConnect Program and the NTIA's Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program will be key potential funding sources. At the state level, the California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) will be an important resource.

The strategy will also explore innovative funding models, including public-private partnerships and community investment initiatives. Partnerships with financial institutions to leverage Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) funds will be explored as a way to support broadband expansion in low-income communities.

Figure 28 Broadband Sector Alignment with Key Program Objectives

Equity	Climate	Job Quality & Access
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ A Digital Equity Fund could: (1) Directly address affordability barriers to internet access; (2) Focus on low income, elderly, and historically underserved populations; and (3) Allocate significant resources specifically for improving connectivity and digital literacy in Tribal communities. ◆ RISE can promote public and private partnerships that include requirements for affordable access and coverage of underserved areas in partnership agreements and actively seeks partnerships with Tribal enterprises and organizations to develop and implement broadband solutions. ◆ A dig once policy would prioritize underserved areas and create opportunities for local and Tribal businesses in infrastructure development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ In general, strategies enable more comprehensive broadband coverage, supporting climate-smart technologies and practices. ◆ Broadband coalition could incentivize green energy use in broadband infrastructure through partnership agreements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Broadband expansion stimulates job growth in the lucrative utilities industry, with the need for installation and maintenance. ◆ Expansion would also enable remote work opportunities across various sectors, as well as digital careers. Establishing more broadband connectivity reduces vehicle trips to urban centers for medical, educational, or work commitments. ◆ Public-private models stimulate private sector investment in the region, creating direct and indirect jobs, and creates opportunities for local businesses, including Tribal enterprises, to partner in broadband initiatives. ◆ Innovative connectivity solutions create jobs in technology deployment and maintenance, and enable remote work and entrepreneurship in previously disconnected areas.

This broadband expansion strategy aims to leverage recent developments, including state funding for a middle mile network, to address these challenges and create a foundation for equitable economic growth and community resilience. The strategy recognizes that broadband access is not just about infrastructure, but also encompasses digital literacy, affordability, and relevance to local communities. By addressing all these aspects, the strategy seeks to ensure that broadband becomes a tool for economic empowerment and social inclusion across the Redwood Region.



Entrepreneurship

Rationale

The Redwood Region faces significant economic challenges, with over 95% of the area qualifying as “disinvested” under California Jobs First criteria. Regional economic growth has stagnated relative to state averages, with per capita output in 2022 at 47% of the statewide average, declining from 62% in 2001. These metrics underscore the imperative for innovative economic development strategies, particularly those fostering entrepreneurship and cross-sector innovation.

Small businesses are in fact a cornerstone of the regional (and American) economy, driving significant employment and economic activity. These enterprises, defined as those employing fewer than 100 people, comprise over 98% of all businesses in the United States. Remarkably, 89% of small businesses have fewer than 20 employees, and 80% are sole proprietorships with no employees. Yet despite their individual size, small businesses collectively employ 47% of the private-sector workforce, totaling more than 59.9 million people. They contribute substantially to job creation, generating approximately 1.5 million new jobs annually.

“I’m trying to start a business [...] but accessing startup funds is very very difficult. So I’m working hard to get started, but unable to get to the part of the movie where I get paid.”

Background

This entrepreneurship strategy addresses critical regional economic issues: diversification of the economic base to mitigate sector-specific vulnerabilities, creation and retention of high-quality employment opportunities, attraction and retention of skilled human capital, development of locally-owned enterprises to enhance economic resilience, and stimulation of innovative solutions to region-specific challenges.

By prioritizing entrepreneurship, the region aims to leverage its unique assets and foster a more dynamic, resilient economy that generates opportunities across all demographic segments. This approach recognizes the potential for entrepreneurship to drive innovation, create jobs, and build community wealth, particularly in rural areas that have historically been overlooked by traditional economic development strategies. The strategy also acknowledges the interconnectedness of entrepreneurship with other sectors, such as education, technology, and natural resource management. By fostering a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem, the Redwood Region can create synergies across various industries, leading to more sustainable and diverse economic growth.

“I think many people are interested in having their own business but don’t love the support. I want local businesses. I am not interested in supporting a company that comes in and skims off profits.”

Strategy

The entrepreneurship strategy comprises four interconnected initiatives designed to cultivate an innovation ecosystem and support both nascent and existing enterprises:



1

Entrepreneurial Culture Cultivation

This initiative focuses on establishing a “Redwood Region Innovators” brand identity to create a cohesive identity for the region’s entrepreneurial community. It implements regular entrepreneurship showcases and thought leadership series, featuring successful local entrepreneurs. A coordinated multi-channel communication strategy will be deployed to highlight local success stories and promote available resources. The initiative also includes creating mentorship programs pairing experienced entrepreneurs with new ventures and developing recognition programs for innovative local businesses and entrepreneurs.

2

Entrepreneurship Education Enhancement

This initiative aims to scale existing programs to increase participant reach and impact, while also initiating new programs such as an intensive “Summer Institute for Entrepreneurship.” It focuses on developing a comprehensive entrepreneurship education continuum from K-12 through tertiary education, integrating financial literacy modules into entrepreneurship curricula. The initiative also establishes partnerships with local businesses for experiential learning opportunities and creates specialized programs focusing on social entrepreneurship and sustainable business practices.

3

Entrepreneur Support Infrastructure Optimization

This initiative establishes a network of business incubators and accelerators to provide physical space, mentorship, and resources to support early-stage businesses. It includes developing and maintaining a comprehensive entrepreneurial resource navigator and implementing sector-specific support programs aligned with regional strengths. The initiative launches an “Entrepreneur E-Zone” digital platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration, facilitates regular cross-sector networking and innovation workshops, creates co-working spaces in rural communities to support remote workers and local entrepreneurs, and develops a regional supply chain network to support local businesses.

4

Capital Access and Resource Allocation Improvement

This initiative establishes a dedicated “Redwood Region Entrepreneurship Fund” offering a range of financial products tailored to different stages of business development. It focuses on cultivating a regional angel investor network and exploring community investment cooperative models. The initiative provides targeted financial literacy and investment readiness programs, develops partnerships with local banks and credit unions for entrepreneur-friendly lending programs, creates a microloan program for small-scale rural entrepreneurs, and establishes a regional crowdfunding platform to support local ventures.

This strategic framework is designed to create synergies across all elements, fostering a comprehensive ecosystem that supports entrepreneurs throughout their development trajectory. The sector-neutral approach facilitates innovation across diverse industries, capitalizing on the region’s heterogeneous economic base.

“I believe that bringing more entertainment to the region, encouraging companies to bring jobs to this region, providing extra support to local businesses and encouraging a more diverse region would help develop this beautiful area of Northern California.”

Regional Assets

The following organizations and initiatives have been identified as key assets for the entrepreneurship strategy in the Redwood Region:

- ◆ Blue Lake Rancheria Tribe’s Toma Resilience Campus and Resilience Business Incubator (opening 2025)
- ◆ Regional Community and four-year Colleges: Offer workforce development and entrepreneurship training, provides research support and entrepreneurship education programs
- ◆ Local Chambers of Commerce: Provide business support and networking opportunities
- ◆ Redwood Region Economic Development Commission: Offers business assistance and financing options
- ◆ SBDCs- Northcoast SBDC, West Business Center
- ◆ CDFIs- North Edge, RREDC, Lake EDC

Figure 29 Entrepreneurship Sector Alignment with Key Program Objectives

Equity	Climate	Job Quality & Access
◆ Priority communities often find opportunities in entrepreneurial fields that are more supportive than wage labor.	◆ The region has a history of producing sustainability focused enterprises and eco-innovation.	◆ Strategies increasing entrepreneurial activity result in job creation. ◆ Entrepreneurial activities can provide increased flexibility in working hours, which may be more compatible with balancing caretaking responsibilities, for example.

“We need financing! Capital funding for startups, women in business. Build it locally.”

“Work with the city on initiatives that will attract more BIPOC individuals to the area. Make it easier for queer businesses and organizations to develop such as fast-tracking, prioritizing liquor licensing, event permits, etc.”

Strategy Implementation

The RRRISE Collaborative could leverage its membership to provide coordination and backbone support to these initiatives. Private sector entities will contribute through mentorship and investment. Funding will be pursued through diversified sources, including state and federal grant programs, private sector partnerships, and innovative community investment models.

The implementation will follow a phased approach:

Phase 1 (Year 1-2)

- **Foundation Building** – Establish key partnerships, conduct needs assessments, and launch pilot programs.

Phase 2 (Year 3-4)

- **Scaling Up** – Expand successful initiatives, increase investment in support infrastructure, and enhance regional branding efforts.

Phase 3 (Year 5-6)

- **Accelerating Growth** – Focus on widespread adoption of entrepreneurial practices, significant expansion of funding options, and increased integration with other economic sectors.

Phase 4 (Year 7-10)

- **Sustaining Success** – Achieve self-sustaining entrepreneurial ecosystem, realize significant increase in new business formation and job creation.

Risk mitigation measures include diversification of funding sources to ensure program sustainability, phased implementation allowing for iterative learning and adjustment, continuous partner engagement and feedback incorporation, adaptive management protocols to respond to emergent challenges, and capacity building through targeted investments in training and support.

Case Study

El Centro Latino Del Lago is an ongoing business advising program run by the Lake County Economic Development Corp. in partnership with the Lake County Chamber of Commerce and the California Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Launched in 2024, it is a new program to assist Latino business owners and potential entrepreneurs in Lake County. It offers a six-week training program with workshop topics that include how to start a business, business planning, marketing, cost analysis, and strategies for success.

More information:

<https://lakeconews.com/news/78206-latino-business-assistance-and-entrepreneurship-program-announced>
<https://lakecountycadc.org/centro-latino-del-lago/>

By strategically leveraging its unique assets and implementing a comprehensive, collaborative approach to entrepreneurship development, the Redwood Region aims to catalyze a thriving, innovative rural economy that generates opportunities across all demographic segments. This strategy represents a significant policy intervention aimed at addressing the region's economic challenges and fostering a more resilient, diverse, and prosperous rural economy.



Food Security and Access

Rationale

Many residents of the Region struggle with food insecurity due to complex transportation and income challenges. After COVID-era emergency allotments expired in February 2023, food insecurity intensified as federal programs like SNAP reduced budgets and reinstated work requirements (USDA, 2023). This disproportionately affected rural and Tribal communities, where smaller populations make operating grocery stores economically challenging. In our region, 21.4% of Humboldt County and 22.8% of Del Norte County residents experience food insecurity, significantly higher than the California average of 17.5% (Feeding America, 2021). Tribal communities face even greater challenges, with our Region's Tribes facing food insecurity rates as high as 90% (Sowerwine et al., 2019). The USDA has designated much of our region as a food desert, with some residents in remote areas traveling over 20 miles to reach the nearest grocery store (USDA ERS, 2021) and 77% of Tribal residents in the Mid-Klamath Basin traveling over two hours (Sowerwine et al., 2019). This situation is exacerbated by frequent road closures due to extreme weather events, which can completely cut off food supply chains to our geographically isolated region (Humboldt County Office of Emergency Services, 2022). These factors underscore the urgent need for a comprehensive, locally-focused food security plan that addresses the unique challenges of our remote, rural, and Tribal communities.

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

"We've been eating ramen for the last eight months and it's embarrassing."

Figure 30 Food Security and Access Data in the Redwood Region

County	% Food Insecure	% Below SNAP Threshold	% with low access to grocery*
Del Norte	14.6%	70%	32%
Humboldt	15.8%	79%	15.7%
Lake	15.4%	78%	18.7%
Mendocino	15.1%	76%	17.4%
Klamath Basin Tribes	75%	N/A	N/A – data indicates that the barrier to access faced by the majority of community members include distance, gas money, and lack of vehicle access. ⁶

⁶ <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/food-environment-atlas/go-to-the-atlas/>

Strategies

1

Support Ongoing Policy Advocacy and Community Outreach and Support

Increasing Market Match Nutrition Incentives and access to CalFresh enrollment at farmers' markets across the region benefits local producers and lower-income individuals and families. Not all Certified Farmers' Markets in the region offer year round Market Match benefits, which are designed specifically to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables. In 2023 Market Match led to \$19.4M in spending of incentives and CalFresh benefits at 294 sites in 116 cities across 38 CA counties. This translates to approximately 38.8M servings of CA grown fresh fruits and vegetables. There are several expansion opportunities for Market Match and SNAP benefits programs being piloted across the state.

Expansion of Women, Infants & Children (WIC) and Senior benefits programs to include electronic benefits transfer and increasing the number of approved sales outlets will benefit local agricultural producers by bringing more of those federal benefits directly into local economies through independent grocery stores as well as farmers' markets.

A comprehensive county-level food purchasing plan supports agricultural production and benefits the local economy. Existing programs, where approved, such as the Cottage Foods Operations allow small-scale home chefs to create value added food products in their home at a lower cost, reducing barrier to entry into this viable market opportunity.

Smart land use planning with a focus on keeping agricultural and working lands in active production, reducing opportunities for conversion of prime soils and prime ag land to development and incentivizing climate resilient agricultural practices supports agricultural producers and increases the available food supply.

Food recovery projects exist in Humboldt, Del Norte, and Mendocino counties but remain small-scale. According to the state, "feeding hungry people through food recovery is the best use of surplus food and a vital way for California to conserve resources and reduce waste thrown in landfills."



2

Expand Supply Chain Infrastructure for Local and Emergency Food

This includes developing new or expanding existing food hubs in the Region, equipping communities with commercial kitchens, cold storage facilities, and processing equipment, as well as connecting local producers with institutional buyers and providing distribution of aggregated goods.

It will also expand small scale agricultural production, processing, and distribution through training for new and beginning farmers/ranchers, ongoing support for direct market sales channels (farm and fish markets) and emergency food outlets (food banks and mobile pantries), and coordination of food system actors to enhance the capacity of local producers to access retail and wholesale market outlets. Special attention will be given to remote and Tribal communities to reduce food insecurity and improve health outcomes, including individuals utilizing regional food banks and pantries and youth in regional school districts.

Additionally, this initiative will engage communities around building capacity to meet needs during times of emergency. It will coordinate actors in emergency services planning, food production and distribution, public health, and education. This includes working with local Offices of Emergency Services to incorporate feeding plans into their emergency strategies, establishing strategically located hubs for emergency feeding operations, and creating a more resilient regional food system capable of withstanding supply chain disruptions caused by road closures, extreme weather events, or other emergencies.

3

Reduce Incidence and Severity of Cultural Food Insecurity

Cultural food security emphasizes the critical importance of having access to desired foods. This may be food included in Indigenous diets or traditional foods of individuals from other areas (immigrants, university students, traveling healthcare workers). It is inherently connected to food sovereignty—a person or community’s ability to exercise control over food choices and the activities that enable the existence of those choices.

This initiative is multipronged, incorporating workforce development, enhancement of cultural competence among partners, Indigenous self-determination and landscape-scale co-management, access to capital and capacity-building efforts, and support for connectivity across priority communities.

It prioritizes leadership from priority communities as a key foundation, but it also creates opportunities for relationship building and transfer of knowledge. It allows for implementation of culturally-specific practices (such as Hmong livestock slaughter practices or Tribal cultural burning).

Specific activities could include:

- ◆ Creating learning exchanges between priority communities and external partners to build relationships, increase cultural competence, and share lessons learned.
- ◆ Supporting workforce development in food systems organizations that increases hiring from and leadership of priority populations.
- ◆ Promoting the implementation of capacity-building programs such as the IDA program sponsored by NorthEdge to increase number of BIPOC food businesses.
- ◆ Identifying opportunities to support Indigenous landscape management activities through funding, collaboration, and awareness-building (e.g., reducing stigmas associated with cultural burning).
- ◆ Supporting development of infrastructure for cultural foods including food truck commissary kitchens and wild foods processing.

4

Build Capacity for Community Ownership of Small-Scale Food Outlets

This initiative will help to overcome the constraints faced by very small food stores and highly rural communities which lack a grocery store. Two examples within the region can be upheld as models of success. The Hoopa Shopping Center was established after successive closures of regional chain grocery stores impacted the rural and Tribal community; the Hoopa Tribe developed a Tribally-owned grocery store which gives the community greater control over its food resources and establishes a greater commitment to the local community's food needs. The Salmon River Outpost, a small general store, was reopened under new ownership, with the help of the regional CDFI, North Edge, a community funder dedicated to supporting community ownership of assets.

Areas of focus include:

- ◆ Create awareness of successful strategies and resources available for supporting food needs of remote and underserved communities.
- ◆ Implement training programs for store owners and connect them with specialists who can support them in creating community-owned operations, managing business challenges, increasing local purchasing, and accepting food benefits payments.
- ◆ Work with last mile distributors to modify restrictive procurement agreements, allowing remote stores to source fresh produce from local farms or prepared foods from cottage food makers.

5

Expand Partnerships for Institutional Purchasing and Food-As-Medicine Programs

Increasing the number of larger institutional buyers (such as universities, colleges, hospitals and school districts) of local agricultural products benefits producers and consumers. Food Hubs play a critical role in increasing the efficient transfer of small-scale farmers products directly to larger buyers. Cal Poly Humboldt and North Coast Growers Association's Harvest Hub have been working in partnership to ensure the university can buy locally grown products, but there are several hurdles to cross to achieve this goal. Individual farmers benefit from the support Harvest Hub offers in achieving the food safety planning and production planning needed for meeting the demands of larger buyers.

Food as Medicine is a concept growing in popularity which integrates consistent diet and nutrition resources with reducing the prevalence of chronic illness. Fresh food vouchers, often distributed directly through doctors offices and other health care providers, can play a critical role in achieving these goals. Open Door Community Health Centers, the largest healthcare provider in Humboldt County, has had tremendous success with this concept while also supporting local agricultural producers by offering a "prescription for farmers' markets" in the form of fresh food vouchers which can be spent directly with farmers at regional farmers' markets.

"Provide more access to healthy foods-low calorie and high nutrition and make available places to work out and exercise as well as guides like local hiking trails and local fauna and flora."

Figure 31 Food Security and Access Sector Alignment with Key Program Objectives

Equity	Climate	Job Quality & Access
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community involvement and collaboration in food systems design results in more equitable outcomes. Deferring to leadership from within priority communities results in active participation and self-determination. Affordability of local food is increased through aggregation. Subsidizing cost of local food increases access and security. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aggregating locally produced food and centralizing distribution can reduce some GHG emissions compared to individual farms distributing products. Enhancing Indigenous food sources promotes cultural food security and Indigenous practices employed in landscape management mitigates climate risks associated with floods/slides, fire, and drought. Enhanced local food production and aggregation/storage can temporarily mitigate risks associated with extreme climate events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Indigenous food security enhancement promotes jobs that prioritize cultural values and contribute to living wage jobs because these jobs often have parity with federal and state land management agencies. Expanding food security leads to better individual access to, and ability to retain, jobs. Alignment of working lands jobs with automation and technology increases demand for higher-skilled workers. Increasing revenues through value-added processing creates jobs and also increases opportunity for working lands jobs to achieve higher-paying wages.



Housing

Rationale

The Redwood Region lacks quality, accessible, and affordable housing. Housing production has not kept pace with demand, especially in rural areas. While California's housing stock has increased by 7% since 2010, the Redwood Region has had only a 1.3% growth in stock (Industry Cluster Analysis). This has resulted in a significant housing shortage and increased housing costs throughout the region. According to the California Housing Partnership's 2024 Housing Needs Report, more than 11,000 low-income renter households in the region do not have access to an affordable home.⁷

⁷ By county this includes 755 low-income renter households in Del Norte, 6,215 low-income renter households in Humboldt County, 1,401 low-income renter households in Lake County, and 2,757 low-income renter households in Mendocino.

When it comes to buying a home, data from the California Association of Realtors shows a steep increase in the median price of homes across the region over the past decade, which outpaces increases in wages:

125%

increase in median
price of homes in Del
Norte County since
2014

73%

increase in median
price of homes in
Humboldt County
since 2014

86%

increase in median
price of homes in
Lake County since
2014

71%

increase in median
price of homes in
Mendocino County
since 2014.⁸

A lack of quality, affordable, and accessible housing across all economic sectors limits economic growth and prosperity and endangers critical community infrastructure. Without housing stability, our emerging and marginalized workforce must focus on meeting basic needs—and this prevents many from effectively participating in education, workforce training, and employment opportunities. A shortage of quality housing makes it difficult to recruit and retain medical professionals, educators, and other professionals. The lack of affordable housing also challenges small businesses, government agencies and other employers when looking to attract and retain workforce. Anticipated developments like offshore wind, with an increased demand on housing for construction workers and permanent employees, will only exacerbate this problem.

“Housing costs, food costs, healthcare and transportation are most important to me. (...) As an adult, I have always had to put the majority of my monthly income into rent alone. If I had more expendable income that would improve my quality of life, lower stress, and give me more opportunities to pursue my creative career.”

Background

Rising construction costs have significantly impacted housing accessibility in the Redwood Region. Over the past ten years, California’s construction cost index shows a 55% increase, with nearly 40% of that occurring in the last four years alone. In this four-county region, new construction costs are around \$350 per square foot, almost double the cost of new construction in states like Texas. These rising costs have led to fewer new homes for ownership, particularly in rural areas where wages have not kept pace with the increase in construction expenses, making home ownership more challenging than ever. Additionally, the scarcity of housing has driven regional vacancy rates below the state average, intensifying competition and increasing costs. While 44.8% of renters statewide spend more than 35% of their household income on housing expenses, the percentage is even higher in this rural region.

“Buying a house seems unaffordable. Feels like I’ll always be renting.”

Moreover, rental properties are increasingly being diverted to primary residences or vacation and temporary rentals. Rising maintenance and repair costs, insurance, and tenant protections that limit deposits and rental increases have led many property owners to exit the rental market, choosing to invest their funds elsewhere.

⁸ Source: California Association of Realtors data via the EDD website.

Landlords often take advantage of temporary workers, such as traveling nurses and construction crews, who generally earn higher incomes than permanent residents, thereby artificially elevating rental costs and displacing local residents. The cost of labor and materials for construction has increased approximately 40% in the last five years, and wages have not kept pace. Consequently, much of the region's housing supply, which is older and requires maintenance, remains deteriorated as many homeowners cannot afford necessary repairs and upgrades, such as painting and reroofing.

The region's geographic features, including coastline, mountainous terrain, and protected habitats, limit opportunities to build outside city limits or in unincorporated areas. To increase housing inventory, communities may need to focus on infill development, which can lead to increased traffic congestion, parking demands, and neighborhood shading—factors that often prompt community opposition. Geographic limitations may also necessitate locating new low-income or affordable housing within primary communities, where lot size and other regulatory requirements for funding cannot always be met, further complicating development efforts and provoking protests from neighbors.



Legislation and funding mechanisms often fail to account for the rural realities of the Redwood region. Much of the area lies along the coast, where the California Coastal Commission retains significant power to slow or block housing projects, even when lawmakers attempt to reduce barriers to development. Land suitable for low-income housing often does not meet regulatory requirements due to factors such as size, isolation, or distance from major transportation hubs, making it difficult to utilize low-income housing programs fully. Despite legislative efforts to prevent individuals and groups from obstructing housing development, local authorities may still yield to community pressure and deny housing projects, even when they meet regulatory requirements, indicating a need for additional legislative tools to ensure suitable projects are approved.

The region also faces a significant shortage of skilled workers in the building trades, which hinders the ability to meet labor demands for new construction and maintenance. Contractors in the area often have waitlists of a year or more for standard projects like roofing and painting. The lack of qualified companies and a skilled workforce contributes to delays and increases the cost of maintaining the existing housing inventory, exacerbating the region's housing challenges.

1 Housing Strategy

Addressing Rural California's housing shortage is critical to building resilient regions and communities. A Comprehensive Rural Housing Policy can identify and address barriers to housing production and access, inform an appropriate policy agenda and identify opportunities for regional action that increase the inventory and access to quality affordable housing for all sectors of the community.

Policy formation should include:

1

A comprehensive assessment that identifies and clearly defines the root causes of rising housing costs and other barriers to development.

2

A map of regional and community assets (property, partners, programs).

3

Identification of innovative solutions to address the barriers to new construction, decrease costs, incentivize the rehabilitation of existing housing, and increase access to affordable housing across the income spectrum.



These solutions could include:

-
- ◆ New policies could reduce builder risk to incentivize new construction and increase the availability of rental housing.
-
- ◆ Redefining “workforce Housing” to include less conventional housing models such as rooming/boarding houses, employer provided housing (dorms, temporary, subsidized or employer owned), mobile home parks, cluster developments, and more.
-
- ◆ Policies that strengthen program supports & housing access for low-income, emerging and re-entry workforce and those at risk of losing housing (youth, low income, previously incarcerated, etc.).
-
- ◆ Exploring new methods and materials for new construction and repairs, including fire hardening.
-
- ◆ Increasing access to home financing responsibly.
-
- ◆ Funding mechanisms and policies that support residential use and conversion of underutilized spaces, like hotels and commercial buildings, into housing.
-
- ◆ Programs and supports that assist owners in protecting the structural integrity of existing housing.
-
- ◆ Explore the development of workforce training programs that focus on conducting repairs and retrofits to improve the quality and longevity of the existing housing stock. This could use funding sources like the Section 504 Home Repair program that provides loans to very-low-income homeowners to repair, improve, or modernize their homes or grants to elderly very-low-income homeowners to remove health and safety hazards.
-
- ◆ Supports for officials to more effectively enforce build by right (and not obstruct development because of neighborhood objections), subsidize infrastructure upgrades, provide pre-approved plans, etc.
-
- ◆ Incentives and supports for property owners to maintain residential rental housing and decrease diversion.
-
- ◆ Formation of a housing trust fund with dedicated funding for housing production, preservation, and related activities, such as grant funding for construction or rehabilitation, infrastructure, land acquisition, or impact fees; low-interest construction, acquisition, or gap financing. This would allow communities to take advantage of California’s matching funds for the creation, rehabilitation, or preservation of affordable housing, transitional housing, and emergency shelters.
-
- ◆ A workforce development plan that includes a building trades skills inventory and industry sector assessment to determine the high demand, high wage occupations needed (and available) in the building trades, mapping of Pathways from high school, internships should be mapped and plan to develop training programs to address gaps.
-
- ◆ Cross-sector coordination with government agencies, employers, religious organizations, and anchor institutions to identify underutilized land and parcels that can be used to develop housing. Working with healthcare providers, schools (including school districts, universities, and community colleges), and churches can be especially helpful since they often have large real estate holdings in central locations close to jobs that can be used for housing development.⁹
-

⁹ For example, [Yes In God’s Backyard](#) is a movement to work with faith-based institutions to use their land for affordable housing development.

-
- ◆ Support for the creation and capacity-building of local mission-driven developers and Community Land Trusts to support the creation of more affordable housing that meets community needs. Currently, the region has a shortage of developers who have the experience and capacity to compete for State affordable housing programs.
-
- ◆ Introduction of streamlined policies, advising efforts (like pre-approved architectural plans), and financing tools that help existing homeowners add additional housing capacity to their properties through the creation of Auxiliary Dwelling Units (ADUs) that can increase the number of units on the market.¹⁰
-
- ◆ Support for the research and development of climate-friendly building technologies and materials using value-added lumber and hemp products that can support more affordable housing development (like mass laminated timber or hempcrete). These technologies can be both used in the region and potentially exported to new markets, creating family-sustaining jobs and career pathways. This can be done with the Working Lands sector.
-
- ◆ Support a market study on the viability of alternative models of homeownership and community shareholding in the region—including condos, cooperatives, shared housing models, and neighborhood real estate investment trusts—that help prevent displacement and build wealth for lower-income residents.¹¹
-
- ◆ Continue to build cross-sector support for low-income renters and job seekers—including expanded renter rights and education; landlord engagement; and as well as anti-speculation policies (like vacation rental limits).
-
- ◆ Provide community members and employers with resources to build shared support for the development of affordable housing, for example: [Humboldt County Association of Governments Keys Campaign](#).
-

Strategy Implementation

RRRISE could use its convening power to create working groups that drive regional Housing conversations forward. The Coalition should seek to fund the comprehensive housing study to create the policy agenda and identify opportunities for advocacy, policy reform, and innovative measures to bring more housing to market on the North Coast.

Regional Assets

- | | |
|--|---|
| ◆ For-profit Developers | ◆ Policy makers and advocates |
| ◆ Non-profit Developers | ◆ Tribal housing organizations |
| ◆ Building Trade orgs and labor groups | ◆ Neighbors |
| ◆ Housing advocates | ◆ Property Owners |
| ◆ Housing supportive services providers | ◆ Building materials suppliers (need less expensive and innovative materials) |
| ◆ County govt actors (housing commissions, etc.) | ◆ Housing Authorities |
| ◆ Municipal govt actors | |

¹⁰ [Los Angeles Backyard Home Project](#) provides CDFI financing options to help homeowners build an ADU and housing a low-income tenant using Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers for seven years.

¹¹ Examples include [URban Institute's New Models for Community Shareholding Equity – Investing in Neighborhood Real Estate Investment Trusts and Cooperatives](#), [San Joaquin Valley Council of Governments – Alternative Housing Ownership Models](#) Innovative emerging legislation on [Tenant / Community Opportunity to Purchase](#).

Access to safe, affordable housing also supports critical community infrastructure vital to health, welfare, and resilience. An adequate housing inventory increases the successful recruiting and retention of all workforce. In addition, adequate workforce housing supports rural communities in attracting needed medical professionals, educators, and other professionals. Housing is also a fundamental foundation that allows access to other basic needs, health care, food security, broadband/information access, etc—all critical for attracting and retaining workforce. A consistent and sufficient housing inventory will also help employers, including small business, government agencies and others to more successfully attract and retain a diverse workforce, offering increased access to high-quality jobs, including those in disinvested communities.

Greater access to low income/affordable housing would allow our most vulnerable residents, including entry level workers, working seniors and others to more easily remain employed and meet their basic needs. Increasing the housing inventory to address the anticipated influx of both construction and permanent workers for new developments like offshore wind, will allow long-standing and permanent residents to more easily compete with these workers for limited rural housing. Increasing the inventory of quality housing will also provide high-quality jobs in Building Trades/Construction.

Figure 32 Housing Sector Alignment with Key Program Objectives

Equity	Climate	Job Quality & Access
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Historically, land use and zoning policies have excluded affordable housing and created racial, economic, and housing segregation. These conditions have limited physical and economic mobility, exacerbated income disparities, compromised food security, limited access to health care and affected other harmful consequences, most particularly for historically marginalized and disinvested groups. Engaging these community members in the development of a comprehensive housing policy that increased access to quality affordable housing will help to increase opportunities to secure basic supports and quality, well-paying employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Including provision for research and development of new climate friendly technologies will help to address environmental impacts. Increasing housing availability in rural areas close to employment centers will decrease commuting and greenhouse gas emissions, reducing environmental impact in these areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An adequate supply of accessible, affordable quality housing in rural areas will provide individuals with the opportunity to access and retain quality living wage jobs at various locations in our isolated communities and allow employers to attract and retain qualified employees. Quality affordable housing will also allow individuals to participate in workforce training and other educational programs that will allow them to increase skills and access high quality jobs. Provisions to build collaborative building trades workforce development programs that include educational institutions, private sector experts and others will also increase sector-specific opportunities in this high demand, high wage sector.

Humans of the Redwoods

Despite Suffering From Cannabis Industry Fallout Post-Legalization, Kathy Finds a Supportive Community in Humboldt

At the cannabis industry's prime, Kathy Perri didn't need to worry about housing, healthcare, or feeding her family. The financial repercussions of legalization took away her livelihood and now she's still trying to pick up the pieces, but high demand for social services makes it hard to actually get reliable help. Through the care of her community she finds the support she needs.



A Thriving Industry

Humboldt has a long history of boom-and-bust industries. Cannabis legalization spurred Humboldt's most recent bust, leaving folks like Kathy Perri adjusting to a whole new way of life. Kathy moved to Shelter Cove 24 years ago, working at the campground and deli until she was invited to work on cannabis farms. She loved the family-friendly atmosphere.

"It was awesome because I could pick my kids from school and bring them along. There were barbecues, and pools for my kids to swim in during the day when they didn't have school. I brought my mom a few times a month, 30 years older than me. She was in her 70s. She'd go trimming with me too. And it was like a family back then."

Kathy had done some guerilla growing before she moved to Humboldt, but she found that the local industry really supported her and her family back then. "I always had money. I was never on welfare or food stamps. I raised my kids with no Medi-Cal. I didn't have to worry about that. It was a good industry, it was easy. I mean, hard work... It was just different because we could make a lot of money and it was more communal back then, way more stable than now."

"I've never in my life thought I would be homeless."

Industry Fallout

Kathy noticed the industry changing throughout the years. The camaraderie was dissolving, the market became more cutthroat, and prices were dropping. Eventually she decided it was best to move on, but the transition forced some unforeseen changes into her life. She now barely gets by with two part-time jobs and disability checks.

"It's way different for me now. I get food stamps. I don't have my own place. I'm on Medi-Cal, I barely have a vehicle, I mean, I work hard and I still never have any money. I can't even find a place to live. I just can't even afford to rent a place. I never thought I'd be in this situation, especially at my age. I never, ever thought I'd end up like this. Ever."

Perri doesn't have much family to turn to in times of need, but the community she's found in Humboldt means everything to her and provides her with the care she needs." I used to think about moving, but I don't think I'll ever get out of here because I don't care how much money I can make somewhere else. I'm happy here. And you know, money's not everything."



[Read Kathy's full story](#)



Infrastructure and Transportation

Rationale

Communities are concerned with disaster preparedness and vulnerabilities related to limited road infrastructure. Lack of transportation, supply chain infrastructure, and connectivity constraints industry growth and access to markets (see Working Lands SWOT, e.g.). Incidence of motor vehicle related accidents and deaths are higher in the region than the rest of the state. Many communities are divided by highways and major thoroughfares, and there is a general lack of workforce housing that is pedestrian and transit friendly. Dirt roads are a primary source of air pollution in the region. Challenges disproportionately impact remote areas and Tribal communities; many are present due in part to the region's rurality, dispersed population, and diverse geography. During the RISE Listening Campaign, many residents and service providers discussed how transportation impacted access to economic opportunities citing long commute times and limited public transit—challenges that are especially acute for young people, people with disabilities, and those who cannot afford a car or bicycle.

"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 in the time... I think that can really pose a challenge for some of our rural entrepreneurs."



Strategies

1

Improving Connectivity, Safety, and Walkability

Jurisdictions across the region are already working to create more pedestrian friendly town and city centers. Caltrans and the California Coastal Commission are also working to incorporate multimodal transportation elements into many transportation projects, including in Mendocino and Humboldt counties. RISE could use its convening power to promote adoption of best practices and identify and name key zones for pedestrian friendly development. The full implementation of the Humboldt County Regional Climate Action Plan and Regional Transportation Plans for Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, and Lake Counties would also support these practices. Funding for clean vehicles may be available through the state's On-Road Heavy-Duty Voucher Incentive and Clean Cars 4 All-programs.¹²

Another key area which could benefit from awareness raising and prioritization at the regional level is accessibility of public spaces for residents with disabilities. Actions identified by the Collaborative include creating and disseminating a guidebook for inclusive design (of spaces, programs, communications materials, etc.), creating a regional multi-modal transportation plan connecting remote areas to economic centers, developing Public Service Announcements (PSA) to promote the importance of road safety, and procuring state and federal funding to increase non-motorized transportation usage and traffic safety, especially along major highway corridors and roads connecting Tribal Lands to other communities.



¹² <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/our-work/programs/road-heavy-duty-voucher-incentive-program>
<https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/our-work/programs/clean-cars-4-all>

“Lack of transportation options as a disabled person is a major limitation to access employment”

Case Study

LOCAL CASE STUDY: The Humboldt Transit Authority (HTA) is committed to fully transitioning their bus fleet to zero emission in compliance with the Innovative Clean Transit regulation. In 2022 HTA was awarded a \$38.7 million grant funded by the California Climate Investment fund through California State Transportation Agency’s Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program (TICRP) to introduce 11 New Flyer fuel cell electric buses (FCEBs) and a hydrogen fueling station at HTA’s facility in Eureka. With 11 new zero-emission FCEBs added to the fleet and the hydrogen station, this project will help kickstart a hydrogen supply chain on the North Coast. In addition to laying the foundation for a zero-emission transit fleet, this project also creates a new intercity transit service, the Redwood Coast Express. This service will connect local riders from Eureka to Ukiah linking riders to Mendocino County and south to the SMART train and the San Francisco Bay Area with fuel cell electric buses.

More information:

<https://www.caclimateinvestments.ca.gov/2023-profiles/hta>

Humboldt Climate Action Plan:

https://humboldt.gov.org/DocumentCenter/View/131636/Humboldt-RCAP_Public-Draft_w-Appendices?bid Id=

This would include adoption of “Smart Growth” planning strategies, which includes creating a streetscape that is inclusive to all modes of transportation. Zoning and Form-Based Code policies would be implemented by cities, counties, and town advisory boards to encourage businesses to build their storefronts directly on the street, with parking in the rear of buildings. Sidewalks would be promoted as public spaces, with human-friendly street trees, art, and furniture abounding. Curbs would include ramps to ensure accessibility. Curb bulb-outs would promote the safe crossing of streets by pedestrians. Bike lanes and ‘sharrows’ would be prioritized, along with high quality transit stops. Public spacemaking would be encouraged, such as parklets, pocket parks, and converted alleyways to enhance the human experience on the streetscape.

Towns can implement innovative programs that promote sustainability and community engagement. One such program involves the creation of edible food gardens in spaces where business owners have parklets in front of their establishments. Through this initiative, business owners can opt into programs that fund urban foraging, encouraging people to visit these areas and pick fresh, locally grown produce. This not only promotes a sense of community and connection to nature but also supports sustainable practices and local food systems.

2

Infrastructure to Support Supply Chain Development and Market Access

While tribes, counties, and municipalities all have their own infrastructure and transportation priorities, there is a sense that regional coordination could be of benefit to support supply chain efficiency and access to markets for the region's producers. For example, regional distribution hubs could improve market access in the region, particularly for rural and Tribal producers. Asset mapping and visualization around things like cold storage networks (see Working Lands Sector Strategies above) helps make gaps and priorities visible. Named constraints to market access and flows of goods and services include specific parts of Highway 101 which are too narrow for conventional trucking. Another area of interest for the region's entrepreneurs is use of port infrastructure for shipping, which some feel is underemphasized/utilized.

3

Resilience and Disaster Preparedness

Concerns have surfaced around vulnerability of communities due to the limited presence and condition of road networks, particularly in rural and remote areas. More work is needed for example on fire hardening around roads, with projects already underway in Mendocino which create jobs for crews and increase fire safety.

There is a bigger picture concern around whether and how much planning for climate change impacts is driving current decisions around where to site development. Some of the largest economic development projects in the region—offshore wind development, large scale foreign investment into an aquaculture endeavor, a transatlantic cable landing, and associated mill site redevelopment initiatives—are all taking place in one of the most vulnerable areas on the California coast with respect to sea level rise (Humboldt Bay). There are anticipated shifts in population centers happening from within the region and also driven by climate refugees coming from drought and fire stricken areas elsewhere in the state and the nation.

Actions identified by the Collaborative include creating an asset map to identify local key resources in the event of large-scale disasters, encouraging regional training opportunities around community-level disaster preparedness, aligning regional strategies with state strategies, promoting the use of electric vehicles for public transportation, and to ensure that rural remote and Tribal communities, inclusive of traditional ecological knowledge and practices, are included in these planning efforts.

Additionally, the Collaborative identified that mobility hubs could benefit priority communities in the region, especially during extreme weather events. These hubs could operate as cooling and heating centers, and route to remote communities in the region, allowing use of electricity, water, and Wifi. At the same time, they can be used as a hub to get enrolled or access county-level benefits. Mobility hubs could also assist rural and remote communities in receiving health services (ex. mobile medical/dental), as medical transportation was elevated as a barrier for many.

“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 strengthen our strategies for a carbon-neutral economy transition, we must focus on improving our infrastructure to support sustainable practices. Investing in renewable energy infrastructure is vital for a successful transition. This includes expanding and upgrading our energy production and distribution systems to accommodate renewable sources such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power. Upgrading our electrical grid to support two-way energy flows and storage capabilities will also be essential to maximize the use of renewable energy and ensure a reliable power supply.

Enhancing our transportation infrastructure is crucial for reducing carbon emissions. More can be done to increase ridership on public transportation systems, building electric vehicle charging stations, and creating infrastructure to support walking and cycling as alternative modes of transportation.

Improving energy-efficient building infrastructure is another key aspect of transitioning to a carbon-neutral economy. Retrofitting existing buildings with energy-efficient technologies and constructing new buildings that meet rigorous energy efficiency standards will help decrease overall energy consumption. Additionally, investing in sustainable and resilient infrastructure that can withstand the impacts of climate change, such as extreme weather events, will be crucial for building a carbon-neutral economy that is adaptable to future challenges.

Incorporating green infrastructure, such as green roofs, permeable pavement, and urban green spaces, into our communities can help mitigate the effects of climate change, reduce urban heat islands, and improve overall environmental quality. Such initiatives can also contribute to carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation, fostering a more sustainable and resilient environment.

Integrating advanced technology into our infrastructure, such as smart grid systems, energy management systems, and IoT (Internet of Things) devices, will enable us to optimize energy use, reduce wastage, and improve overall system efficiency. Leveraging data analytics and real-time monitoring can help us identify opportunities for energy conservation and make informed decisions to support our carbon-neutral economy transition.

Implementation

Assets to be leveraged:

- ◆ Humboldt County Association of Govts (HCAOG) and Mendocino County Council of Governments (MCCOG) [RISE Voting Members]
- ◆ Local Caltrans units
- ◆ California Highway Patrol (CHP)
- ◆ Tribal Planning Depts
- ◆ Green transportation advocates
- ◆ County and Municipal Governments
- ◆ County Offices of Education
- ◆ Community Colleges
- ◆ Red Cross
- ◆ Training Providers

Figure 33 Transportation and Infrastructure Sector Alignment with Key Program Objectives

Equity	Climate	Job Quality & Access
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Reduce air pollution burden on rural and remote communities. ♦ Create better connectivity and safety for priority communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Improve climate resilience of rural and remote communities; strategies help fire-safe roads. ♦ Promote green transportation including shared transit, biking and walking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ♦ Job and procurement opportunities for local workers and firms. <p>*Tribal communities note a need to create more equitable opportunities for Tribal firms to bid on these infrastructure contracts.</p>



Workforce Development

Rationale

The Redwood Region has worker shortages in occupations that have family sustaining wages. While there are existing training pathways into these occupations, completion rates for these programs are too low to meet demand. The region has high rates of ACEs and high attrition from the workforce due to cognitive and behavioral disability, higher rates of mental health conditions including depression, anxiety, and health conditions that are correlated with trauma. Employers report that this affects worker productivity, resilience, and turnover. Shortages of childcare providers, lack of transportation, and lack of higher wage opportunities are barriers reported by priority communities.

Background

Discussions of the workforce development system often focus on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), federal legislation that establishes and funds a system of public services designed to help two customers: workers and employers. WIOA services help job seekers and workers, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment, find, keep and advance in high-quality jobs and careers. WIOA also funds services to help employers hire and retain skilled workers. Since WIOA was authorized in 2014, increasing attention has been devoted to forming connections between workforce, education, and social services to build pathways to careers and successful employment. However, alongside the public systems that serve workforce functions, private employers invest considerable resources in developing, procuring, and implementing workforce development and training programs to attract, train, and upskill a workforce that meets their needs.

“We need policies that hold agencies, organizations, corporations etc. accountable to ensure that their offered wages grow with the rising cost of living whether they are private/public, nonprofit or otherwise. We need to create better accessible education programs and trade schools that give people the opportunity to thrive without living in poverty.”

Workforce development is best understood not as a publicly funded service system, but as a complex ecosystem that must be cultivated, diversified, and balanced. It is the practical application of strategies critical to powering the economy. Workforce development strategies must enable government to government and public-private partnerships, maximize public and private investments within and across industry sectors, equip a workforce with skills that meet immediate and long-term business needs, design quality jobs and career pathways that build family and community prosperity, prepare for and manage disruptions and shocks, and generate ongoing analysis, planning, and resources required for innovation and resilience (Oleary, Overly, and Datar).

RRRISE has established a foundation for this work guided by a vision in which “...*everyone belongs, with stable jobs, accessible healthcare, and a flourishing natural environment. Together, we work towards a future where anyone can thrive.*” To build a regional workforce development ecosystem serving this vision, workforce strategies must address specific challenges outlined in the SWOT assessments relayed above and summarized here.



The Redwood Region is a newly designated planning area covering four profoundly rural counties and Tribal Lands, many of which experience capacity challenges in carrying out workforce development programming. It is served by three separate Workforce Investment Boards covering vastly different geographies and populations. Only one of the four counties in the region has a dedicated public workforce development office and staff in all four counties responsible for economic and workforce development are overburdened and carry multiple responsibilities. Tribes in the region have expressed a need for increased capacity in this realm in the form of dedicated staff positions for economic development and workforce development, which some have and others do not. The region is well served by North Coast Indian Development Council who provides workforce development programming.

Compounding these capacity issues, most employers in the region are small businesses which don't typically participate in or drive the design of public sector workforce programs in a coordinated way and struggle to meet their own workforce needs, while larger employers—primarily concentrated in government and health sectors—are confronted by both resource and labor shortages that limit their capacity to guide or contribute to workforce training resources at a county-wide or regional scale. The recent arrival of national and international developers in the emerging offshore wind industry have introduced new challenges and opportunities to these dynamics.

Additionally, the region is facing a wave of retirements in skilled trades (construction, maintenance, repair) providing critical support to anchor industries with few younger members of the workforce to come behind. This creates current backlogs and logjams in accessing labor to conduct emergency response efforts, public works construction projects, business development and residential improvement—like ADUs—even when policy is supportive, costs are prohibitive. Anchor industries like tourism, arts, culture, hospitality, and social services providing safety net and wraparound support are primarily staffed with entry-level and lower skilled jobs. Residents across the region report a culture of disposable labor, poor treatment, and limited opportunities for advancement.

The region has high rates of adults with ACEs and high attrition from the workforce due to cognitive and behavioral disability, higher rates of mental health conditions including depression, anxiety, and health conditions that are correlated with trauma. These outcomes are disproportionately concentrated in priority populations. Employers report that this affects worker productivity, resilience, and turnover. Shortages of childcare providers, lack of transportation, and lack of higher wage opportunities are also barriers reported by priority communities.

The RRRISE sector and cross-cutting strategies outlined in this plan include commitments to growing key features of the workforce development ecosystem: Data and analysis, K-12 and post-secondary career pathways programs, on the job training, apprenticeship programs, entrepreneurship, and investments in infrastructure like broadband, healthcare, and housing. The success of these initiatives will depend on coordinating and leveraging investments across the sectors to ensure jobseekers, incumbent workers and employers in priority communities lead, design, and access these resources and businesses participate in building the capacity of a regional workforce ecosystem to deliver benefits to all workers, businesses and communities.

This includes:

-
- ◆ Leveraging funding resources—federal, state, and other grant programs and business investments—across the region.
-
- ◆ Using key data—such as that developed and proposed in this plan to understand workforce gaps and opportunities, make strategic investments, identify and nurture strategic partnerships, and track impact.
-
- ◆ Resourcing leadership in priority communities to help identify and track the unique characteristics, opportunities, and workforce development needs of priority communities.
-

- ♦ Integrating the needs of employers and workers by creating industry-based, worker-focused training partnerships (i.e., High Road Training Partnerships)–where employers collaborate to build sector strategies based on quality of product and service achieved through innovation and investment in people–the local workforce–thereby generating family-supporting jobs where workers have agency and voice.
- ♦ Applying local and traditional knowledge along with evidence of best practices to design workforce development solutions that work in our region’s rural context.
- ♦ Developing training and assistance to implement strategies effectively and improve them over time.

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

Strategies

Strategy 1: Build Capacity of Regional Workforce Development Leaders, Providers and Partners to Plan and Implement Best Practices That Build Workforce Readiness

In this region, where many residents lack access to information on viable career paths, lack experience and skills or experience barriers to employment, resources must be developed and aligned to help prepare them to find, secure and flourish in jobs in their chosen field of work. Further, the absence of a coordinated and resourced workforce development ecosystem limits the capacity of partners to access best practice research, technical support and training that can better prepare them to build workforce readiness and success.

There is a rich and growing fund of research, assistance and funding supported by federal and private organizations (foundations, think tanks, etc.) documenting workforce best practices, including those serving people facing barriers to employment. Few, however, address the needs and circumstances in highly rural areas. California, through collaborative efforts of the CA Workforce Development Board, Employment Development Department, California Department of Education, CA Community College Chancellor’s Office, CA Community College Foundation, Department of Social Services, Department of Developmental Services, Department of Industrial Relations and other agencies/departments, has invested in grant programs funding pilots, TA and evaluation to demonstrate what works for people experiencing barriers to employment to enter, participate in, and complete broader workforce preparation, training and education programs, and to obtain and retain employment. State agencies are now collaborating on a Master Plan for Career Technical Education and Jobs First Council to better align funding, practices and support resources that:

1

Ensure the success of individuals either preparing to enter or already enrolled in workforce and education programs.

2

Address racial and ethnic exclusion and inequity in the labor force and enhance racial and economic justice.

3

Create pipelines to quality jobs, upward mobility, and income security for workers historically excluded from quality jobs and economic prosperity.

This statewide focus on equitable skill-building to further economic and climate justice and resilience has provided templates for success and creates opportunities for rural regions to define what successful practices across the education and workforce development continuum of services should be and achieve. The relative dearth of strategies that are directly applicable to profoundly rural areas points to the need to build the capacity of partners in the RRRISE workforce development ecosystem to translate these practices to local conditions, test and pilot, and scale successful practices to break down barriers to employment as well as work collaboratively with employers to support hiring and retention of nontraditional job candidates and those confronting barriers to employment.

“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.”

Coordinate and Support Communities of Practice; Develop and Provide Training and TA on Best Practice Models for Working with Priority Communities

Examples of relevant training in models and practices meeting needs of priority populations could include Workforce Navigator Approaches, Co-enrollment Approaches, or Self-directed Services Approaches. Of central importance to the region however will be scaling uptake of Trauma-informed Approaches amongst key employers and training programs. Doing so could involve:

-
- ◆ Training programs that integrate trauma awareness, resilience-building, and mental health components. Educate workforce professionals and employers on trauma’s impact on job performance and retention. Provide trauma-informed coaching alongside technical skills training. Ensure that all staff involved in workforce development are trained in trauma-informed care. This training should cover how trauma affects individuals’ behavior, learning, and engagement in work environments.
-
- ◆ Establish trauma-informed practices in workforce organizations. Train staff to recognize and respond to trauma signs. Create safe, supportive environments for staff and clients. Offer resources to address staff trauma and prevent secondary traumatization.
-
- ◆ Partner with employers for trauma-informed workplaces: collaborate with employers to implement trauma-informed practices. Educate employers on trauma’s impact on employee performance and retention. Assist in developing trauma-informed management practices and policies. Provide ongoing support to maintain trauma-informed workplaces.
-

Seed Pilots and Scale Effective Experiential Learning Models

Support coordination of regional “grow your own” workforce approaches. This tactic would take direction from leadership bodies in Strategy 1, communities of practice established above, and coordinate efforts to build on-ramps to and stand up new training and education programs, including:

- ◆ Adult education, family literacy, digital literacy and English as a Second Language
- ◆ Career exploration

- ◆ Mentorship and Internship opportunities
- ◆ Dual enrollment and post-secondary career pathways programs
- ◆ Integrated career education and training programs
- ◆ On the job training
- ◆ Apprenticeship programs
- ◆ Entrepreneurship programs

These programs take time and resources to develop. It is critical to cultivate partnerships not only across leaders but also people working in the field with the future and current workforce to conduct pilots and demonstration projects. These can be seeded through communities of practice that are built on relevant training and TA, grants and other funding vehicles. Provide and coordinate processes and resources to scale effective practices.

Strategy 2: Foster Regional Cooperation on Workforce Strategies

RRRISE holds the potential to foster a thriving workforce development ecosystem built on shared leadership and multi-national and multi-sector partnerships that help align information, document needs, establish shared interests and draw down resources that enable partners to efficiently and effectively design and implement skills-based workforce development solutions.

Multiple strategies in this plan call for investments in data, mapping, and analysis that can drive sector and workforce development. This creates a clear need for regional coordination, cultivation of strategic partnerships among and between governments, public workforce actors and private businesses, and forums or structures that support diverse actors within and across sectors to discuss implications for skills development and demand. This work can create avenues to direct education, training and skills development programs along a continuum of providers to train the region's existing workforce—which experiences significant barriers to employment—to meet a range of skills needed by the region's employers, including nonprofits, small businesses, public sector employers, and global investors.

Implementation

- A. Leverage and coordinate the work of collaborative sector-based structures**, partnerships and projects underway (K-12 collaborative, WIBs, AJCs, adult ed consortia, RANCHO) to build out the network or continuum of job training and business service.
- B. Build high-road structures** – Bring forward and resource work underway in each sector and seed pilots to grow capacity of partnerships directing industry-based, worker centered employment and advancement opportunities.
- C. Resource leadership** in Tribal and priority communities to fully participate in designing all facets of the workforce development infrastructure.

Figure 34 Workforce Development Sector Alignment with Key Program Objectives

Equity	Climate	Job Quality & Access
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Improve wraparound services, coordination, trauma-informed practices, and access to training/retraining opportunities for priority communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Strategies prepare the regional workforce to realize opportunities in growing clean energy and climate adaptation related occupations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Strategies provide overall guidance for improving prevalence of and access to thriving wage careers.

Regional Assets

- ◆ Those housed in the region's polytechnic university and institutions of higher education with outstanding R&D capabilities, including:
 - K-12 Collaborative, RANCHO, and Building Healthy Communities led and supported by Cal Poly Humboldt
 - Mendocino College, College of the Redwoods, Cal Poly Humboldt career pathways initiatives
- ◆ Tribal economic development and workforce organizations
- ◆ Offices of Education in each county and Tribal education programs
- ◆ Employer networks and Chambers of Commerce

These initiatives are all committed to increasing economic diversification and resilience and training workers to meet employment demands. Increasing knowledge, coordination and information across this work will improve alignment with regional job quality and access, equity, and climate goals.

A network of RRRISE partners—including Tribal, state and local governments, education institutions and training providers, employers, entrepreneurs, community organizations, and social service and infrastructure service providers—should be at the table to design and implement comprehensive workforce development strategies addressing workforce ecosystem infrastructure, sectoral and cross-sectoral capacity-building requirements, business leadership, and focused attention on enabling industries as set forth in other sections of this plan.

