April 15, 2026

County-Wide Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy

Goal: To create a comprehensive tourism strategy and plan that supports all of Humboldt County and outlines a way forward for ongoing, consistent and coordinated tourism marketing.

Prepared for County of Humboldt | Prepared by JayRay

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Section 1: Executive Framework

1.1 Executive Summary

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1.4 Structural Conditions & Opportunities

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1.1 Executive Summary

Humboldt County's visitor economy is significant, but structurally constrained.

Tourism is a foundational component of Humboldt County's economy. The visitor economy generates approximately $508.3 million in annual visitor spending, $46.1 million in state and local tax revenue and supports an estimated 5,800 local jobs. As this sector continues to evolve, governance and coordination structures must keep pace.

At the state level, California travel spending reached $157.3 billion in 2024, up 3% year-over-year, supporting 1.2 million jobs. Travel remains one of California's largest export industries.

Despite Humboldt's strong natural assets and improving airport retention rates, tourism marketing, governance, funding allocation and regional coordination have historically operated without a unified structure, resulting in:

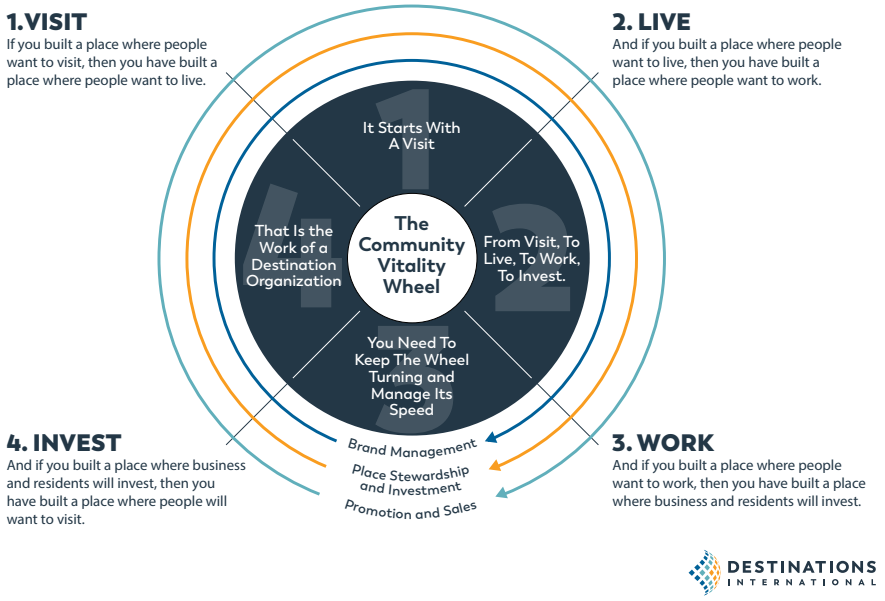
- Fragmented messaging
- Lack of funding rationale
- Limited accountability
- Unclear ownership of digital assets
- Misalignment between promotion and readiness

This Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy modernizes Humboldt County's approach to tourism oversight, funding allocation, regional coordination and marketing implementation. It aligns directly with the County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and establishes a durable framework rooted in transparency, equity and measurable performance.

This Strategy includes a benchmark-based marketing investment framework grounded in Destinations International and national destination marketing research. By adopting a percentage-based allocation model, Humboldt County can scale marketing responsibility, prioritize shoulder-season activation and ensure public funds are invested in channels that generate measurable economic impact.

At the center of this framework is the establishment of a Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO).

Destinations International defines the work of a Destination Organization as follows:



Advancing to Destination Stewardship

The County is not simply seeking a marketing contractor. It is advancing to a stewardship model.

Destination stewardship reflects a national evolution in tourism governance. Modern destination organizations balance economic vitality, community well-being, environmental integrity and long-term brand sustainability.

In Humboldt County, stewardship means:

- Promoting the destination responsibly and in alignment with readiness and infrastructure capacity
- Supporting shoulder-season and geographically balanced visitation
- Coordinating county-wide across six Tourism Regions to avoid fragmentation
- Strengthening partnerships with airlines and statewide entities
- Ensuring transparent, performance-based allocation of public funds
- Protecting County-owned brand and digital assets

This plan incorporates a readiness-based activation framework to ensure that promotion aligns with capacity and visitor experience quality. The goal is not simply increased visitation, but intentional growth aligned with community values and economic resilience.

Collaboration is the foundation of this Strategy. The Destination Stewardship Organization is designed not only as a marketing operator but also as a countywide convener — bringing together Tourism Regions, community partners, and industry leaders under a shared framework. By aligning strategy, funding and performance expectations across regions, this plan prioritizes coordination over competition and partnership over fragmentation.

While incorporated cities (Arcata, Blue Lake, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, Rio Dell and Trinidad) collect and manage their own Transient Occupancy Tax revenues, visitors experience Humboldt County as a single destination. Travel patterns routinely cross jurisdictional boundaries, and a fragmented

marketing approach risks diminishing overall economic impact. This Strategy establishes a unified countywide framework that supports coordinated storytelling, infrastructure alignment and visitor dispersal — while respecting the distinct fiscal authorities of incorporated cities.

Governance & Accountability

The County retains fiduciary oversight of Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) revenue. The Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO) will operate as the implementation arm of the strategy under County supervision, supported by a Tourism Advisory Board (TAB) representing each Tourism Region.

To ensure continuity and stability during implementation, this plan includes a defined transition period for communities that have historically received tourism funding. Former Gateway Communities will continue to play an important role and remain eligible for funding under the new Tourism Region model, with a structured transition period to prevent disruption while the DSO Request for Proposal (RFP) and Tourism Region Fund application processes are launched.

This approach honors long-standing partnerships while modernizing funding to align with strategy, transparency and measurable economic impact.

The DSO will also serve as Humboldt County's centralized hub for destination intelligence and shared creative assets — ensuring that tourism decisions are data-informed, brand-consistent and strategically aligned.

This Strategy ensures that Humboldt County's visitor economy is not only promoted, but responsibly stewarded, coordinated and measured for long-term success.

How to Read This Plan

Tourism markets shift, infrastructure evolves and community priorities change. Through structured reporting, performance reviews and transparent governance, Humboldt County will continuously refine this plan to ensure it supports economic diversification, rural equity and sustainable destination stewardship over time.

This Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy is designed to support multiple audiences, including elected officials, County staff, regional partners and future Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO) operators.

Because the plan integrates economic analysis, governance reform, funding policy and marketing strategy, readers may engage with different sections depending on their role.

For Board Members

Key sections include:

- Executive Summary
- Why Destination Stewardship
- Governance Structure
- Regional Funding Allocation Model
- Implementation Timeline

These sections outline structural modernization, fiscal oversight and phased implementation.

For County Staff

Key sections include:

- Governance & Oversight Framework
- Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO) Scope of Work
- Funding & Reporting Requirements
- Risk Mitigation & Performance Review
- Appendices (Request for Proposal (RFP) & Templates)

These sections clarify operational expectations and compliance standards.

For Regional Partners

Key sections include:

- Tourism Region Profiles
- Readiness Framework
- Regional Funding Structure
- Reporting Expectations

These sections explain how projects will be evaluated and how regions align within the broader strategy.

For Future Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO) Applicants

Key sections include:

- Destination Stewardship Framework
- Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO) Scope of Work
- Destination Intelligence & Asset Management Requirements
- Performance Benchmarks
- Appendices (RFP & Templates)

This document is organized into eight major components:

1. Executive Framework
2. Tourism Regions & Assets
3. Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO) Model, Governance Funding & Staffing
4. Destination Marketing Strategy Framework
5. Destination Readiness
6. Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy — Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Crosswalk
7. DSO Request for Proposal (RFP)
8. Implementation

Detailed tools, templates and supporting research are included in the Appendices.

The structure is designed to separate policy direction from operational detail, ensuring clarity and usability.

What This Plan *Is* — and What It *Is Not*

This Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy establishes a coordinated, accountable and forward-looking framework for stewarding Humboldt County's visitor economy. Clarity regarding scope and intent is essential.

What This Plan *Is*

- **A Governance Modernization Framework**
  It establishes a clear structure for oversight, accountability and coordination through a Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO) operating under County supervision.
- **A Transparent Funding Model**
  It replaces legacy allocations with a competitive, performance-aligned funding structure.
- **A Regional Equity Framework**
  It defines six Tourism Regions to support representation, collaboration and geographic balance.
- **A Readiness-Based Activation Strategy**
  It aligns promotion with infrastructure capacity and visitor experience readiness.
- **A Data-Informed Stewardship Model**
  It centralizes destination intelligence, reporting and asset management to support measurable outcomes.
- **A Phased Implementation Plan**
  It includes a Transitional Stabilization Period to support continuity during the transition.
- **An Economic Development Tool**
  It aligns tourism investment with the County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

What This Plan *Is Not*

- **It is not the elimination of regional participation.**
  Regional representation remains central through the Tourism Advisory Board and regional funding process.
- **It is not an immediate removal of funding.**
  A transitional year provides continuity while moving toward strategy alignment.
- **It is not solely a marketing plan.**
  The document addresses governance, fiscal oversight, data systems and long-term stewardship.
- **It is not a rigid redistribution formula.**
  Funding decisions will be guided by strategic alignment, measurable impact and equity over time.
- **It is not a substitute for broader infrastructure or social policy.**
  The Strategy incorporates readiness considerations but does not replace separate County initiatives.
- **It is not centralized control of local identity.**
  Regional character remains essential within a coordinated Countywide framework.
- **It is not growth without intention.**
  The objective is balanced, responsible visitation aligned with community values and economic resilience.

1.2 Community & Industry Engagement

Reflecting Lived Experiences

A comprehensive industry partner engagement process informed the development of this Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy. The goal of this engagement was to ensure the plan reflects the lived experience of industry partners, regional leaders and local businesses across Humboldt County.

Methodology and Data Sources

This plan integrates primary data collected by JayRay and secondary data and reports from industry leaders. Recommendations are grounded in documented data and industry benchmarks and support the County of Humboldt's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2025-2030.

Primary data includes:

- Online survey of the Humboldt County tourism industry (335 responses)
- Online survey of Humboldt County's visitors (108 responses)
- One-on-one virtual interview with 15 tourism industry partners
- Tourism marketing audit
- Competitive analysis
- Tourism asset inventory and analysis
- A Countywide Travel & Tourism Strategy Workshop attended by 46 participants
- Tourism Advisory Committee input from a group of 12
- Review of historical funding allocations and performance reports

Participants represented all major geographic areas of Humboldt County, tribal partners and a cross-section of sectors, including hospitality, outdoor recreation, arts and culture, events, film, transportation, agriculture, aviation, small business and economic development.

Key Themes Identified

While perspectives varied by region, consistent themes emerged:

1. **Desire for Coordinated Countywide Branding**
   Industry partners expressed a need for stronger, unified messaging that connects Humboldt County's diverse assets into a single, recognizable story while still allowing regional differentiation.

2. **Need for Transparent & Strategy-Based Funding**
   Many partners noted that the prior "gateway community" funding model lacked clarity in allocation criteria, measurable performance standards and long-term alignment with economic development goals.

3. **Infrastructure & Readiness Gaps**
   Participants acknowledged disparities in infrastructure readiness across regions, including wayfinding, public amenities, event capacity and visitor services. There was broad agreement that promotion should be aligned with readiness.

4. **Air Service & Market Access Opportunities**
   Industry partners emphasized the importance of aligning tourism marketing with California Redwood Coast - Humboldt County Airport (ACV) air service strategy to improve inbound passenger retention and support route sustainability.

5. **Rural Equity & Regional Identity**
   Participants supported establishing Tourism Regions to better organize storytelling and itinerary development. There was recognition that equitable investment does not mean equal funding, but rather strategic funding aligned with readiness and impact.

6. **Collaboration as a Cultural Shift**
   There was strong support for a formal convening structure to reduce fragmentation, increase cross-regional cooperation and strengthen communication between the County and industry partners.

Secondary data includes a variety of reports from the County of Humboldt and tourism industry benchmarks from destination leaders, including Visit California and Destinations International. See Section 9 for a complete list of secondary data sources.

1.3 Economic Context & Market Conditions

Travel as Economic Infrastructure

According to the 2024 California Economic Impact Report, travel-generated state and local taxes reached $12.6 billion statewide, up 3.1% from 2023.

Tourism Supports:

- Retail sales
- Food & beverage revenue
- Transportation services
- Cultural institutions
- Arts and entertainment sectors

In Humboldt County specifically:

- Accommodations and food services represent the largest share of tourism-supported employment (3,100 jobs) (*ACV Passenger Retention and Leakage Report)
- Travel-related earnings exceed $145 million in accommodations and food services alone (*ACV Passenger Retention and Leakage Report)

This demonstrates tourism's role as a wage-generating cluster, not a peripheral activity.

Lodging Performance

Despite international travel declines, economic uncertainty, wildfires and unrest in Los Angeles last summer, California's hotel industry outperformed the overall U.S. hotel industry in 2025, according to Visit California.

In 2025, Humboldt County's average hotel occupancy was 55%, with an average daily rate (ADR) of $130.43 and an average revenue per available room (RevPAR) of $74.11. In looking at seasonality trends, summer months performed best, followed (in order) by fall, spring and winter. July and August had the highest hotel occupancy, while January, February and December had the least.

Lodging performance in Humboldt County is heavily driven by nature-based tourism and characterized by seasonal demand fluctuations. According to CoStar, which provides year-round hotel occupancy and average daily rates to organizations such as Visit California and the Humboldt Lodging Alliance through subscription, there are **68 hotel properties** with **3,011 rooms** in Humboldt County.

Peak Season | June-August

The peak tourist season for Humboldt County is during the summer months (June-August). This period offers the warmest, sunniest weather with the highest lodging occupancy rates. Most destination organizations focus on extending their peak seasons into shoulder seasons.

Average hotel occupancy in the 2025 summer peak months was 71%, with an ADR of $157.64. July had the highest overnight lodging performance with 74% occupancy, $165.35 ADR and $122.45 in revenue per available room (RevPAR). July's performance was down from 2024 (-4.3% occupancy, -3.5% RevPAR). However, ADR in July increased by .08%.

Shoulder Seasons | March-May + September-November

The shoulder seasons for Humboldt County typically fall in the spring (March-May) and fall (late September-November). During these periods, visitors can experience milder, often sunny weather, fewer crowds than the summer peak (June-August) and the beginning of fall redwood foliage or spring wildflower blooms.

The 2025 spring shoulder season saw an average hotel occupancy of 53% and an ADR of $124.67. The 2025 fall shoulder season saw an average hotel occupancy of 56% and an ADR of $126.50, performing slightly better than spring months.

Low Season | December-February

The off-season (low season) is generally during the rainy winter months (December-February). During this time, the area experiences high rainfall and cooler temperatures, which contribute to lower lodging occupancy.

December 2025 data shows Humboldt occupancy at 40.8% compared to California's 58.4%. While ADR (average daily rate) increased 6.8% year-over-year, RevPAR (revenue per available room) remains below statewide averages. Average hotel occupancy in winter, off-peak months, was 41%, with an ADR of $112.90 in January, February and December.

This indicates:

- Strong pricing recovery (ADR) despite lower occupancy
- Continued shoulder season underperformance
- Opportunity for demand stimulation rather than inventory expansion alone — modest marketing-driven growth potential

Air Service as Economic Multiplier

ACV:

- 804 passengers per day each way
- 41% catchment retention (highest in a decade)
- LA Basin now top market

However, outbound share remains 55%. Industry research consistently shows that inbound leisure growth improves route sustainability more than outbound traffic alone. Therefore, inbound demand

development must become a coordinated DSO responsibility.

North Coast Visitor Personas & Target Markets

Visit California's North Coast research identifies distinct traveler segments whose motivations, trip behaviors and spending patterns align with Humboldt County's tourism assets.

These traveler personas provide a data-informed foundation for marketing prioritization and product development. The detailed persona profiles are included in Section 9.4. The following high-level segments are particularly relevant to Humboldt County:

- Outdoor Adventure Seekers
- Nature & Conservation Enthusiasts
- Cultural Explorers
- Culinary & Agritourism Travelers
- Road Trip & Scenic Drive Visitors
- Multi-Generational Leisure Travelers

These segments demonstrate:

- Higher-than-average interest in coastal and redwood environments
- Preference for immersive, place-based experiences
- Willingness to travel off-peak seasons
- Interest in sustainability and environmental stewardship
- Higher engagement with itinerary-driven planning

Rather than attempting to attract all visitor types, the Strategy recommends prioritizing segments that:

- Align with Humboldt's natural and cultural strengths
- Support shoulder-season visitation
- Demonstrate higher per-trip spending
- Respect environmental capacity
- Travel by air into ACV where feasible

This focus strengthens return on investment and reduces reputational risk.

1.4 Structural Conditions & Opportunities

Several structural conditions impact the County's ability to fully leverage tourism as a stable economic driver. However, these conditions are not barriers — they are strategic realities that inform this plan.

1. **Seasonality & Revenue Volatility**
   Humboldt experiences pronounced seasonal visitation patterns, with summer occupancy significantly exceeding winter and shoulder-month occupancy. This volatility affects:

   - Lodging stability
   - Workforce retention
   - Small business sustainability
   - Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) predictability

   Opportunity: Stabilizing shoulder-season visitation is essential to long-term economic resilience.

2. **Below-Statewide Occupancy Performance**
   Lodging occupancy rates remain below California statewide averages. This suggests growth potential, particularly in shoulder seasons and fly-market demand segments.

   Opportunity: Launch a countywide shoulder-season campaign to increase overnight stays.

3. **Air Leakage & Market Access Constraints**
   ACV retains approximately 41% of passenger catchment within the region, indicating significant outbound leakage.

Opportunity: While drive markets remain dominant, improved coordination between aviation and tourism marketing represents a meaningful opportunity for inbound growth.

4. **Infrastructure & Destination Readiness Disparities**
   Infrastructure readiness varies across the County's newly established Tourism Regions. Some areas are well-positioned for immediate promotion, while others require investments in wayfinding, amenities, beautification or event activation before marketing expansion.

   Opportunity: Align promotion with readiness to protect visitor satisfaction and community perception.

5. **Legacy Funding Model Fragmentation**
   Previous tourism funding allocations were tied to historical gateway designations rather than strategy-based performance metrics. This limited transparency and reduced the County's ability to align tourism investment with economic development goals.

   Opportunity: Transition to a Tourism Region Strategic Funding Program addresses this gap.

6. **Limited Centralized Tourism Data Infrastructure**
   Historically, tourism performance data has not been centralized in a single, publicly accessible reporting system. Without consistent dashboards and performance measurement, it has been difficult to assess Return on Investment (ROI) or the geographic distribution of impact.

   Opportunity: Formalize the DSO's role as the countywide source of tourism data and reporting.

Rather than viewing these realities as limitations, this Strategy positions them as drivers for modernization and long-term economic resilience.

1.5 Travel & Tourism Trends

Aligning Strategy with Market Shifts

Tourism markets are evolving rapidly due to technological change, shifting traveler preferences and macroeconomic uncertainty. The following trends, informed by Destinations International, the 2026 Travel Marketing Outlook, Visit California insights and Datafy geolocation data, shape the strategic direction of this plan.

Understanding these trends ensures Humboldt County's tourism strategy is forward-looking, competitive and resilient.

1. **Shorter Booking Windows & "Always-On" Demand**
   National research indicates travelers are booking trips closer to departure dates, particularly for domestic leisure travel. Economic uncertainty and flexible work schedules contribute to this behavior.

   Opportunity: Marketing that's continuous rather than campaign-limited. Always-on digital advertising and real-time itinerary content are essential, particularly for shoulder-season activation.

2. **Zero-Click & AI-Driven Search Behavior**
   Search behavior is shifting from traditional website browsing to AI-powered responses, zero-click results and answer engine summaries. Travelers increasingly rely on generative search tools and curated content feeds.

   Opportunity: Prioritize structured, AI-optimized content, also known as Answer Engine Optimization (AEO), itinerary-based landing pages and discoverable regional storytelling. SEO alone is no longer sufficient; content must be designed for AI visibility.

3. **Continued Demand for Nature-Based & Rural Travel**
   Post-pandemic travel patterns show sustained demand for outdoor recreation, national parks, coastal escapes and rural destinations offering space, authenticity and lower density. Humboldt County's redwoods, coastline and agricultural landscapes align strongly with this trend.

   Opportunity: Emphasize immersive, place-based storytelling — while balancing promotion with readiness to avoid overtourism pressures in sensitive areas.

4. **Growth in Shoulder-Season Travel**
   National data indicates an increasing willingness among travelers to visit destinations outside peak periods to avoid crowds and secure value pricing.

   Opportunity: Shoulder-season campaigns represent one of the most significant opportunities to stabilize occupancy, improve RevPAR and support small business sustainability. Strategic media allocation should prioritize March–May and September–November.

5. **Increased Expectation for Sustainability & Stewardship**
   Travelers increasingly expect destinations to demonstrate environmental responsibility and community stewardship. Destinations that fail to articulate sustainability practices risk reputational harm.

   Opportunity: Establishing a Destination Stewardship model, readiness framework and impact monitoring system will position Humboldt to lead with responsible tourism practices rather than reactive management.

6. **Domestic Drive Markets Remain Dominant, With Targeted Fly-Market Opportunity**
   While drive markets continue to account for the majority of visitation to rural California destinations, select fly markets offer high-spend growth potential when air access is aligned with marketing. ACV currently captures approximately 41% of the passenger catchment, indicating both constraints and opportunities.

   Opportunity: A strong drive-market focus for marketing, while strategically investing in fly-market campaigns aligned with ACV route development and Passengers Daily Each Way (PDEW) data.

7. **Experience-Led & Itinerary-Based Travel Planning**
   Travelers increasingly seek curated experiences rather than singular attractions. Multi-stop itineraries, themed trails and immersive journeys outperform static attraction lists.

   Opportunity: Newly established Tourism Regions provide a framework for itinerary development, cross-county storytelling and visitor dispersal. Marketing should emphasize routes, themes and experiences that encourage longer stays.

8. **Importance of First-Party Data & Measurable ROI**
   Public accountability expectations for tourism funding are increasing nationwide. Boards and elected officials require clearer ROI reporting and performance dashboards.

   Opportunity: Formalizing the DSO as the Countywide source of tourism data strengthens transparency and protects long-term funding stability.

By aligning strategy with travel trends and measurable market shifts, Humboldt County positions its visitor economy for disciplined, data-informed growth.

1.6 Industry Benchmarking: Why Structure Matters

This section grounds tourism governance and staffing recommendations in industry data.

According to Destinations International, approximately 73% of all destination organizations operate with a budget of less than $5 million, placing a $2 million organization in the mainstream "small destination" category.

Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) Governance Trends

The 2021-2022 Civitas DMO Funding Survey found that:

- 73% of destination marketing organizations operate as nonprofit 501 (c) (6) or 501 (c) (3) organizations
- 21% operate as public or quasi-governmental entities
- Public oversight and contract clarity significantly correlate with funding stability

Additionally, the 2025 Funding Futures Report (*Civitas/Miles/Tourism Economics) indicates:

- Communities increasingly require formal accountability triggers
- Performance-based funding models are becoming standard
- Contractual clarity around asset ownership is now considered best practice

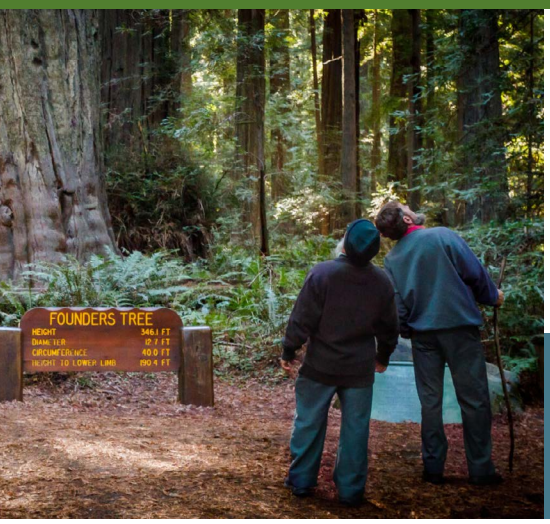
Humboldt's prior governance conflict underscores the importance of adopting modern safeguards.

DMO Budget & Staffing Benchmarks

Destinations International's Destination Organization Performance Reporting (DOPR) data shows:

- DMOs with annual budgets under $1M average 4-6 full-time employees
- DMOs with $1-3M budgets average 7-12 employees
- Marketing & program expenses (sales and marketing promotions, media relations, advertising, website, etc.) typically represent 40-55% of the total budget
- Administrative & operations (compensation, payroll, benefits, administrative tasks/ oversight) represent 20-30% of the total budget
- General expenses (expenditures on public affairs, partnerships/memberships) represent 15% of the total budget

Therefore, if Humboldt County allocates approximately $1.2M to DSO operations, a staffing model of 5-8 FTEs would align with national norms. This is expanded upon in Section 3.



Section 2: Tourism Regions & Assets

2.1 Tourism Regions & Place-Based Strategy

2.2 Asset Inventory & Regional Analysis

2.1 Tourism Regions & Place-Based Strategy

How Humboldt County's Tourism Regions Were Established

Humboldt County's six Tourism Regions were identified during a Travel & Tourism Marketing Strategy Workshop attended by 46 industry participants representing lodging, events, outdoor recreation, arts organizations, chambers, rural communities and regional leaders.

Participants worked collaboratively to:

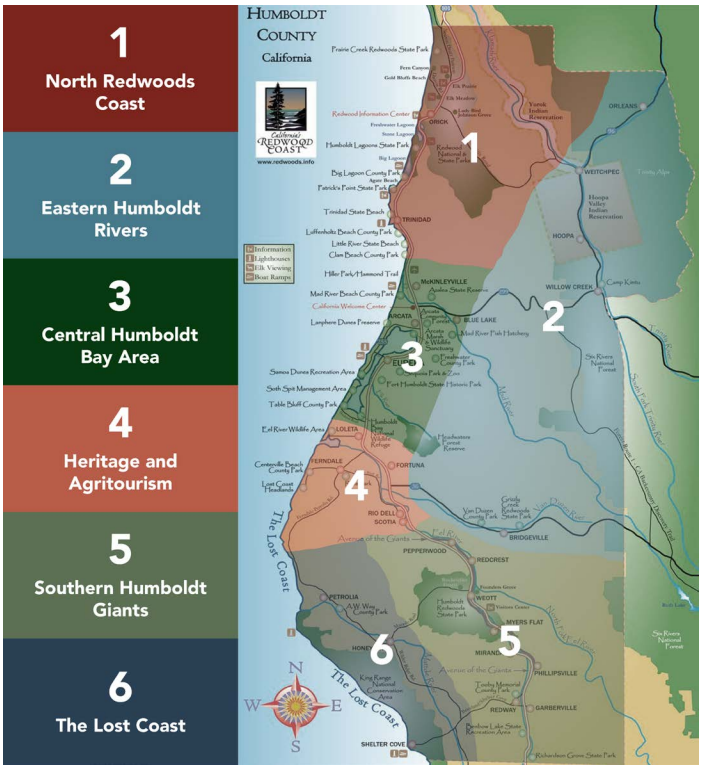
- Identify shared assets and visitor patterns
- Group communities based on geographic cohesion and visitor experience
- Recognize areas with distinct identity or product clusters
- Surface equity concerns and regional readiness differences

The result was six general Tourism Regions (as shown on map):

1. North Redwoods Coast
2. Eastern Humboldt Rivers
3. Central Humboldt Bay Area
4. Heritage and Agritourism
5. Southern Humboldt Giants
6. The Lost Coast

These names are placeholders for planning purposes only. The future Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO), in collaboration with the Tourism Advisory Board (TAB) and industry leaders, may refine region names to better reflect identity, culture and brand voice.

These regions are not political boundaries and do not alter jurisdictional authority. They are strategic planning and storytelling frameworks.



Why Tourism Regions Matter

The Tourism Regions serve three core purposes:

1. Coordinated Storytelling & Promotional Clarity
2. Visitor Experience & Length-of-Stay Growth
3. Funding Strategy & Regional Equity

Each purpose supports the County's CEDs goals related to economic resilience, business vitality and quality of place.

Purpose #1: Coordinated Storytelling & Promotional Clarity

Humboldt County is geographically large and diverse. Without a regional approach, promotional messaging risks being fragmented or confusing.

Tourism Regions allow the DSO to:

- Tell clearer, place-based stories
- Highlight distinctive natural and cultural assets
- Package experiences in a way visitors can understand
- Avoid over-promoting under-developed areas
- Align marketing with readiness levels

Rather than promoting isolated attractions, regions create thematic identity.

Example: Instead of marketing "individual sites," the DSO can market:

- Redwood Coast Adventure
- Bayfront Arts & Culinary
- Heritage & Agriculture
- Remote Wilderness & Solitude
- River & Mountain Exploration

This approach reflects how modern travelers plan trips — by experience cluster rather than municipal boundary.

Research from Destinations International and the 2026 Travel Marketing Outlook supports this model: travelers increasingly seek immersive, place-based, thematic journeys rather than single-destination stops.

Purpose #2: Visitor Experience & Length-of-Stay Growth

One of Humboldt County's key economic opportunities is movement across the County, to increase:

- Length of stay
- Per-visitor spending
- Cross-regional exploration

The Tourism Regions approach allows the DSO to build curated itineraries that intentionally move visitors across regions.

Example:

- 3-Day Redwoods & Coast Loop
- Makers & Artisans Route
- Food, Farm & Craft Beverage Experience
- Lost Coast Adventure Extensions
- Historic Towns of Humboldt
- Tribal Heritage
- Agriculture Journey

The cross-regional movement:

- Spreads economic impact more equitably
- Supports small rural communities
- Reduces over-concentration in high-traffic zones
- Encourages return visitation

Importantly, promotion should follow readiness. Regions with limited infrastructure or visitor services may be positioned as extensions or niche experiences until capacity improves.

Purpose #3: Funding Strategy & Regional Equity

The Tourism Regions Approach also provides structure for the new recommended Tourism Region Funding model. Historically, funding allocations were not guided by a formal regional or performance-based strategy framework.

The new approach creates:

- Transparent funding criteria
- Regional representation in application review
- Clear linkage to tourism strategy goals
- Performance tracking requirements

Tourism Region funding will:

- Support projects aligned with strategy
- Encourage collaboration within regions
- Incentivize cross-regional partnerships
- Require reporting tied to measurable outcomes

This structure improves transparency and fairness while maintaining flexibility.

It does not guarantee equal dollar amounts per region. Instead, funding decisions will consider:

- Strategic alignment
- Readiness level
- Measurable impact
- Collaboration
- Leveraged funding

This allows equity without enforcing artificial parity.

Regional Readiness & Responsible Promotion

There is concern about promoting areas that lack infrastructure, attractions or visitor services.

The Tourism Regions approach allows the County and TAB to:

- Conduct regional readiness assessments
- Identify infrastructure gaps
- Prioritize product development before promotion
- Phase marketing based on capacity

This ensures that marketing does not outpace experience quality. It also protects Humboldt's reputation by avoiding over-promotion of areas that are not yet visitor-ready.

Relationship to Governance & Representation

Each Tourism Region should:

- Have representation on the Tourism Advisory Board (TAB)
- Be eligible to apply for Tourism Region Funding
- Participate in industry convenings led by the DSO

Regions are not separate organizations. They are strategic planning units within a unified countywide destination framework.

The goal is unity through structure — not division through geography.

Managing Potential Conflicts of Interest on the Tourism Advisory Board

It is common practice for tourism advisory boards and destination organizations to include industry and regional representatives

whose organizations may also be eligible for tourism funding. This structure is beneficial because it ensures funding decisions are informed by local expertise and regional perspectives. To prevent conflicts of interest, standard governance safeguards are used, such as requiring board members to disclose any organizational interest in a funding request and recuse themselves from discussion and voting on proposals submitted by their own organization or any entity with which they have a financial relationship. With these safeguards in place — and with the County's Economic Development Department providing oversight — Tourism Region representation on the Tourism Advisory Board can strengthen transparency, regional collaboration and informed decision-making while maintaining fairness in the funding process.

Long-Term Opportunity

Over time, Tourism Regions should:

- Develop signature events
- Establish trail systems or thematic routes
- Create brand sub-identities
- Participate in cooperative marketing campaigns
- Develop visitor dispersal strategies
- Attract niche markets aligned with place strengths

This strengthens Humboldt County's overall competitive positioning while protecting rural identity.

2.2 Asset Inventory & Regional Analysis

From Assets to Readiness

Following the establishment of Humboldt County's six Tourism Regions, the next foundational step in building a coordinated tourism strategy is understanding what exists today — and what is needed tomorrow.

An Asset Inventory & Analysis was conducted by region as an initial baseline exercise. JayRay worked with County staff and tourism workshop participants to compile available asset data and supplemented this with independent online research to identify:

- Arts, Culture & Entertainment
- Cannabis Tourism
- Unique Food and Drink, including Breweries, Cideries and Distilleries
- Guided Cultural & Historic Tours
- Sports & Recreation
- Lodging (not including Short-Term Rentals (STRs))
- Marina & Retail Experiences
- Museums, Heritage & Interpretive Sites
- Native American Culture & History
- Parks, Trails & Natural Areas
- Seafood & Fishing Experiences
- Urban Centers & Institutions
- Wildlife Area/Sanctuary

While CoStar shows **3,011 hotel rooms** for the County, there isn't a current breakdown by region. The Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO) will need to identify the total number of rooms by region to understand regional readiness from a lodging standpoint.

The initial inventory provides directional understanding of each region's current tourism landscape. However, an asset list alone does not determine destination readiness.

The following pages represent the beginnings of **Regional Asset Readiness Profiles**.

Region 1 | North Redwoods Coast

Total Assets: 86 **Lodging Properties: 197 (Including Short-Term Rentals)**

Overview: Region 1 encompasses the northern coastal strip anchored by Orick and Trinidad, extending through Redwood National and State Parks to the Yurok Nation corridor. Home to ancient redwood forests, dramatic coastal bluffs and world-class marine experiences, it is one of California's premier natural destinations.

Asset Inventory by Type ** Assets below are those included in current data set, not a comprehensive list*

Asset Category	Count	% of Humboldt Total
Arts, Culture & Entertainment	7	7%
Cannabis Tourism	—	—
Unique Food and Drink	7	10%
Guided Cultural & Historic Tour	9	35%
Sports & Recreation	4	7%
Lodging (not STRs)	13	21%
Marina & Retail Experiences	—	—
Museums, Heritage & Interpretive Sites	6	21%
Native American Culture & History	8	36%
Parks, Trails & Natural Areas	25	30%
Seafood & Fishing Experience	3	29%
Urban Centers & Institutions	2	13%
Wildlife Area/Sanctuary	1	11%

Top Asset Types ** By quantity, not visitor demand*

Rank	Asset Type	Count
#1	Parks, Trails & Natural Areas	25
#2	Lodging (not STRs)	13
#3	Guided Cultural & Historic Tour	9

Region 1 Lodging Snapshot | 13 properties identified in data set ** Not an exhaustive list*

Property Name	Location	Lodging Type
Sue-meg State Park Cabins	Trinidad	Cabin/Cottage
Emerald Forest Cabins & RV	Trinidad	RV Park
Ancient Redwoods RV Park	Trinidad	RV Park
Heart of the Redwoods Cottages & RV	Trinidad	RV Park/Cabin
View Crest Lodge	Trinidad	Lodge

Region 1 | North Redwoods Coast

Trinidad Inn	Trinidad	Hotel/Motel
Sounds of the Sea	Trinidad	Inn/Boutique Hotel
Roosevelt Basecamp	Trinidad	Hotel/Motel
Elk Meadow Cabins	Orick	Cabin
Lost Whale Inn	Trinidad	Inn/Boutique Hotel
Trinidad Bay Bed & Breakfast	Trinidad	Bed & Breakfast
Turtle Rocks Oceanfront Inn	Trinidad	Inn/Boutique Hotel
The Lookout at Trinidad Bay	Trinidad	Inn/Boutique Hotel
Estimated Short-Term Rentals (Airbnb/VRBO)	Various	~184

Region 2 | Eastern Humboldt Rivers

Total Assets: 46 **Lodging Properties: 344 (Including Short-Term Rentals)**

Overview: Region 2 covers the rugged inland eastern corridor — Willow Creek, Hoopa Valley, Blue Lake, Bridgeville and the Six Rivers National Forest — defined by the Trinity and Van Duzen River systems. It is Humboldt's dramatic interior zone, anchored by tribal cultural heritage, world-class river recreation and the county's signature Bigfoot tourism identity.

Asset Inventory by Type

** Assets below are those included in current data set, not a comprehensive list*

Asset Category	Count	% of Humboldt Total
Arts, Culture & Entertainment	6	6%
Cannabis Tourism	1	6%
Unique Food and Drink	10	14%
Guided Cultural & Historic Tour	1	4%
Sports & Recreation	5	8%
Lodging (not STRs)	4	6%
Marina & Retail Experiences	—	—
Museums, Heritage & Interpretive Sites	3	10%
Native American Culture & History	5	23%
Parks, Trails & Natural Areas	8	10%
Seafood & Fishing Experience	3	20%
Urban Centers & Institutions	—	—
Wildlife Area/Sanctuary	—	—

Region 2 | Eastern Humboldt Rivers

Top Asset Types ** By quantity, not visitor demand*

Rank	Asset Type	Count
#1	Unique Food and Drink	10
#2	Parks, Trails & Natural Areas	8
#3	Arts, Culture & Entertainment	6

Region 2 Lodging Snapshot | 4 properties identified in data set ** Not an exhaustive list*

Property Name	Location	Lodging Type
Bigfoot Motel	Willow Creek	Hotel/Motel
Coho Cottages	Willow Creek	Cabin/Cottage
China Creek Cottages	Willow Creek	Cabin/Cottage
Blue Lake Casino & Hotel	Blue Lake	Casino Hotel
Estimated Short-Term Rentals (Airbnb/VRBO)	Various	~340

Region 3 | Central Humboldt Bay Area

Total Assets: 231 **Lodging Properties: 426 (Including Short-Term Rentals)**

Overview: Region 3 is Humboldt's urban and economic core, centered on Eureka, Arcata, McKinleyville and the Humboldt Bay estuary. It holds the county's highest concentration of tourism assets across food and drink, arts and culture, cannabis tourism and bay-based experiences.

Asset Inventory by Type ** Assets below are those included in current data set, not a comprehensive list*

Asset Category	Count	% of Humboldt Total
Arts, Culture & Entertainment	56	54%
Cannabis Tourism	13	76%
Unique Food and Drink	34	47%
Guided Cultural & Historic Tour	10	38%
Sports & Recreation	38	64%
Lodging (not STRs)	18	29%
Marina & Retail Experiences	5	83%
Museums, Heritage & Interpretive Sites	13	43%
Native American Culture & History	8	36%
Parks, Trails & Natural Areas	18	21%
Seafood & Fishing Experience	9	60%
Urban Centers & Institutions	4	33%
Wildlife Area/Sanctuary	6	67%

Region 3 | Central Humboldt Bay Area

Top Asset Types ** By quantity, not visitor demand*

Rank	Asset Type	Count
#1	Arts, Culture & Entertainment	56
#2	Sports, Recreation & Guided Experiences	39
#3	Unique Food and Drink	34

Region 3 Lodging Snapshot | 17 properties identified in data set ** Not an exhaustive list*

Property Name	Location	Lodging Type
Eureka Inn	Eureka	Hotel
Carter House Inns	Eureka	Inn/Boutique Hotel
Hotel Arcata	Arcata	Hotel
Best Western Plus Bayshore Inn	Eureka	Hotel
Ramada by Wyndham Arcata	Arcata	Hotel
Red Lion Hotel Eureka	Eureka	Hotel
The Inn at 2nd & C	Eureka	Inn/Boutique Hotel
Travelodge Eureka	Eureka	Motel
Motel 6 Eureka	Eureka	Motel
Best Western Plus Humboldt Bay Inn	Eureka	Hotel
Quality Inn Eureka	Eureka	Hotel
Comfort Inn Eureka	Eureka	Hotel
Holiday Inn Express and Suites Eureka	Eureka	Hotel
Hampton Inn and Suites Arcata	Arcata	Hotel
Comfort Inn Arcata	Arcata	Hotel
The Front Porch Inn	Arcata	Inn/Boutique Hotel
Lady Anne Victorian Inn	Arcata	Bed & Breakfast
Holiday Inn Express & Suites Arcata/Eureka-Airport Area	McKinleyville	Hotel
Estimated Short-Term Rentals (Airbnb/VRBO)	Various	~409

Region 4 | Heritage and Agritourism

Total Assets: 55 **Lodging Properties: 196 (Including Short-Term Rentals)**

Overview: Region 4 follows the Eel River valley through Loleta, Ferndale, Fortuna, Rio Dell and Scotia — a pastoral agricultural landscape anchored by the nationally recognized Victorian Village of Ferndale. It is the county's agritourism hub, with the strongest concentration of festivals, heritage events and working-farm experiences.

Asset Inventory by Type ** Assets below are those included in current data set, not a comprehensive list*

Asset Category	Count	% of Humboldt Total
Arts, Culture & Entertainment	12	12%
Cannabis Tourism	—	—
Unique Food and Drink	12	17%
Guided Cultural & Historic Tour	3	12%
Sports & Recreation	4	7%
Lodging (not STRs)	9	14%
Marina & Retail Experiences	—	—
Museums, Heritage & Interpretive Sites	3	10%
Native American Culture & History	1	5%
Parks, Trails & Natural Areas	7	8%
Seafood & Fishing Experience	—	—
Urban Centers & Institutions	2	13%
Wildlife Area/Sanctuary	2	22%

Top Asset Types ** By quantity, not visitor demand*

Rank	Asset Type	Count
#1	Arts, Culture & Entertainment	12
#2	Unique Food and Drink	12
#3	Lodging (not STRs)	9

Region 4 Lodging Snapshot | 9 properties identified in data set ** Not an exhaustive list*

Property Name	Location	Lodging Type
Gingerbread Mansion Inn	Ferndale	Bed & Breakfast
Victorian Inn Ferndale (also listed as Victorian Inn & Redwood Suites)	Ferndale	Inn/Boutique Hotel
Super 8 Fortuna	Fortuna	Motel
Scotia Lodge	Scotia	Hotel

Region 4 | Heritage and Agritourism

Redwood Riverwalk Hotel	Fortuna	Hotel
Bear River Casino Resort Hotel	Loleta	Casino Hotel
Shaw House Inn	Ferndale	Bed & Breakfast
Francis Creek Inn	Ferndale	Inn/Boutique Hotel
Humboldt Gables Motel	Rio Dell	Motel
Estimated Short-Term Rentals (Airbnb/VRBO)	Various	~187

Region 5 | Southern Humboldt Giants

Total Assets: 73 **Lodging Properties: 287 (Including Short-Term Rentals)**

Overview: Region 5 stretches through the southern redwood interior — Benbow, Garberville, Redway, Myers Flat, Miranda, Redcrest, Pepperwood and the Avenue of the Giants corridor — centered on Humboldt Redwoods State Park, home to the world's largest contiguous old-growth redwood forest. It combines extraordinary natural assets with an emerging cannabis tourism cluster and a nationally recognized music festival.

Asset Inventory by Type

** Assets below are those included in current data set, not a comprehensive list*

Asset Category	Count	% of Humboldt Total
Arts, Culture & Entertainment	22	21%
Cannabis Tourism	3	18%
Unique Food and Drink	5	7%
Guided Cultural & Historic Tour	1	4%
Sports & Recreation	5	8%
Lodging (not STRs)	13	21%
Marina & Retail Experiences	1	17%
Museums, Heritage & Interpretive Sites	1	4%
Native American Culture & History	—	—
Parks, Trails & Natural Areas	17	20%
Seafood & Fishing Experience	—	—
Urban Centers & Institutions	5	33%
Wildlife Area/Sanctuary	—	—

Region 5 | Southern Humboldt Giants

Top Asset Types ** By quantity, not visitor demand*

Rank	Asset Type	Count
#1	Arts, Culture & Entertainment	22
#2	Parks, Trails & Natural Areas	17
#3	Lodging (not STRs)	13

Region 5 Lodging Snapshot | 13 properties identified in data set ** Not an exhaustive list*

Property Name	Location	Lodging Type
Benbow Inn	Benbow	Lodge
Benbow Historic Inn	Benbow	Historic Inn/Lodge
Redwood Riverwalk Cabins	Garberville	Cabin/Cottage
Redwoods RV Resort	Garberville	RV Park
Myers Country Inn	Myers Flat	Hotel/Motel
Benbow KOA & Golf Course	Benbow	RV Park/Campground
Best Western Plus Humboldt House Inn	Garberville	Hotel
Humboldt Redwoods Inn	Garberville	Hotel/Motel
Lone Pine Motel	Garberville	Motel
My Humboldt Abode (Spa Retreat House)	Redway	Vacation Rental/Retreat
Giant Redwoods RV and Cabins	Myers Flat	RV Park/Cabin
Miranda Gardens Resort	Miranda	Resort/Cottage
Redcrest Resort Cabins & RV Park	Redcrest	Cabin/RV Park
Estimated Short-Term Rentals (Airbnb/VRBO)	Various	~274

Region 6 | The Lost Coast

Total Assets: 31 **Lodging Properties: 105 (Including Short-Term Rentals)**

Overview: Region 6 encompasses California's most remote and undeveloped coastline — Shelter Cove, Petrolia and Honeydew — anchored by the King Range National Conservation Area and the legendary Lost Coast Trail. It offers world-class wilderness experiences but has the thinnest visitor infrastructure of any region in the county.

Asset Inventory by Type ** Assets below are those included in current data set, not a comprehensive list*

Asset Category	Count	% of Humboldt Total
Arts, Culture & Entertainment	—	—
Cannabis Tourism	—	—
Unique Food and Drink	4	6%
Guided Cultural & Historic Tour	2	8%
Sports & Recreation	3	5%
Lodging (not STRs)	6	10%
Marina & Retail Experiences	—	—
Museums, Heritage & Interpretive Sites	4	13%
Native American Culture & History	—	—
Parks, Trails & Natural Areas	9	11%
Seafood & Fishing Experience	—	—
Urban Centers & Institutions	3	20%
Wildlife Area/Sanctuary	—	—

Top Asset Types ** By quantity, not visitor demand*

Rank	Asset Type	Count
#1	Parks, Trails & Natural Areas	9
#2	Lodging (not STRs)	6
#3	Unique Food and Drink	4

Region 6 Lodging Snapshot | 6 properties identified in data set ** Not an exhaustive list*

Property Name	Location	Lodging Type
Oceanfront Inn at Shelter Cove	Shelter Cove	Hotel
Inn of the Lost Coast	Shelter Cove	Inn/Boutique Hotel
Black Sands Inn	Shelter Cove	Inn/Boutique Hotel
Mario's Marina Motel		Hotel/Motel
Spyglass Inn	Shelter Cove	Inn/Boutique Hotel
Tides Inn of Shelter Cove	Shelter Cove	Inn/Boutique Hotel
Estimated Short-Term Rentals (Airbnb/VRBO)	Various	~99

Asset Types Grouped Into Categories

1. **Parks, Trails & Natural Areas — 84 assets**
   Combines: Parks and Campgrounds (37), Trail (15), Park (8), Scenic Drive (6), Beach (5), Waterway (4), Scenic Byway (3), Trailhead (2), Scenic Overlook (2), Campground (1), Redwood Recreation (1)

2. **Wildlife Area/Sanctuary — 9 assets**
   Combines: Wildlife Area (6), Wildlife Sanctuary (1), Aquarium (1), Zoo (1)

3. **Sports, Recreation & Guided Experiences — 59 assets**
   Combines: Sports and Recreation (35), Guided Outdoor Experience (19), Public Garden (2), Guided Experience – Guided Hiking (1), Guided Experience – Guided Nature Experience (1), Guided Experience – Guided Rafting (1)

4. **Seafood & Fishing Experience — 15 assets**
   Combines: Seafood & Fishing Experience – Charter (4), Seafood & Fishing Experience – Seafood Restaurant (3), Seafood & Fishing Experience – Fishing Pier (2), Freshwater Fishing (2), Seafood & Fishing Experience – Fish Market (1), Seafood & Fishing Experience – Oyster Farm (1), Seafood & Fishing Experience – Fisheries Education (1), Charter boat fishing (1)

5. **Guided Cultural & Historic Tour — 26 assets**
   Combines: Guided Cultural/Historic Tour (19), Movie/Film Attraction (6), Guided Outdoor Experience (1)

6. **Museums, Heritage & Interpretive Sites — 30 assets**
   Combines: Museums and Historical Sites (14), Historic Site (7), Visitor Center (4), Lighthouse (4), Bigfoot Lore (1)

7. **Native American Culture & History — 22 assets**
   Combines: Native American Culture and History (21), Cultural Asset (1)

8. **Unique Food and Drink — 72 assets**
   Combines: Food and Drink (52), Brewery/Distillery/Cidery (7), Farm-to-Table Restaurant (6), Farm & Food Experience – Farmers Market (4), Farm & Food Experience – U-Pick (3)

9. **Arts, Culture & Entertainment — 103 assets**
   Combines: Major Festivals & Events (91), Art/Makers/Galleries (8), Conference Center (1), Native American Culture and History (1), Farm & Food Experience (1), Museums and Historical Sites (1)

10. **Lodging — 63 assets**
    Includes: Lodging (63)

11. **Cannabis Tourism — 17 assets**
    Includes: Cannabis Tourism (17)

12. **Urban Centers & Institutions — 15 assets**
    Combines: Unincorporated Town (9), City (2), Town (2), College (2)

13. **Marina & Retail Experiences — 6 assets**
    Combines: Shopping (5), Marina (1)

Moving From Asset Inventory to Destination Readiness

An Asset Inventory identifies what exists. Destination Readiness evaluates whether those assets are prepared to deliver a positive, high-quality visitor experience at scale.

Readiness includes consideration of:

- Infrastructure capacity (roads, signage, broadband, restrooms)
- Lodging availability and quality
- Wayfinding and interpretation
- Public safety perception
- Visitor services and staffing
- Seasonal accessibility
- Event management capacity
- Environmental stewardship safeguards

The Destination Readiness Framework (Section 5) is included in this plan as a structured guide for advancing this work, identifying regions by Tiers to prioritize Tourism Region funding.

This framework provides the County and future Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO) with a practical tool to:

- Identify infrastructure gaps by region
- Prioritize product development before promotion
- Phase marketing based on capacity
- Align funding with readiness improvements
- Strengthen applications for state and federal grants
- Address regional inequities with data

Why This Work Must Continue at The Regional Level

The initial Asset Inventory completed for this plan provides a baseline — but it should not be considered comprehensive, rather the Asset Inventory should be treated as a living document.

The next iteration of this work should involve each Tourism Region working directly with the County and DSO to:

- Make asset inventory database accessible and editable
- Identify informal or emerging experiences
- Surface infrastructure barriers
- Prioritize near-term readiness improvements
- Identify long-term capital needs

This collaborative process is critical for three reasons:

1. **Accuracy**
   Local leaders understand the nuances of challenges and opportunities
2. **Equity**
   Regions with fewer assets may require investment in readiness before promotion
3. **Credibility**
   Partner participation increases buy-in and reduces perception of top-down planning

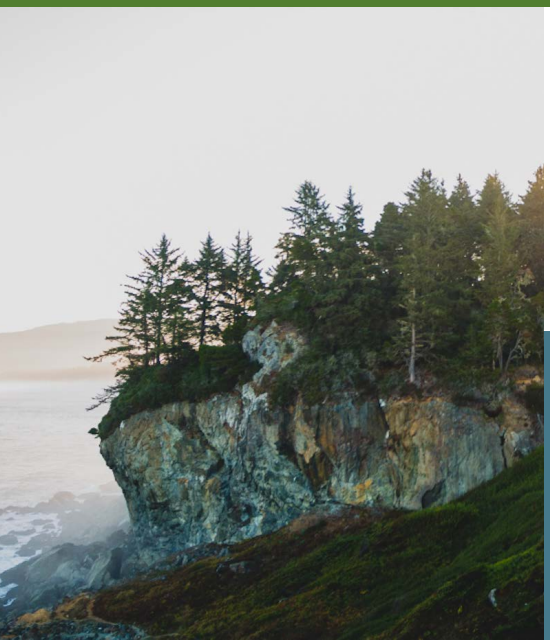
By involving regions in readiness assessment, the County strengthens trust while building a defensible prioritization framework.

Using the Asset Inventory Today

While readiness analysis evolves, the Asset Inventory can be used immediately to:

- Craft region-specific storytelling
- Develop themed itineraries
- Identify cross-regional routes
- Highlight ready-to-promote experiences
- Inform Tourism Region funding decisions
- Begin addressing gaps through targeted programs

The phased approach ensures that marketing does not outpace infrastructure — a concern voiced by industry partners. Promotion should follow preparedness.



Section 3: DSO Model, Governance & Funding

3.1 Destination Stewardship Model

3.2 Governance Structure

3.3 Funding & Staffing Framework

3.4 Tourism Region Funding Model

3.1 Destination Stewardship Organization Model

Why DSO Model

Destinations International defines the 21st-century DMO as a Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO), focused on:

- Community vitality
- Economic development
- Sustainability
- Industry partner alignment

The traditional promotional-only model has evolved nationally toward:

- Public-private accountability
- Measurable economic outcomes
- Infrastructure alignment

Humboldt's context requires this modernization — balancing promotion, coordination and stewardship under the DSO framework, with the focus on impact.

Evolution of Destination Models

FROM PROMOTION TO STEWARDSHIP

Destination Intelligence & Shared Asset Stewardship

As part of its stewardship model, the Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO) should serve as Humboldt County's centralized hub for visitor data, marketing intelligence and performance reporting. This was a top sentiment that emerged from JayRay's primary research with the Humboldt tourism industry.

Tourism decisions — including marketing investments, funding allocations and their service coordination — should be informed by consistent, standardized data managed through the DSO.

Key responsibilities:

- Collecting and analyzing visitor performance data
- Monitoring lodging trends and seasonal patterns
- Tracking marketing return on investment
- Producing quarterly performance dashboards
- Publishing an annual "State of Humboldt County's Visitor Economy" summary
- Supporting Tourism Region applicants with data-informed projections
- Aligning local reporting with statewide and national industry benchmarks

The DSO should gather, annually, statewide benchmarks from Visit California on overall tourism visitation and hotel lodging data, and national industry marketing benchmarks (social media engagement rate, ad click-through rate, website analytics, etc.) from sources such as Destinations International, to compare average industry performance with Humboldt County's results.

By centralizing destination intelligence, Humboldt County will avoid fragmented reporting, inconsistent metrics and duplication of effort across regions.

Shared Asset Bank & Content Stewardship

In addition to data stewardship, the DSO should establish and manage a centralized digital asset library for use by regional partners.

This shared asset bank should include:

- Professionally produced photography (noting photo credits/copyright)
- B-roll video footage
- Brand-approved messaging
- Regional story content
- Social media-ready content packages
- Co-op marketing templates

An asset bank will:

- Ensure brand consistency
- Reduce duplication of creative expenses
- Support smaller regional partners with limited marketing budgets
- Protect County-owned creative assets developed with public funds

The DSO may partner with established destination marketing technology providers to implement and manage this system. Examples of industry vendors offering digital asset management and content platforms for destination organizations include:

- CrowdRiff
- Simpleview DAM (previously Barberstock)
- Aprimo

3.2 Governance Structure

Structure Diagnosis (Evidence-Based)

The challenge in Humboldt is not demand scarcity. It's governance ambiguity.

Primary data sources supporting this conclusion:

- Industry partner interviews indicating 87% fragmentation signal
- A unified brand system is desired by 80% of industry partner participants
- A shared infrastructure and tools are needed by 73% of industry partner participants
- Marketing audit identifying inconsistent brand governance
- County of Humboldt staff report showing legacy-based funding allocations
- Concerns over the lack of coordinated assets

This alignment across qualitative and fiscal data indicates systemic, not promotional, issues.

Proposed Governance Structure

HUMBOLDT COUNTY DESTINATION STEWARDSHIP ORGANIZATION ECOSYSTEM

Why Separate Oversight from Execution

Industry best practice suggests:

Strategic oversight (board-level) should be separate from operational execution (staff-level).

This reduces:

- Political interference
- Conflict-of-interest risk
- Accountability ambiguity

Tourism Advisory Board (TAB)

Purpose of TAB:

- Strategic guidance
- Funding review recommendations for DSO and Tourism Regions
- Monitor performance dashboards, quarterly and annual reports
- Advise on regional readiness
- Report to Board of Supervisors (TAB is advisory, not final decision-making authority)

Note: Final funding authority remains with the Board of Supervisors.

Composition (13-16 voting members):

- One representative (from unincorporated communities) from each Tourism Region (6)
- One lodging representative
- One events representative
- One outdoor recreation representative
- One arts representative
- One airport representative
- One agritourism representative
- One Tribal member representative
- Humboldt Lodging Association liaison (non-voting)
- County Economic Development staff (non-voting)
- Board of Supervisors liaison (non-voting)

Note: The TAB should include at least 13 voting members to ensure balanced representation across Humboldt County's tourism industry sectors and geographic regions. Designated Tourism Region seats are intended to represent the County's unincorporated communities, as Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) revenues administered by the County are collected within these areas and are the primary funding source supporting the County's tourism initiatives. This structure ensures that communities contributing directly to the County's tourism funding framework have a voice in regional strategy and stewardship. At the same time, **representation from incorporated cities can be reflected through the sector-based seats (such as lodging, events, arts and culture or outdoor recreation), ensuring that perspectives from across the broader visitor economy are included while maintaining clear alignment with the County's governance and funding responsibilities**. The County may also appoint additional members from certain areas — such as Tribal or arts representatives — based on demonstrated expertise and commitment to supporting Humboldt County's visitor economy.

Tribal representation is an important component of Humboldt County's tourism stewardship framework, recognizing the cultural leadership and longstanding relationship that Tribal communities have with the region's lands, waters and heritage. Given that Humboldt County is home to multiple federally recognized Tribes and Tribal organizations, the County may consider appointing up to two Tribal representatives to the TAB based on interest and willingness to serve. Tribal representatives could be identified

through outreach to Tribal governments and organizations, with appointments made through the County's standard advisory board process. To support broad participation over time, Tribal seats may operate on staggered two- to three-year terms, allowing different Tribes or Tribal organizations the opportunity to participate in future cycles. In addition to the designated Tribal seat(s), **Tribal perspectives may also be represented through sector-based seats such as arts, outdoor recreation or events, ensuring Indigenous voices and expertise can contribute across multiple aspects of the visitor economy**.

Appointments & Terms:

- Appointment process (and any conflicts of interest) to be established by the County
- Recommended term length of 2-3 years, staggered

Safeguards

The DSO operator contract with the County should include:

- County ownership of domains and digital platforms
- Data reporting requirements (quarterly)
- Annual performance review
- Clear termination rights
- Financial transparency clauses
- Audit access

There are now standard contractual safeguards in public DMO/DSO agreements nationwide.

Why Not Fully In-House?

According to Civitas data, small- to mid-sized counties that internalize full DMO/DSO operations often face:

- Political cycle instability
- Staffing retention challenges
- Limited marketing agility

The County of Humboldt currently lacks the staffing capacity to internalize tourism fully. A contracted DSO under structured oversight provides:

- Professional specialization
- Accountability with a clear reporting cadence required
- Marketing must align with readiness
- Shared asset management

3.3 Funding & Staffing Framework

Current Funding Context

Humboldt County's TOT is primarily collected within unincorporated areas of the County. Incorporated cities (Arcata, Blue Lake, Eureka, Ferndale, Fortuna, Rio Dell and Trinidad) manage their own TOT revenues independently. However, visitors do not travel according to jurisdictional boundaries. Lodging, attractions, dining, transportation and experiences often span both incorporated and unincorporated areas within a single trip.

A unified countywide tourism strategy strengthens economic outcomes for all regions by promoting cohesive branding, itinerary development and cross-regional visitor dispersal. The Strategy does not reallocate or control municipal TOT revenues; rather, it provides a coordinated framework for storytelling, readiness alignment and regional collaboration.

By emphasizing coordination rather than consolidation, the County ensures that tourism promotion reflects how visitors actually experience Humboldt County — as one interconnected destination with diverse communities.

Consideration of Measure J and Tourism-Related Public Services

Measure J, the Humboldt County Hotel Tax Update Measure, directly supports the tourism industry by funding essential public services relied upon by visitors and residents alike. Revenues from Measure J help strengthen 9-1-1 emergency response systems, rural fire and ambulance services and road repairs — core infrastructure that underpins visitor safety, accessibility and overall destination readiness.

Measure J also supports the local creative economy through the "Artists in Tourism" stipend program, which compensates local artists for promoting Humboldt County through cultural storytelling and creative expression. This investment reinforces the County's identity, supports small businesses and strengthens arts-driven tourism experiences.

TOT and Measure J funding streams contribute to the same ecosystem: a safe, accessible, culturally vibrant destination. This Strategy is designed to complement Measure J by aligning tourism marketing, regional funding and destination stewardship with the public infrastructure and creative assets that Measure J helps sustain.

TOT Projections for 2025-2026 Fiscal Year

According to the County Staff Report, 25-502 (April 22, 2025), outlining Fiscal Year 2025-26 Funding Recommendations, projected TOT revenue for FY 2025-26 is approximately $3.44 million.

Historically:

- ~$1.83M allocated across various tourism-related entities
- Funding is distributed largely based on legacy allocations
- No formal performance rubric
- No region-based formula
- No unified reporting structure

This structure does not align with modern destination governance standards.

In addition to public funding sources administered by the County, Humboldt County also benefits from industry-led tourism investment through the Humboldt Lodging Alliance.

Collaboration with the Humboldt Lodging Alliance (HLA)

The Humboldt Lodging Alliance (HLA) plays a critical role in Humboldt County's tourism economy as the official owners' association for the lodging industry and the management entity for the county's Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID). The TBID is funded through a self-imposed assessment on lodging properties and is required to support initiatives that generate measurable overnight stays for lodging partners. Its primary priorities include destination marketing outside Humboldt County, funding visitor-attracting events (particularly during shoulder seasons) and supporting capital projects that increase visitation.

Given this alignment, the future Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO) and HLA have a significant opportunity to coordinate marketing strategy, messaging and investments to maximize impact while ensuring clear benefits for HLA member properties. Potential collaboration could include co-funded shoulder-season campaigns designed to increase overnight stays, coordinated event and itinerary promotion that packages lodging with regional experiences, shared market research and visitor data, and cooperative advertising programs that allow HLA lodging partners to participate directly in destination marketing campaigns. Through regular coordination meetings and strategic planning alignment, the DSO and HLA can ensure that County tourism investments and TBID resources complement one another —

strengthening the visitor economy while clearly demonstrating return on investment for Humboldt County lodging businesses.

About 30% of TBID funds have historically gone to marketing programs with an approximate annual revenue of ~$1.5 million, according to HLA's financial statement published on November 30, 2025

Industry Benchmark: How Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) Allocate Budgets

Marketing vs. Administration

The 2015 Financial Profile Study by Destinations International, previously Destination Marketing Association International, found:

- Average DMO allocates **49% of their total budget to marketing**
- 24% to administrations & operations
- 15-20% to sales & partnership functions

The 2025 Funding Futures Report (*Civitas/Miles Partnership/Tourism Economics) indicates that:

- Marketing expenditures for DMOs under $3M typically range between 40–55% of total budget
- Administrative oversight (public accountability, reporting, finance) averages **5–10%** in publicly funded structures
- Increasingly, destinations are reserving **10–15% for strategic initiatives or contingency reserves**

These benchmarks guide the proposed Humboldt County DSO allocation model. See the link to the 2025 Funding Futures Report in Section 9.5.

Recommended TOT Allocation Model (Percentage-Based)

Due to variability in funding from TOT and Measure J this plan does not specify exact dollar amounts. Therefore, this framework uses percentage ranges aligned with industry standards.

Recommended Allocation Structure

45-50%: DSO Core Operations, Marketing & Stewardship

Supports:

- Staffing
- Regional brand messaging and management
- Central hub of tourism assets
- Shared calendar of events
- Paid media
- Digital platforms
- Fly-market regional campaigns
- Cooperative marketing opportunities for tourism regions
- Reporting & analytics
- County-wide data
- Destination stewardship
- Industry convener
- Supports the goals of the CEDS 2025-30

20-25%: Tourism Region Fund (Replaces "Gateway" Funding)

Supports:

- Regional participation
- Events
- Visitor services
- Content development

- Experience packaging
- CEDS-aligned projects

10-15%: Strategic Initiatives & Event Development (Application Process)

Supports:

- Anchor events
- Rural activation
- Infrastructure readiness grants
- Pilot programs

10-15%: County Oversight & Administration

Supports:

- County tourism oversight staff
- Legal review
- Contract administration
- Performance reporting
- Tourism Advisory Board coordination

5-10%: Reserve Policy

Supports:

- Revenue volatility protection
- Emergency stabilization
- Multi-year funding continuity

Why This Structure Is Data-Defensible

TOT and Measure J funds work together to provide public infrastructure, safety and destination promotion that benefits locals and visitors. While year-to-year revenue fluctuates, **the following is an example of annual revenue being ~$3.44M, with $2.4M allocated to travel and tourism marketing**.

For example, if 50% of annual TOT revenue is allocated to travel and tourism marketing, the DSO budget is $1.2M.

This falls squarely within national DSO budget tiers for small- to mid-sized destinations.

According to Destinations International benchmarking, DMOs with a $1-2M budget typically:

- Employ 5–8 full time employees (FTE) (fully dedicated tourism staff)
- Maintain lean but professional marketing capacity
- Focus on regional drive markets
- Utilize co-op amplification strategies

This aligns with Humboldt County's scale and economic profile.

County Oversight Allocation Justification

Industry best practice increasingly includes formal public oversight funding.

The 2025 Funding Futures Report notes that destinations lacking dedicated oversight funding often experience:

- Accountability gaps
- Reporting inconsistencies
- Political instability

The County of Humboldt Economic Development staff have absorbed tourism tasks without designated funding.

Allocating 10-15% of TOT to County oversight:

- Prevents staff resource strain
- Protects contract compliance
- Formalizes accountability
- Reduces future governance conflict

This is a structural safeguard.

Dedicated Tourism Staff

If a host organization, such as a chamber of commerce or nonprofit, is selected to operate the Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO), the organization should demonstrate that dedicated tourism staff positions will be established to implement the County's Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy. These positions should be fully allocated to tourism program delivery, not shared across unrelated organizational responsibilities, to grow and sustain Humboldt County tourism.

DSO Staffing Model (data-supported)

Salary ranges are informed by Destinations International Destination Organization Performance Report (DOPR) benchmarking data, and publicly available compensation ranges for similarly sized U.S. destination organizations. Final compensation should reflect market conditions, candidate experience and County of Humboldt procurement guidelines.

Budget Tier Assumption

If DSO receives $1-2M annually, benchmarking suggests employing 5-8 FTEs (*Destination International DOPR).

Recommended Initial DSO Staffing Structure (Year 1-2)

The selected DSO operator should allocate tourism-dedicated full-time equivalent (FTE) positions. Salaries below reflect positions that are fully focused on tourism.

Executive Director/Tourism Director

- Strategic leadership
- Board reporting
- Contract accountability
- Tourism Regions convener
- Estimated salary range (national average small DMO): $120k-$150k

Director of Marketing

- Campaign strategy
- Paid media oversight
- Vendor management
- Regional brand messaging and management
- Shared tourism asset management
- Estimated salary range: $90K–$115K

Data & Reporting Analyst (or contracted equivalent)

- KPI dashboard
- Quarterly reporting
- Visitor economy market intelligence
- Estimated salary range: $65k-$85k

Digital Experience (or contracted equivalent)

- Content creation
- Social media channels
- Website management
- Estimated salary range: $65k-$85k

Marketing Investment Allocation (within DSO budget)

Using 49% marketing benchmark (*DMAI Financial Profile Study):

If DSO budget = $1.2M (adjust numbers below based on finalized total budget)

Approximate internal breakdown:

- 50% Marketing & Media: $600k
- 25% Staffing (non-marketing): $300k
- 10-15%: Technology: $120k-$180k
- 5-10%: Data, Research & Measurement: $60k-$120k

Paid Media Allocations Benchmark

The 2026 Travel Marketing Outlook found:

- 53% of DMOs report the highest ROI from Meta platforms
- 65% prioritize short-form video
- 92% participate in co-op marketing
- 24% of marketing budgets are typically allocated to co-ops

Recommendation for Humboldt:

- 35-45% Paid Social
- 15-20% Video Production
- 15-20% Search & SEO/AEO
- 20-25% Co-op Amplification

This aligns with industry ROI trends.

Reserve Policy Justification

The Funding Futures Report indicates destinations with formal reserve policies are:

- More stable during revenue downturns
- Less vulnerable to political funding shifts
- Better positioned for crisis recovery

COVID-era volatility reinforced this.

Recommendation for Humboldt:

- Maintain a minimum 6-12 months of operating reserve over time

Funding Accountability Mechanisms

To address prior governance conflict, include:

- Quarterly KPI dashboard and report (Sections 4.3, 6.1, 8.3)
- Annual KPI dashboard and report (Sections 6.1, 7.2, 8.3)
- Annual independent financial review
  - Conducted by a licensed Certified Public Accountant (CPA) firm specializing in nonprofit and public-sector accounting (consider RFP process for selection)
  - The CPA firm should not be affiliated with the DSO operator
  - This review should verify that TOT funds are managed in accordance with the County's funding agreement, approved budgets and applicable public funding guidelines
  - Results should be shared with the County Economic Development Department and the Tourism Advisory Board
- Defined renewal criteria (Section 7.2)

Why This Model Is Politically Durable

This structure:

- Protects County asset ownership
- Provides measurable accountability
- Aligns with national benchmarks
- Removes legacy inequities
- Supports regional participation
- Aligns with CEDS economic goals
- Protects against revenue volatility

3.4 Tourism Region Funding Model

Transition from Legacy Gateway Funding to the Tourism Region Funding Model

Humboldt County has historically provided tourism funding to unincorporated areas and a variety of organizations under the "Gateway Communities" program to support local promotion, events and visitor engagement efforts. These investments have played an important role in maintaining the visitor activity and sustaining tourism assets throughout the County.

The new Tourism Regional Funding model does not eliminate eligibility for these communities. Rather, it transitions funding from a legacy allocation model to a strategy-aligned structure designed to ensure transparency, equity, measurable outcomes and alignment with Countywide economic development priorities.

Under the new model:

- Former Gateway Communities remain eligible to apply for funding
- Applications must demonstrate alignment with the County's Tourism Strategy and CEDS goals
- Projects must identify measurable outcomes tied to visitation, economic impact or regional collaboration
- Applicants should identify which visitor persona their proposed project is designed to attract and provide a rationale for alignment
- Funding will be evaluated within each applicant's designated Tourism Region

This shift ensures that funding decisions are guided by strategic priorities and performance metrics rather than historical precedent alone. Participation in coordinated countywide marketing remains voluntary for incorporated cities; however, alignment is encouraged to maximize shared economic benefit.

Modern best practice (*Civitas DMO Funding Survey) shows:

- Application-based funding increases transparency
- Competitive scoring improves political defensibility
- Regional equity improves collaboration

Proposed Tourism Region Funding Model

- Annual application cycle
- Contracts paid in two disbursements (bi-annual)
- Second disbursement contingent on reporting

Mandatory alignment with:

- County Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy
- CEDS priorities
- Defined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Evaluation criteria may include:

- Projected overnight impact
- Shoulder-season activation
- Regional equity
- Leveraged matching funds
- Measurable outcomes (see Section 8.5)
- Impact on local businesses

One Year Transition Period Recommendation

Recognizing the importance of operational stability and the time required to launch the new Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO) Request for Proposal (RFP) and Tourism Region Fund application process, the County should implement a defined transition period.

For the first transitional year:

- **Former Gateway Communities should continue receiving transitional funding at either 100% or 75% of their most recent annual allocation** (County decision, based on TOT funds)
- This funding is intended to maintain continuity of operations while the new funding model is finalized and launched
- During this period, communities will receive guidance on preparing applications under the new Tourism Region Funding criteria

This transitional approach:

- Prevents service disruption
- Reduces uncertainty
- Allows time for education and alignment
- Continues valuable partnerships while the approach to funding is modernized
- Allocates time for Tourism Advisory Board development and appointments, including participation in DSO RFP process
- Allocates time for RFP drafting, posting, review, interviews and award
- Allocates time for the Tourism Region Fund application process

At the conclusion of the transition period, all tourism funding for year two (FY 2027-28) should be awarded through the DSO and Tourism Region Fund process as outlined in this plan.

One Year Transitional Funding: 100% or 75%

While 100% signals goodwill and may lower any resistance to funding changes, 75% is also justifiable if:

- TOT budget uncertainty exists
- The Board of Supervisors wants to signal evolution
- There is concern about over-commitment
- Funding is needed to support the County's role in establishing the DSO RFP, TAB and Tourism Region Fund

The transitional period should not be intended to predetermine future award levels. Future allocations should be based on application strength, strategic alignment and measurable impact.

Section 4: Destination Marketing Strategy Framework

4.1 Destination Marketing as Economic Infrastructure

4.2 Destination Marketing Budget Allocation Model

4.3 Measurement Evolution

4.4 Brand Platform & Storytelling Architecture

4.5 Content Calendar

4.6 Marketing Channel Strategy

4.7 Marketing Investment & Implementation Budget Framework

4.1 Destination Marketing As Economic Infrastructure

Tourism marketing is not awareness for awareness's sake. It is revenue activation.

According to the 2026 Travel Marketing Outlook:

- 53% of DMOs report the highest ROI from paid social platforms (primarily Meta)
- 65% prioritize short-form video content as the primary engagement driver
- 92% participate in cooperative marketing programs

Nationally, DMOs that focus on full-funnel strategies (awareness → consideration → booking) outperform those relying solely on brand campaigns.

For Humboldt County, the objective is measurable economic impact:

- Increase overnight stays
- Improve shoulder-season occupancy
- Increase inbound air share
- Grow TOT and retail tax revenue

Marketing must therefore be structured as a demand engine.

Demand Generation (Full-Funnel Model)

Humboldt County's DSO should implement a three-tier demand model:

1. **Awareness (Upper Funnel)**

   Goal: Build recognition in target markets

   Primary Tools:

- Paid social (Meta, YouTube, short-form video)
- Outdoor recreation content

- Earned media
- Influencer Familiarization (FAM) trips

Industry Data: Meta continues to produce the highest ROI among DMOs.

2. **Consideration (Mid Funnel)**

Goal: Convert interest into trip planning behavior

Primary Tools:

- Search Engine Optimized (SEO) and AI-indexed (AEO) blog content
- Travel itineraries by Tourism Region
- Events calendar integration
- Retargeting campaigns
- Email nurture sequences

Industry Data: The 2026 Outlook notes a growing shift toward "zero-click search" behavior, requiring DMOs to optimize for Answer Engine Optimization (AEO).

Humboldt must build structured content designed to appear in AI-generated responses.

3. **Conversion (Lower Funnel)**

Goal: Drive bookings and overnight stays

Primary Tools:

- Co-op booking campaigns
- Hotel packages
- Fly-market offers
- Event-led travel weekends
- Geotargeted promotions tied to flight routes

Industry Data: DMOs that integrate airline co-op programs see improved route sustainability (*Civitas funding research).

Fly-Market Activation

The ACV Leakage Study identifies:

- 153 PDEW from Los Angeles Basin
- Strong Denver market
- 55% outbound/45% inbound mix

This indicates there is room to grow inbound share without requiring new routes.

Priority Fly Markets (Years 1-3)

Tier 1:

- San Francisco
- Los Angeles Basin (Burbank focus)
- Denver

Tier 2:

- Phoenix
- Seattle

Tier 3:

- Las Vegas
- San Diego

Fly Market Tactics

1. Geo-targeted paid campaigns
2. Airline co-op marketing
3. Outdoor recreation positioning
4. Seasonal travel pushes (fall, winter, shoulder)
5. Influencer partnerships in priority DMAs

Marketing budget should allocate a defined percentage (15–25%) to fly-market activation aligned with airport routes. This supports airline load factors and route sustainability.

Visitor Persona Strategy

All Countywide campaigns and Tourism Region marketing initiatives shall align with

identified North Coast visitor personas to ensure message consistency and efficient media investment.

4.2. Destination Marketing Budget Allocation Model

Based on national DMO benchmarks (*DMAI Financial Profile Study & Civitas), within DSO marketing allocation (~50% of total DSO budget):

Recommended Breakdown

- 40–45% Paid Digital Media
- 15–20% Video Production & Creative
- 15–20% Search/SEO/AEO
- 20–25% Co-op Marketing
- 5–10% Research & Measurement

This distribution aligns with reported ROI performance in 2026 Outlook.

4.3 Measurement Evolution

Traditional KPIs:

- Website visits
- Social engagement

Modern KPIs:

- Overnight occupancy
- RevPAR
- DMA-based visitation
- Inbound air share
- Event-driven room nights
- Partner revenue participation

The 2026 Outlook notes attribution complexity as a top challenge.

Humboldt County's DSO should invest in:

- First-party Customer Relationship Management (CRM) growth
- Designated Marketing Area (DMA) tracking through geolocation data
- Air service reporting alignment
- Quarterly performance dashboard
- Countywide lodging data

Industry partner conversations to determine whether this data is already being collected in one region and could be expanded to all areas are essential.

4.4 Brand Platform & Storytelling Architecture

Core Brand Insight

According to industry partner interviews, 100% aligned around redwoods and natural identity. Many feel that the destination doesn't need a new brand; it just needs to be articulated cohesively.

From the marketing audit, nature-forward materials perform strongest.

In conclusion, Humboldt County's competitive advantage lies in its ecological scale and authenticity.

Brand Positioning Direction (working concept)

Humboldt County is California's most authentic redwood-coast destination — where scale, solitude and community converge.

This position:

- Differentiates from crowded coastal destinations
- Aligns with outdoor-driven fly markets (Denver, LA)
- Supports shoulder-season messaging
- Reinforces rural character

Tourism Region Storytelling Architecture

Rather than fragment messing, the DSO should embrace one countywide brand, activated through six Tourism Region story arcs.

Each region receives:

- Defined thematic narrative
- Distinct visual cues
- Integrated digital itineraries featuring tourism assets
- Event-led content amplification

But under one umbrella brand.

This solves prior fragmentation identified in marketing audit and noted in 1:1 industry partner interviews.

Content Ecosystem Strategy

Based on the 2026 Outlook, short-form video is prioritized by 65% of DMOs.

Recommendation for Humboldt County:

- Develop a consistent video series format
- Capture resident voices, local businesses
- Highlight trail systems, redwoods, artisan culture
- Integrate drone and environmental scale visuals

Written content must support:

- AI search optimization
- Itinerary planning
- Event weekend guides
- Seasonal themes

Brand Governance

The DSO should:

- Develop formal county-wide brand standards
- Provide Tourism Region toolkits
- Require co-op compliance with brand guidelines
- Centralize digital asset management

This ensures marketing dollars reinforce one identity.

Events as Brand Accelerators

Events allow rural regions to activate brand identity without overexposing limited infrastructure.

The County of Humboldt should introduce:

- Event maturity model
- Multi-year funding for high-impact anchors
- Rural activation grants
- Season shoulder strategy

Brand Protection Through Readiness Sequencing

Tourism marketing promotion should align with readiness tiers.

This prevents:

- Negative visitor experience
- Brand dilution
- Online reputation damage

Marketing scale must follow infrastructure readiness.

Alignment with CEDS

Marketing and branding directly support:

- Economic diversification

- Talent attraction
- Entrepreneurial ecosystem
- Retail vitality
- Infrastructure investment

Tourism becomes economic infrastructure, not optional marketing.

4.5 Content Calendar

Shoulder Season Focused. Destination Stewardship-Aligned.

This calendar prioritizes:

- December-February (Winter "Cozy Season")
- March-May (Spring Shoulder)
- September-November (Fall Shoulder)

Peak summer (June-August) receives lighter demand-driven promotion and more stewardship messaging. The DSO should market Humboldt County's shoulder seasons for demand growth, peak seasons for stewardship and dispersal and winter for high-value niche travel.

The following draft content calendar should be vetted with the DSO, the Humboldt Lodging Alliance (HLA) and the Tourism Regions once established, then distributed to regional partners for coordinated storytelling. Hotel lodging performance data by month (available through Visit California and HLA) should be reviewed monthly to adjust content based on visitation patterns.

Winter Cozy Season		
Theme: "Solitude, Storms & Stillness"		
Strategic Goal	**Priority Personas**	**Content Ideas**
Drive off-peak visitation from: • Bay Area drive markets • Southern Oregon • Outdoor-focused niche travelers • Remote-work flexible travelers	• Nature & Conservation Enthusiasts • Road Trip Explorers • Romantic Getaway Travelers • Wellness & Retreat Seekers	• Storm season on the North Coast • Coastal trails without crowds • Wellness retreats and cabin stays • Redwoods and farm-to-table pairings • Couples' itinerary (3-day loop) • Migration season wildlife watching • Forest bathing and cannabis education pairing • Artisanal cannabis cultivation heritage and tours (licensed only)
Focus: Begin pushing itinerary movement across regions.		

Spring

Theme: "Fresh Air & First Adventures"

Strategic Goal	Priority Personas	Content Ideas
• Build pre-summer momentum • Drive length-of-stay • Support rural regions before peak • Target key fly-in markets	• Outdoor Adventure Seekers • Cultural Explorers • Agritourism Visitors	• Trails & Tides • Farm, Food & Forest • Coastal Hiking Guide • Bike routes by region • Heritage & Agritourism features • Farm stays • Oyster trails • Local makers

Focus: Agritourism and cross-regional movement.

Summer

Theme: "Explore Responsibly" and "Escape the Heat"

Strategic Goal	Priority Personas	Content Ideas
• Don't oversell peak • Shift messaging toward stewardship and dispersal • Visitor management, less demand generation	• Road Trip Explorers (drive-markets in high temps) • Outdoor Adventurer Seekers	• Redwoods & Road Trips • Multi-region loops • Giants & Wilderness • Hiking & Backpacking • ACV getaway packages (encourage mid-week travel) • Signature regional events • Outdoor music • River exploration • "Secret Season" (late summer push)

Focus: Shift narrative: "Spread out. Explore more." Promote lesser-known areas with capacity to host.

Fall		
Theme: "Harvest, History & Hidden Gems"		
Strategic Goal	**Priority Personas**	**Content Ideas**
• Reignite visitation post-summer • Target drive and fly-markets • Craft messaging for niche travelers	• Cultural Explorers • Culinary & Agritourism Visitors • Off-the-Beaten-Path Travelers • Empty Nesters • Wellness & Retreat Seekers	• Craft beverage trails • Peak oyster season • Fog photography • Harvest Humboldt • Quiet Coastlines & Cultural Roots • Indigenous history • Arts & small business spotlight • Local gift guides and holiday markets • Small-batch craft producers • Year-in-review storytelling
Focus: Air packages and extended weekends.		

Content Integration with Tourism Regions

The DSO should collaborate with each Tourism Region to:

- Reshare content (including their 1-2 spotlight months)
- Participate in themed itineraries
- Develop at least one anchor seasonal story

Data Integration Layer

The DSO should:

- Review lodging occupancy monthly
- Adjust paid spend by season
- Monitor ACV load factors
- Reallocate spend if summer exceeds thresholds

4.6 Marketing Channel Strategy

Identification of Key Marketing Channels

The County of Humboldt's tourism marketing strategy prioritizes high-performance, data-informed channels aligned with identified North Coast visitor personas, seasonal demand patterns and air service opportunities.

Channel selection is based on:

- Destinations International Destination Organization Performance Report (DOPR) benchmarking
- 2026 Travel Marketing Outlook
- ACV Designated Market Area (DMA) analysis
- Industry partner input
- Full-funnel demand modeling

Channel Mix Overview

1. **Paid Digital Advertising (Primary Demand Driver)**

   Purpose: Drive shoulder-season visitation in drive and fly markets.

   Tactics:

- Paid social (Meta, Instagram)
- YouTube pre-roll
- Connected TV (CTV)
- Programmatic display
- Retargeting campaigns
- Geo-targeted fly-market campaigns
- Paid search (Google)

   Rationale: According to the 2026 Travel Marketing Outlook, 53% of DMOs report the highest ROI from Meta platforms, and 65% prioritize short-form video.

   Role in Funnel: Upper- and mid-funnel demand generation.

2. **Search & AI-Optimized Content (Owned Growth Engine)**

   Purpose: Capture high-intent travelers planning redwood, coastal and outdoor trips.

   Tactics:

- SEO and Answer Engine Optimization (AEO)
- Structured itinerary pages
- Regional landing pages
- Blog and experience guides
- AI-indexed content design

   Rationale: Zero-click search behavior requires structured, AI-discoverable content systems.

   Role in Funnel: Mid- and lower-funnel conversion.

3. **Public Relations & Influencer Marketing**

   Purpose: Generate earned media and third-party credibility.

   Tactics:

- Travel media pitching
- Familiarization (FAM) tours
- Fly-market influencer partnerships
- Event-driven PR

   Role in Funnel: Upper-funnel awareness + niche targeting.

4. **Cooperative Marketing Programs**

   Purpose: Leverage private-sector match to amplify County investment.

   Tactics:

- Lodging cost-share campaigns
- Airline co-ops
- Regional business packages
- Event amplification

   Industry Benchmark: 92% of DMOs participate in co-op marketing (Travel Marketing Outlook 2026).

5. **Email & CRM Development**

   Purpose: Build first-party audience for long-term demand stability.

   Tactics:

- Seasonal newsletters
- Itinerary drip campaigns
- Event alerts
- Relocation/talent attraction content

   Role in Funnel: Mid- and lower-funnel retention and repeat visitation.

6. **Local & Regional Partner Amplification**

   Purpose: Ensure unified messaging across Tourism Regions.

   Tactics:

- Regional storytelling toolkits
- Shared asset library
- Cross-regional content calendars

Seasonal Channel Emphasis

At least 40–50% of paid media investment should prioritize shoulder seasons:

- March–May (Spring)
- September–November (Fall)

Peak summer shifts toward stewardship messaging and dispersal.

4.7 Marketing Investment & Budget Framework

Budget to Implement Marketing

Because Transient Lodging Tax revenue fluctuates annually, this plan adopts a percentage-based budget allocation model aligned with DMO benchmarks.

Industry Benchmarking

According to:

- Destinations International DMO Financial Profile Study
- Civitas Funding Futures Report (2025)

DMOs typically allocate:

- 40–60% of total budget to marketing
- 40–55% of marketing budget to digital media
- 10–20% to content production
- 5–15% to PR
- 5–10% to research and analytics

Recommended Marketing Allocation Structure

If total DSO budget = 45–50% of TOT allocation, then marketing should represent ~50% of the DSO budget.

Within Marketing Allocation:

Category	Recommended % of Marketing Budget
Paid Digital Media	45–55%
Content Production	15–20%
SEO/AI Content	10–15%
PR & Influencer	10–15%
Co-op Marketing	10–20%
Research & Analytics	5–10%

Shoulder Season Emphasis

Minimum 40% of paid media investment should be directed toward:

- Spring & Fall shoulder seasons

Fly-Market Allocation*

15–25% of paid media budget should support:

- San Francisco
- Los Angeles Basin
- Denver
- Phoenix/Mesa
- Seattle

Aligned with ACV PDEW data.

Why Percentage-Based Budgeting Is Recommended

- Protects against TOT volatility
- Aligns with industry best practices
- Scales with revenue growth
- Maintains fiscal discipline
- Provides Board-level clarity

**In the event that a destination flight is discontinued or a new destination is added, fly market allocations should be adjusted accordingly to align with ACV PDEW data.*

Section 5: Destination Readiness Framework

5.1 Destination Readiness Framework

5.2 Infrastructure Gaps

5.3 Activation Timeline

5.1 Destination Readiness Framework

Tourism promotion is most effective when aligned with visitor readiness.

National research consistently shows that visitor satisfaction, safety perception and infrastructure quality strongly influence:

- Repeat visitation
- Online reviews
- Word-of-mouth referrals
- Brand equity

The 2026 Travel Marketing Outlook emphasizes that DMOs must protect brand integrity by ensuring that marketing aligns with the on-the-ground experience.

For Humboldt County — a geographically dispersed, rural destination — readiness sequencing is essential to avoid:

- Overpromotion of underdeveloped areas
- Negative visitor experience
- Reputational harm
- Inefficient marketing spend

This Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy adopts a phased destination readiness model.

Readiness Indicators

Tourism Regions should be evaluated across four readiness indicators:

1. Lodging Capacity & Quality
2. Dining & Retail Availability
3. Wayfinding & Public Realm Condition
4. Anchor Attractions & Experience Depth

Based on these indicators, regions fall into one of three categories:

Tier 1: Market-Ready

Characteristics:

- Established lodging supply
- Strong restaurant presence
- Clear wayfinding
- Recognized attractions
- Walkable visitor zones

Marketing Approach:

- Immediate inclusion in full-funnel campaigns
- Fly-market targeting
- Seasonal expansion
- Event amplification

Tier 2: Emerging

Characteristics:

- Moderate lodging
- Strong natural or cultural assets
- Infrastructure gaps
- Event potential

Marketing Approach:

- Event-led promotion
- Content marketing focus
- Regional storytelling
- Targeted shoulder-season campaigns

Investment Focus:

- Wayfinding
- Experience packaging
- Small business capacity building

Tier 3: Foundational

Characteristics:

- Limited visitor services
- Public realm concerns
- Infrastructure gaps
- Minimal coordinated visitor experience

Marketing Approach:

- Limited broad promotion
- Focus on readiness investment first

Investment Focus:

- Beautification
- Trailhead improvements
- Signage
- Public space activation
- Business incubation

This sequencing ensures brand integrity and visitor satisfaction.

5.2 Infrastructure Gaps

Through primary research, industry partners revealed:

- Wayfinding deterioration
- Limited lodging in some regions
- Restaurant capacity concerns
- Perceived blight in select areas
- Parking limitations
- Trail maintenance needs

These concerns are not uniform across the County's Tourism Regions, but they influence marketing prioritization.

Addressing Blight & Public Realm Concerns

Promoting areas without sufficient readiness may result in a negative visitor experience.

This plan does not position tourism as a solution to complex social challenges such as homelessness or housing instability. However, it acknowledges that public realm condition and perception influence visitor confidence and repeat travel behavior.

The Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy recommends:

- Cross-department coordination between Economic Development, Public Works and Environmental Services
- Alignment of tourism activation with public space improvement
- Event-based activation to concentrate positive visitor experiences
- Integration of beautification efforts where tourism concentration is anticipated

Tourism funding should not be used to address social service systems. However, tourism-driven economic vitality can support:

- Retail stabilization
- Public space utilization
- Job creation
- "Downtown" activation

Wayfinding & Visitor Navigation

Wayfinding can be a low-cost, high-impact readiness investment.

Research across small rural DMOs shows that improved wayfinding increases:

- Visitor dwell time
- Retail capture
- Attraction discovery

The Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy recommends:

- Countywide wayfinding audit
- Unified signage standards aligned with the brand
- Trailhead identification improvements
- Downtown walking maps integrated digitally

These improvements can be funded through Tourism Region grants where appropriate.

Lodging Supply & Market Realities

Humboldt County's occupancy remains below statewide averages.

This indicates:

- Shoulder-season opportunity exists
- Current supply can absorb incremental growth
- Immediate large-scale hotel development is not a prerequisite to marketing activation

However, in rural Tourism Regions with minimal lodging inventory:

- Marketing must align with realistic carrying capacity

The DSO should:

- Avoid overexposure of limited-capacity areas
- Encourage length-of-stay extensions in higher-capacity hubs

Event-Led Activation as a Brand Strategy

In line with the Destination Readiness Framework, events provide a structured activation model for Tier 2 and Tier 3 regions.

Event-based travel:

- Concentrates visitor flow
- Supports small businesses
- Allows infrastructure testing
- Reduces risk of overpromotion

The Tourism Region Fund should prioritize:

- Seasonal festivals
- Outdoor recreation events
- Farm-to-table weekends
- Artisan markets
- Cultural heritage celebrations

These events can gradually elevate readiness tier classification.

Air Service & Infrastructure Alignment

The ACV market analysis shows Los Angeles and Denver demand.

Fly-market marketing should focus on:

- Regions capable of accommodating increased visitation
- Areas with lodging and dining infrastructure
- Anchor experiences with scalable capacity

This protects route sustainability and avoids visitor disappointment.

CEDS Alignment

Destination readiness aligns with the County's Comprehensive Economic Development strategy through:

- Infrastructure enhancement
- Rural economic resilience
- Business incubation
- Industry diversification
- Workforce attraction

Tourism-readiness investments strengthen both the visitor experience and residents' quality of life.

5.3 Activation Timeline

The phased timeline below identifies activities that could be covered by both the DSO and Tourism Region budgets, awarded by the County of Humboldt, supported by the Tourism Advisory Board (TAB). The timeline assumes an initial transition year (FY 2026-27) to establish the TAB, DSO and Tourism Regions Fund process.

Year 1 (FY 2026-27):

The first 9 months of year 1 are transitional, focusing on governance. The remaining months should focus on:

- Wayfinding audit plan
- Event maturity evaluation plan
- Identify Tier classifications

Year 2 (FY 2027-28):

- Implement readiness assessment across six Tourism Regions
- Fund targeted readiness improvements
- Launch Tier 1 fly-market campaigns
- Event activation in Tier 2 regions

Year 3–5 (FY 2028-29; 2029-30; 2030-31):

- Elevate Tier 2 to Tier 1 status where appropriate
- Expand marketing footprint
- Improve shoulder-season occupancy metrics

Why This Approach Is Structurally Sound

The Destination Readiness Framework:

- Addresses concerns about premature promotion
- Protects brand integrity
- Supports rural equity without overexposure
- Aligns marketing to infrastructure reality
- Integrates economic development and tourism planning
- Reduces political risk

It demonstrates that Humboldt County's Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy is disciplined, phased and fiscally responsible.

Section 6: Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy — CEDS Crosswalk

(Aligned to CEDS 2025-2030 Framework)

6.1 Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy

- **Strategy 1:** Economic Diversification & Industry Cluster Strengthening
- **Strategy 2:** Infrastructure & Community Vitality
- **Strategy 3:** Workforce & Talent Attraction
- **Strategy 4:** Air Service & Market Access
- **Strategy 5:** Transparency, Accountability & Governance
- **Strategy 6:** Brand & Marketing Positioning
- **Strategy 7:** Rural Equity & Regional Balance

6.1 Travel And Tourism Marketing Strategy

This section highlights Humboldt County's Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy with the County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), using the CEDS structural format:

Strategy → Action → KPI → Timeline → Role → CEDS

Tourism functions as a cross-cutting economic development sector that supports infrastructure, workforce, entrepreneurship, public revenue and rural resilience.

Strategy 1: Economic Diversification & Industry Cluster Strengthening

Tourism is one of Humboldt County's largest industry clusters, generating $508.3M in visitor spending and supporting 5,800 jobs in 2024. Humboldt must transition legacy funding to strategic allocation to modernize tourism governance, align with economic development and improve occupancy, which currently remains below state-wide averages.

Action	KPIs	Timeline	Roles	CEDS Alignment
Action 1.1: Establish a Countywide Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO)	RFP published, DSO contract executed, Tourism Advisory Board established, Quarterly reporting dashboard implemented, Asset ownership retained by County	Within first 12 months of Strategy adoption	Economic Development (Oversight), Board of Supervisors (Approval), DSO (Execution)	*Formalizing tourism as a coordinated industry cluster with structured oversight, performance tracking and interdepartmental alignment.* CEDS Strategy 1.1 – Strengthen Priority Industry Cluster CEDS Strategy 5.1 – Improve Governance & Economic Development Coordination CEDS Strategy 5.2 – Enhance Data-Driven Decision Making
Action 1.2: Implement Strategy-Based Tourism Region Funding Model	Tourism Region funds program launched; Evaluation rubric adopted, 100% of funded projects align with CEDS/ Tourism Strategy priorities, Mid-year reporting compliance rate ≥ 95%	Years 1-2	Economic Development (Oversight/ Administration), Tourism Advisory Board (Scoring & Recommendation), Board of Supervisors (Approval)	*Transitioning from legacy allocations to performance-based investment aligned with economic development priorities.* CEDS Strategy 1.2 – Align Public Investment with Strategic Industry Priorities CEDS Strategy 4.1 – Promote Rural Economic Equity CEDS Strategy 5.1 – Improve Transparent Allocation of Public Resources
Action 1.3: Increase Shoulder-Season Occupancy	+5% shoulder-season occupancy over 3 years, +3% RevPAR growth in off-peak months	Years 2-5	DSO (Execution), Lodging Partners (Co-op Participation), Economic Development (Oversight)	*Stabilizing year-round revenue for hospitality businesses and increasing RevPAR in non-peak periods.* CEDS Strategy 1.1 – Industry Cluster Growth CEDS Strategy 1.3 – Increase Revenue & Business Stability CEDS Strategy 4.2 – Support Rural Resilience

Strategy 2: Infrastructure & Community Vitality

Tourism readiness supports both visitor satisfaction and resident quality of life. Ensure tourism growth does not outpace environmental capacity or resident quality of life.

Action	KPIs	Timeline	Roles	CEDS Alignment
Action 2.1: Conduct Countywide Destination Readiness Assessment	Six Tourism Regions classified into readiness tiers, Infrastructure gaps report completed, Wayfinding audit completed	Year 2	DSO (Assessment Support), Economic Development (Oversight) + Consult with Public Works (infrastructure-related gaps)	*Identifying infrastructure deficiencies and aligning tourism activation with readiness.* CEDS Strategy 2.1 – Infrastructure Investment & Gap Analysis CEDS Strategy 2.2 – Improve Transportation & Wayfinding CEDS Strategy 4.1 – Support Underserved Rural Areas
Action 2.2: Fund Tier-Based Readiness Improvements	At least three Tier 2 regions elevated to Tier 1 within five years, Wayfinding improvements implemented in priority zones, Event activation in a minimum of four regions annually	Years 2-5	Tourism Region Fund Program: Economic Development (Oversight), Tourism Advisory Board (Scoring & Recommendation), Board of Supervisors (Approval), Tourism Region Partners (Implementation)	*Elevating underdeveloped regions through targeted investment.* CEDS Strategy 2.1 – Infrastructure Modernization CEDS Strategy 3.1 – Support Small Business Competitiveness CEDS Strategy 4.1 – Promote Regional Equity
Action 2.3: Align Tourism Activation with Public Real Improvements	Beautification or activation projects supported in two more regions annually	Years 2-5	Tourism Region Fund Program: Economic Development (Oversight), Tourism Advisory Board (Scoring & Recommendation), Board of Supervisors (Approval), Tourism Region Partners (Implementation)	*Leveraging beautification and activation as dual-purpose visitor and resident benefit strategies.* CEDS Strategy 2.3 – Community Vitality & Public Space Enhancement CEDS Strategy 4.2 – Strengthen Place-Based Economic Assets

Action	KPIs	Timeline	Roles	CEDS Alignment
Action 2.4: Implement a Destination Stewardship & Sustainability Monitoring Framework	Annual resident sentiment survey launched, Visitor dispersal metrics reported annually, Environmental impact indicators identified (trail pressure, parking capacity, etc.)	Years 3-5	DSO (Execution), Economic Development (Oversight) + Consult with Public Works/Parks (data support)	*It shows growth with guardrails — very important politically in Humboldt.* CEDS Strategy 2.3 – Community Vitality CEDS Strategy 4.2 – Place-Based Sustainability CEDS Strategy 5.2 – Performance Monitoring

Strategy 3: Workforce & Talent Attraction

Tourism strengthens local workforce stability and entrepreneurial opportunity.

Action	KPIs	Timeline	Roles	CEDS Alignment
Action 3.1: Promote Tourism as a Talent Attraction Tool	Launch "Visit -> Live" digital content initiative, Track web engagement from relocation-oriented pages, Partner with workforce agencies	Years 3-5	Tourism Region Fund Program: Economic Development (Oversight), Tourism Advisory Board (Scoring & Recommendation), Board of Supervisors (Approval), DSO (Brand, Messaging), Tourism Region Partners (Implementation)	*Using tourism storytelling to attract remote workers, entrepreneurs and new residents.* CEDS Strategy 3.2 – Workforce Recruitment & Retention CEDS Strategy 1.3 – Support Business Expansion CEDS Strategy 4.3 – Increase Population Stability in Rural Areas
Action 3.2: Support Small Business & Event Entrepreneurship	Minimum five new or expanded tourism-related businesses supported through Tourism Region Funds Program, Annual event incubation program launched	Years 3-5	Tourism Region Fund Program: Economic Development (Oversight), Tourism Advisory Board (Scoring & Recommendation), Board of Supervisors (Approval), Tourism Region Partners (Implementation)	*Encouraging business formation and event-driven economic activity.* CEDS Strategy 3.1 – Entrepreneurship Development CEDS Strategy 1.2 – Industry Cluster Strengthening CEDS Strategy 4.1 – Rural Economic Development

Strategy 4: Air Service & Market Access

ACV retains 41% of passenger catchment. Inbound growth opportunity remains significant. Continued coordination between tourism marketing and airport infrastructure improvements that enhance passenger experience and access will support this strategy.

Action	KPIs	Timeline	Roles	CEDS Alignment
Action 4.1: Align Air Service Marketing with DSO Fly-Market Strategy	Fly market campaign launched in LA Basin, Las Vegas, Seattle & Denver, Inbound air share increased to 50% within 5 years, Airline co-op campaigns executed annually, Airport enhancements for travelers (e.g., food, beverage, shops)	Years 2-5	DSO (Marketing), County Aviation (Collaboration, Route Development)	*Increasing inbound passenger retention and expanding economic reach.* CEDS Strategy 2.2 – Transportation & Access Improvement CEDS Strategy 1.1 – Industry Cluster Competitiveness CEDS Strategy 4.2 – Regional Connectivity
Action 4.2: Improve Data Sharing Between Aviation & Tourism	Quarterly air service dashboard created, DMA-based marketing targeting aligned with PDEW data	Year 2	County Aviation (Data), DSO (Execution), Economic Development (Oversight)	*Coordinating aviation and tourism investments using shared data dashboards.* CEDS Strategy 5.2 – Data-Driven Economic Planning

Strategy 5: Transparency, Accountability & Governance

Clarity of asset ownership and reporting is needed. The TAB and DSO operator together should serve as the formal convener of Humboldt County's tourism ecosystem, facilitating structured collaborations across Tourism Regions and encouraging shared learning countywide.

Action	KPIs	Timeline	Roles	CEDS Alignment
Action 5.1: Implement Ongoing Public Reporting Dashboard + Biennial DSO Performance Evaluation	Financial summary published quarterly, Marketing KPIs published quarterly, Tourism Region Fund Program reporting compliance ≥ 95%, DSO KPI compliance ≥ 85%	Year 1 onward (After DSO established)	DSO (Reporting), Tourism Region Partners (Reporting), Economic Development (Oversight) Board of Supervisors (Contracts)	*Providing public-facing performance accountability.* CEDS Strategy 5.1 – Improve Transparency & Governance CEDS Strategy 5.2 – Performance Measurement Systems

Action	KPIs	Timeline	Roles	CEDS Alignment
Action 5.2: Establish a Contingency Budget	Contingency budget adopted (typically 10% of marketing budget)	Years 1-2	Economic Development (Recommendation), Board of Supervisors (Adoption)	*Protecting tourism operations against revenue volatility.* CEDS Strategy 5.3 – Fiscal Stability & Risk Mitigation
Action 5.3: Establish the DSO as Countywide Tourism Industry Convenor	Quarterly Tourism Region meetups, Annual Countywide Tourism Summit hosted, cross-regional collaborative projects increase year-over-year	Year 1 (Convening structure established) Year 2 (Ongoing implementation and refinement)	DSO (Convener/ Facilitation), Economic Development (Oversight/ Participation), Tourism Advisory Board (Convener/ Strategy), Board of Supervisors (Annual briefing)	*Creating structured collaboration between public and private sectors, strengthening rural participation and reinforcing tourism as a coordinated industry cluster rather than isolated efforts.* CEDS Strategy 5.1 – Improve Cross-Sector Coordination CEDS Strategy 5.2 – Enhance Governance & Transparency CEDS Strategy 4.1 – Promote Regional Equity
Action 5.4: Develop Countywide Tourism Crisis Communication Protocol	Crisis playbook developed, Rapid response framework established, Coordination plan determined	Year 2	DSO (Communications) Economic Development (Oversight)	*Protects reputation and economic continuity especially important given wildfire risk, infrastructure concerns, weather events and air service disruptions.* CEDS Strategy 5.3 – Risk Mitigation CEDS Strategy 2.3 – Community Resilience

Strategy 6: Brand & Marketing Positioning

Humboldt County's core identity centers on redwoods and natural scale. Crafting a countywide story that highlights other tourism assets ready for prime time will greatly benefit the visitor economy. Timing is key: focus on lower-occupancy (shoulder-season) months. Leverage private dollars and partnerships (e.g., HLA) to amplify County investment.

Action	KPIs	Timeline	Roles	CEDS Alignment
Action 6.1: Develop Unified Countywide Brand Platform	Brand standards published, Tourism Region storytelling toolkit created, 100% of funded marketing uses brand standards, Centralized hub created for asset sharing	Year 2	Tourism Advisory Board (Recommendations), DSO (Execution)	*Unifying regional storytelling and strengthening destination competitiveness.* CEDS Strategy 1.1 – Industry Cluster Branding & Promotion CEDS Strategy 4.2 – Place-Based Identity Strengthening
Action 6.2: Implement AI-Optimized Content Strategy	Content calendar developed, Structured blog & itinerary system launched, SEO/ AEO performance tracked quarterly, Increase in DMA-specific engagement metrics	Years 2-5	DSO (Execution)	*Modernizing marketing infrastructure and improving search performance.* CEDS Strategy 5.2 – Innovation & Technology Adoption CEDS Strategy 1.3 – Digital Competitiveness
Action 6.3: Become a Countywide Source of Tourism Data	Visitor demographics understood, Geolocation data secured, DMAs known, Visitor personas refined based on data for each Tourism Region, Lodging data sourced, Destination marketing trends established annually	Years 2-5	DSO (Execution)	*Centralizing tourism intelligence to inform economic development policy.* CEDS Strategy 5.2 – Data & Analytics Infrastructure CEDS Strategy 1.1 – Industry Performance Tracking

Action	KPIs	Timeline	Roles	CEDS Alignment
Action 6.4: Launch Countywide Shoulder Season Campaign Introducing Tourism Regions	Shoulder-season occupancy increases +5% over 3 years, Increase in engagement with itinerary-based content, Geographic visitor dispersal metrics tracked annually (geolocation)	Year 1 (Planning) Year 2 (Launch) Years 3-5 (Optimization & expansion)	DSO (Execution) Tourism Advisory Board (Strategy) Tourism Region Partners (Content and itinerary activation), County Aviation (Fly-market coordination)	*Stabilizing tourism-dependent businesses through off-peak visitation growth, strengthening rural economies through geographic dispersal, increasing air service utilization and aligning marketing investments with measurable economic outcomes.* CEDS Strategy 1.3 – Increase Revenue Stability CEDS Strategy 4.1 – Promote Regional Equity CEDS Strategy 2.2 – Improve Market Access & Connectivity CEDS Strategy 5.2 – Data-Driven Economic Performance Monitoring
Action 6.5: Establish Regional & Industry Cooperative Marketing Program	Co-op participation rate ≥ 40% of lodging partners, Campaign cost-share model implemented	Year 2 onward	DSO (Execution) Loding & Industry Partners (Participation)	*Improves sustainability of marketing budget and leverages joint funds to make a bigger impact.* CEDS Strategy 1.1 – Industry Competitiveness CEDS Strategy 1.3 – Revenue Stability

Strategy 7: Rural Equity & Regional Balance

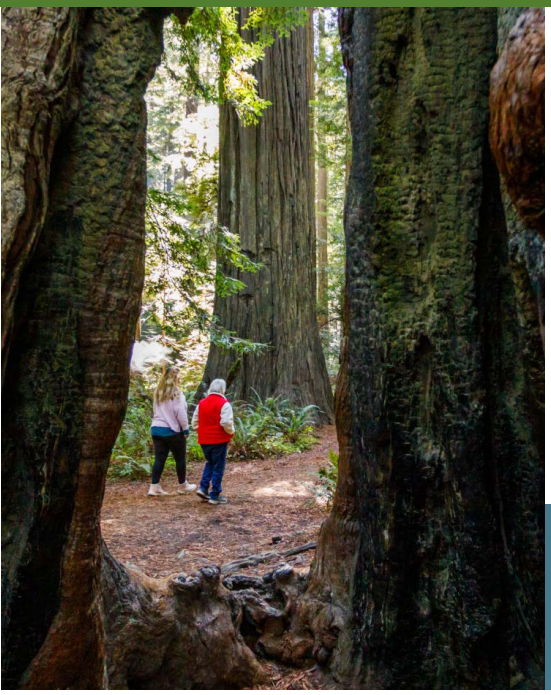
Tourism Regions replace "Gateway community" funding in a phased approach.

Action	KPIs	Timeline	Roles	CEDS Alignment
Action 7.1: Launch Tourism Region Strategic Funding Program	Annual application cycle implemented, Bi-annual disbursement system executed, All regions eligible annually	Years 1-2	Economic Development (Admin/ Oversight), Board of Supervisors (Adoption), Tourism Regions (Application), Tourism Advisory Board (Recommendations)	*Ensuring all regions are eligible for performance-based investment.* CEDS Strategy 4.1 – Regional Equity CEDS Strategy 1.2 – Strategic Investment Alignment CEDS Strategy 5.1 – Transparent Allocation
Action 7.2: Monitor Geographic Distribution of Visitor Spending	Regional visitation analysis conducted annually, Adjust marketing emphasis based on data	Years 2-5	Economic Development (Admin/ Oversight), DSO (Execution)	*Using data to rebalance marketing and funding emphasis across regions.* CEDS Strategy 4.1 – Equitable Economic Development CEDS Strategy 5.2 – Performance Monitoring

Why This Crosswalk Matters

This alignment:

- Mirrors the County's CEDS format
- Grounds tourism in economic development language
- Demonstrates measurable outcomes
- Show interdepartmental and cross-organization collaboration
- Provides role clarity



Section 7: Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO) Request for Proposal

7.1 DSO RFP Structure

7.2 Performance Framework

7.1 DSO RFP Structure

Purpose of the RFP

Humboldt County will issue a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) to identify a qualified organization to operate the County of Humboldt's DSO under contract.

The DSO will be responsible for:

- Tourism marketing execution
- Regional coordination
- Fly-market campaigns
- Tourism Region support
- Quarterly reporting
- Economic impact tracking
- Brand governance

The RFP will be open to nonprofit and private-sector entities, consistent with County guidelines.

Governance Structure Within RFP

The RFP must clearly articulate the governance framework to prevent ambiguity.

Structure Hierarchy

Board of Supervisors
(Approval & Adoption)
↓
County Economic Development Department
(Oversight)
↓
Tourism Advisory Board
(Strategy, Staffed by Economic Development)
↓
Destination Stewardship Organization + Tourism Regions
(Contracted Implementation)

See Section 3.2 for a more detailed infographic.

Non-Negotiable Protections

Based on prior experience and leadership expectations, the contract must include:

1. **Digital Asset Ownership**

- County retains ownership of all domains
- County retains administrative access to all social platforms
- County retains ownership of CRM databases
- County retains ownership of creative assets developed with TOT funds

2. **Financial Transparency**

- Quarterly financial reporting
- Annual independent financial review
- Itemized expenditure reporting
- Audit rights reserved by the County

3. **Performance Review & Termination Clauses**

- Annual performance evaluation
- Failure to meet reporting deadlines constitutes breach
- Failure to meet agreed KPIs triggers corrective action
- County retains the right to terminate for cause

These safeguards align with modern DMO contracting standards nationwide.

Required Organizational Qualifications

RFP respondents must demonstrate:

- Tourism marketing/stewardship experience
- Budget management capacity
- Public contract compliance history
- Board governance experience
- Data reporting infrastructure
- Plan to hire qualified staff, aligned with budget tier
- Fly-market campaign experience
- Event & grant administration capacity
- Understanding of CEDS and Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy
- Understanding of the Humboldt County tourism industry including priority visitor segments

Staffing Plan Requirements in RFP

Respondents must submit:

- Proposed organizational chart
- Position descriptions
- Salary ranges
- Contractor relationships
- Allocation of FTE to marketing vs. administration

Benchmark justification: Destinations International benchmarking indicates DMOs with $1–2M budgets average 5–8 FTEs.

The County of Humboldt should require that staffing plans align with national norms to avoid under-resourced operations.

Proposed Evaluation Criteria

To ensure transparency and defensibility, the RFP should include weighted scoring criteria.

Criteria	Weight
Organizational Experience & Capacity	20%
Marketing Strategy Approach	20%
Staffing Plan & Qualifications	15%
Data & Reporting Infrastructure	15%
Regional Collaboration Plan	10%
Financial Management & Controls	10%
Air Service & Fly-Market Integration	5%
Equity & CEDS/Strategy Alignment	5%

This aligns with competitive procurement best practices.

RFP Timeline Expectations

The County of Humboldt has indicated that procurement would require a minimum of six months, from the release of the initial RFP.

Recommended timeline:

- Month 1: TAB established
- Month 2: RFP released
- Month 3: Proposal review by Tourism Advisory Board/County Economic Development
- Month 4: Finalist interviews by Tourism Advisory Board/County Economic Development
- Month 5: Recommendation agenda item to Board of Supervisors
- Month 6: Board of Supervisors approval
- Month 7: Contract execution
- Month 9: Operational launch

This aligns with County procurement norms.

See Appendix B for RFP samples.

7.2 Performance Framework

Required Annual Work Plan Submission

Each year, the DSO must submit:

- Marketing plan with channel allocation
- Fly-market campaign calendar
- KPI dashboard targets
- Budget breakdown by program category
- Co-ops and other collaborative opportunities with Tourism Regions

Approval required by:

- Tourism Advisory Board
- Economic Development
- Board of Supervisors (if required)

Performance Metrics & Contractual KPIs

The RFP must identify measurable KPIs tied to DSO contract renewal.

Core Economic KPIs

- Year-over-year TOT growth
- Shoulder-season occupancy growth
- Inbound air share increase
- Designated Marketing Area (DMA)-based visitation growth
- Regional distribution metrics in Tourism Regions

Operational KPIs

- Quarterly reporting compliance
- Brand standards enforcement
- Website and marketing analytics reporting
- Visitor economy data updates

Reporting Cadence

Quarterly:

- Financial summary
- Marketing performance dashboard
- Air service alignment report
- Tourism Advisory Board (TAB) presentation
- Visitor economy data

Annually:

- Economic impact summary
- Marketing ROI overview
- Strategic progress toward CEDS/Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy goals
- Board of Supervisors presentation with TAB chair

This annual report and presentation provides a summary of the previous fiscal year and should include goals for the following fiscal year.

Contract Term & Renewal

Recommended DSO contract structure:

Initial Term: 3 years with optional 1-year extension

Renewal Option: Based on KPI performance and compliance, including satisfaction with annual reports

This structure balances stability and accountability.

Transition Plan Requirements

Respondents should include:

- Six-month transition plan to establish/staff DSO
- Asset migration strategy
- Vendor contract transition plan
- Communication strategy for industry partners
- Annual financial review process

This prevents repetition of prior asset management disputes.

Why This RFP Structure is Durable

- Protects County assets
- Ensures measurable performance
- Aligns with industry standards
- Prevents governance ambiguity
- Encourages professional operators
- Aligns tourism with CEDS economic goals

Section 8: Implementation

(2026-2031)

8.1 Five-Year Phased Roadmap

8.2 Risk Mitigation

8.3 DSO Performance Measurement

8.4 Tourism Region Performance Measurement

8.5 Events & Experience Development Framework

8.1 Five-Year Phased Roadmap

This Strategy is designed for phased execution.

Humboldt County has emphasized:

- Avoiding rushed governance changes
- Ensuring asset management protections
- Aligning promotion with readiness
- Building a durable structure rather than short-term campaigns

Therefore, implementation is structured in three major phases:

- Phase I: Structural Foundation
- Phase II: Market Activation
- Phase III: Expansion & Optimization

Phase I: Structural Foundation (Year 1, FY 2026-27)

Objectives:

- DSO contract executed
- TAB operational
- Tourism Region Funds process developed
- Readiness tiers established
- Reporting dashboard template finalized

Months 0-6

A. Adopt Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy (County)

- Board of Supervisors approval
- Public presentation
- Publish final plan

B. Establish Tourism Advisory Board (County)

- Define representation from the six Tourism Regions
- Adopt bylaws
- Establish meeting cadence

C. Draft & Release DSO RFP (County + TAB)

- Include governance safeguards
- Include staffing expectations
- Include KPI performance requirements

- Include asset protections
- Clarify TAB's support during this process

D. Evaluate RFP Proposals (County + TAB)

- Scoring rubric applied
- Finalist interviews
- Board of Supervisors approval

Timeline aligns with 6-month procurement window.

Months 6-12

A. Execute Contract (County + DSO)

- Contract is finalized between the County and DSO

B. Transition Plan (County + DSO)

- Domain and digital asset audit
- Vendor transitions
- Industry partner communication plan

C. Destination Readiness Assessment (County + DSO + Tourism Regions + TAB)

- Classify six Tourism Regions into tiers
- Conduct a wayfinding audit
- Identify infrastructure priorities

Phase II: Market Activation (Years 2-3)

Objectives:

- Activate marketing engine
- Establish Tourism Region funding program
- Protect brand integrity
- Fly-market campaign live in 2+ DMAs
- 100% brand compliance in funded marketing
- 3 regions elevated to higher readiness tier
- 2% increase in shoulder-season occupancy
- 5 new or expanded tourism events supported

Year 2, FY 2027-28

A. Launch Unified Brand Platform (DSO + County)

- Publish countywide brand standards
- Deploy Tourism Region storytelling framework
- Update website
- Develop a centralized tourism asset hub with County

B. Launch Fly-Marketing Campaign (Tier 1 Regions) (DSO)

- Focus on priority markets: Los Angeles Basin and Denver

C. Implement Tourism Region Program Funding (County + TAB)

- First annual application cycle
- Bi-annual disbursement structure
- Mid-year reporting

D. Launch Event Activation Program (County + TAB + Tourism Region Partners)

- Fund Tier 2 event-based activations
- Pilot shoulder-season programming

Year 3, FY 2028-29

A. Expand Marketing to Additional DMAs (DSO)

- Add Phoenix/Mesa and Seattle
- Increase co-op participation (target 24% marketing allocation benchmark)

B. Elevate Tier 2 Regions (County + TAB + Tourism Region Partners)

- Invest in readiness improvements
- Expand event portfolio

C. Implement AI-Content Strategy (DSO)

- Structure itineraries
- Search optimization for zero-click environment

Phase III: Expansion & Optimization (Years 4-5)

Objectives:

- Strengthen inbound share
- Optimize ROI
- Solidify rural equity
- Event-driven room nights increase
- 5% shoulder-season growth over baseline

Year 4, FY 2029-2030

A. Expand Fly-Market Investment (DSO)

- Increase inbound-focused campaigns
- Develop airline co-op incentives

B. Evaluate Event Portfolio (Tourism Region Partners + TAB + County)

- Identify anchor events
- Provide multi-year funding to high-performing events

C. Assess Reserve Policy (County)

- Establish a minimum 6-month operating reserve target

D. Renew or Rebid DSO Contract (if applicable) (County + DSO)

Year 5, FY 2030-31

A. Comprehensive Strategy Review (County)

- Align DSO goals with the new CEDS plan (FY 2030-35)
- Assess economic impact trends
- Review funding allocation effectiveness
- Evaluate regional distribution equity

B. Prepare Next Five-Year Travel & Tourism Marketing Strategy (TAB + County)

Five-Year Milestone Summary

Year	Milestone
Year 1	Governance established
Year 2	Brand & fly-market activation
Year 3	Regional elevation & AI generation
Year 4	Expansion & route stability
Year 5	Optimization & next 5-year Travel & Tourism Marketing Strategy

8.2 Risk Mitigation

Identified risks:

1. Procurement delays
2. Understaffed DSO model
3. Premature promotion of Tier 3 regions
4. Revenue volatility
5. Airline route instability

Migration strategies embedded in:

1. Reserve policy
2. Phased marketing
3. Performance KPIs
4. Annual review checkpoints
5. Air Service Working Group (if interest)

Why This Timeline Is Realistic

- Reflects 6-month procurement window
- Avoids immediate overextension
- Protects brand during infrastructure improvement

- Allows readiness sequencing
- Builds marketing gradually
- Aligns with CEDS multi-year structure

8.3 DSO Performance Measurement

Measurement Philosophy

Tourism performance must be measured not by impressions alone, but by economic outcomes.

The 2026 Travel Marketing Outlook identifies attribution and ROI tracking as one of the top challenges facing DMOs.

Therefore, Humboldt County's DSO must adopt a structured KPI framework that:

- Aligns with CEDS
- Demonstrates fiscal accountability
- Measures economic return
- Tracks geographic equity
- Protects public investment

KPI Framework Structure

Performance will be tracked across five categories:

1. Economic Impact Metrics
2. Lodging & Tax Metrics
3. Air Service & Market Access Metrics
4. Marketing & Demand Metrics
5. Governance & Compliance Metrics

Each category includes both outcome metrics and operational metrics.

Category 1: Economic Impact Metrics

These reflect the broader economic health of tourism.

Core Indicators:

- Total Visitor Spending (annual)
- Tourism-Supported Employment
- Travel-Generated Tax Revenue

Baseline:

- $508.3M in visitor spending
- $46.1M in state & local tax revenue

Target:

- Outpace inflation-adjusted growth over a 5-year period

Reporting Frequency:

- Annual

Role:

- DSO (Reporting)
- Economic Development (Validation)

Category 2: Lodging & Tax Metrics

Lodging is the most direct indicator of overnight visitation.

Core Indicators:

- Occupancy Rate
- ADR (Average Daily Rate)
- RevPAR
- TOT Revenue
- Shoulder-Season Occupancy (Oct–Mar)

Baseline:

- December occupancy: 40.8%

Five-Year Targets:

- +5% shoulder-season occupancy
- Sustained RevPAR growth
- TOT growth exceeding baseline inflation

Reporting Frequency:

- Quarterly summary
- Annual trend analysis

Role:

- DSO (Reporting)
- Economic Development (Validation)

Category 3: Air Service & Access Metrics

Based on ACV data.

Core Indicators:

- Passenger Retention Rate
- Inbound vs. Outbound Share
- PDEW in Priority DMAs
- Route Stability (daily departures)
- Airline Co-op Campaign Execution

Baseline:

- 41% retention
- 45% inbound share

Five-Year Target:

- Inbound share ≥ 50%

Reporting Frequency:

- Quarterly

Role:

- DSO (Reporting)
- Economic Development (Validation)

Category 4: Marketing & Demand Metrics

These measure DSO performance in demand stimulation.

Upper Funnel:

- DMA-based paid media reach
- Video completion rates
- Cost-per-engagement

Mid Funnel:

- Website sessions by DMS
- Itinerary page views
- Event page visits
- Email list growth

Lower Funnel:

- Hotel referral clicks
- Co-op campaign engagement
- Event-driven room tracking
- Campaign-attributed visitation (measurable through geolocation marketing)

Industry note: The 2026 Outlook emphasizes moving beyond vanity metrics toward performance-based KPIs.

Reporting Frequency:

- Quarterly

Role:

- DSO (Reporting)
- Economic Development (Validation)

Category 5: Governance & Compliance Metrics

These ensure structural accountability.

Indicators:

- Quarterly report (on-time rate ≥ 95%)
- Tourism Region funding compliance rate
- Financial reporting completeness
- Asset management compliance
- Board meeting attendance

This category directly addresses prior governance concerns.

Reporting Frequency:

- Quarterly/TBD

Role:

- DSO (Reporting)
- Economic Development (Validation)

Sample Quarterly Dashboard Structure

The DSO should present a standardized dashboard containing:

Section A: Economic Snapshot

- YTD Visitor Spending Estimate
- YTD Trips by Month Estimate
- YTD Length of Stay Estimate
- YTD TOT vs Prior Year
- Lodging Trend Graph

Section B: Air Service Snapshot

- Passenger Retention %
- Inbound Share %
- PDEW By Target DMA
- Co-op Airline Campaign Status

Section C: Marketing Performance

- Paid Media ROI
- DMA Engagement Heat Map
- Website Conversion Trends
- Email Growth
- Social Media Growth

Section D: Regional Distribution

- Number of Tourism Region Promotions
- Event Promotion by Region
- Tourism Region Visitation Trends
- Unified Branding Examples

Section E: Compliance & Financial

- Budget vs. Actual
- Reporting Compliance Summary

Annual Public Tourism Report

Each year, the DSO should publish:

- Economic impact summary
- Marketing highlights
- Fly-market performance
- Tourism Region investment map
- CEDS alignment summary
- Infrastructure coordination updates

This ensures transparency and public trust.

KPI Governance Review Process

At 18 months (mid-contract):

- Evaluate performance against baseline
- Assess marketing ROI
- Review staffing adequacy
- Determine need for strategy adjustments

At 3 years (before 3-year mark):

- Comprehensive review prior to contact renewal

Data Collection Infrastructure Requirements

To support this KPI framework, the DSO should implement:

- CRM system
- Google Analytics 4 with structured event tracking
- Paid media attribution tools
- Geolocation data
- Airline data sharing agreement
- Lodging reporting partnerships

Budget allocation must account for Marketing Technology (MarTech) investment.

8.4 Tourism Region Performance Measurement

Tourism Region Funds Performance Metrics

Each funded project/organization should report:

- Estimated room nights generated
- Event attendance
- Shoulder-season impact
- Marketing reach
- Geographical visitor origin
- Leveraged funding ratio or match

Failure to report results is ineligibility for subsequent funding cycle.

See Appendix E for samples of performance measurement.

Why This Measurement Model is Durable

- Moves beyond impressions to economic metrics
- Aligns with CEDS Strategy format
- Protects County oversight authority
- Encourages regional accountability
- Supports air service sustainability
- Enables Board-level strategy decision

8.5 Events & Experience Development Framework

(Economic Activation & Rural Equity Strategy)

Why Events Matter in Humboldt County

Events serve as controlled economic accelerators.

In rural and dispersed destinations, events:

- Concentrate visitor demand
- Stimulate shoulder-season travel
- Support small businesses
- Activate underutilized public spaces
- Generate measurable room nights
- Build repeat visitation

Nationally, event-led travel is one of the most effective tools for activating rural tourism. According to Tourism Economics (via Civitas Funding Futures research):

- Event-driven visitation can increase hotel occupancy by 5-15% during activation windows
- Multi-day festivals often generate higher per-capita visitor spending than general leisure travel due to bundled consumption (lodging + food + retail + ticketed entry)

For Humboldt County, where some Tourism Regions have limited daily attraction density, events provide structured activation without overexposing infrastructure gaps.

Event Maturity Model

To align Tourism Region funds (focused on supporting unincorporated communities) with measurable outcomes, this plan adopts a three-tier event classification model.

Tier A: Anchor Events in Unincorporated Communities

Characteristics:

- 3,000+ attendees (or strong overnight component)
- Multi-day format
- Demonstrated room night generation
- Regional or state-level draw
- Media coverage potential

Funding Approach:

- Multi-year funding eligibility
- Higher funding threshold
- Required economic impact reporting
- Airline and fly-market integration where appropriate

KPIs:

- Room nights generated
- Average length of stay
- Shoulder-season activation
- Visitor origin tracking

Tier B: Growth Events in Unincorporated Communities

Characteristics:

- 1,000–3,000 attendees
- Regional draw
- Emerging overnight potential
- Strong community support

Funding Approach:

- 1-year funding
- Growth benchmarks required
- Marketing amplification through DSO channels

KPIs:

- Attendance growth rate
- Marketing engagement metrics
- Regional participation

Tier C: Emerging & Rural Activation Events in Unincorporated Communities

Characteristics:

- <1,000 attendees
- Community-based
- Limited marketing budget
- High rural equity value

Funding Approach:

- Smaller grants
- Capacity-building assistance
- Event development mentorship
- Focus on shoulder-season opportunities and readiness impacts

KPIs:

- Attendance baseline tracking
- Local business participation
- Progression toward Tier B classification

Economic Modeling for Event Investment

To ensure accountability, funded events should report economic indicators.

Basic impact framework:

Visitor Spending Estimate
=
(# of non-local attendees
×
average daily spend
×
length of stay)

According to Visit California travel data, average daily visitor spending (statewide average benchmark) supports:

- Lodging
- Food & beverage
- Retail
- Recreation

Even conservative modeling demonstrates:

An event attracting 1,000 overnight visitors for 2 nights can generate significant economic injection in the local area.

A standardized reporting template should estimate:

- Direct spending
- Room nights
- Tax impact
- Event cost-to-impact ratio

Events as Air Service Support

Events in unincorporated communities can play a critical role in route sustainability.

ACV market data shows strong LA and Denver demand.

Strategic alignment:

- Schedule anchor events during fly-market promotional windows
- Coordinate airline co-op campaigns around event weekends
- Bundle event promotions with flight messaging
- Support regional readiness Tiers (tourism infrastructure investments)

This supports inbound seat load factors and route viability.

Events and Rural Equity

Tourism Region funding will ensure geographic distribution.

Events allow:

- Unincorporated communities to participate without needing year-round tourism capacity
- Cultural preservation and local identity amplification
- Economic inclusion

Funding will require:

- CEDS alignment
- Clear marketing plan
- Basic reporting compliance (event primarily based in unincorporated areas)

This transitions from legacy allocation to strategy and performance-supported rural investment.

Experience Development Beyond Events

In addition to event promotion, the DSO should support:

- Experience packaging (weekend itineraries)
- Farm-to-table weekends
- Outdoor recreation
- Artisan and maker markets
- Cultural heritage programming

These initiatives support both tourism and local entrepreneurship in unincorporated communities.

Shoulder Season Strategy

Humboldt County's occupancy data indicates a shoulder-season growth opportunity (*ACV Passenger and Leakage Summary).

Event funding priority should favor:

- October–March activation
- Winter storm-watching weekends
- Off-season trail events
- Holiday markets
- Culinary and craft festivals

KPIs:

- Off-peak room night growth
- Seasonal RevPAR improvement
- Repeat attendance

Governance & Event Accountability

To protect public funds:

- Bi-annual disbursement model retained
- Mid-year reporting required before the second payment
- Standardized post-event report template
- Noncompliance results in ineligibility for the next cycle

This aligns with County expectations for accountability.

Event Portfolio Review (Year 4-5)

Together by year 4, the County of Humboldt, Tourism Advisory Board and DSO should:

- Evaluate ROI across funded events in unincorporated communities
- Identify top-performing anchor events
- Consider multi-year agreements for high-impact events
- Sunset underperforming initiatives

This ensures continuous event portfolio optimization and regional equity.

Alignment with CEDS

Events support:

- Industry diversification
- Small business development
- Workforce stability
- Downtown activation
- Cultural preservation
- Infrastructure justification (once areas are ready to welcome visitors, events can drive visitation)

Tourism events become economic development tools.

Why This Framework Is Defensible

The event model:

- Moves from legacy funding to tiered evaluation
- Supports rural equity without overpromotion
- Links funding to measurable outcomes
- Supports fly-market strategy
- Aligns with shoulder-season growth
- Provides structured performance oversight
- Integrates with Tourism Region funding system

Section 9: Sources

View external data

9.1 Research Integrity Statement

9.2 County of Humboldt Sources

9.3 Airport & Air Service Data

9.4 State and Regional Visitor & Economic Data

9.5 National DMO Research & Benchmarking

9.6 Marketing & Industry Trend Data

9.7 Supplemental Research & Contextual Reports

9.1 Research Integrity Statement

Research Foundation for Humboldt County's Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy

All recommendations contained within this Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy are grounded in:

- Quantitative economic data
- Airport leakage and retention analysis
- Industry-standard DMO benchmarking
- Industry partner interview synthesis
- Marketing performance research
- County fiscal documentation
- Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) alignment
- First-hand, tourism industry experience

Where applicable, national benchmarking sources (Civitas Advisors, Destinations International, Tourism Economics, Future Partners) were used to support recommended funding percentages, staffing ranges, marketing allocations and governance structures.

9.2 County Of Humboldt Sources

Humboldt County Gateway Community Reports. *County of Humboldt, 2024*

Humboldt County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2025–2030. *County of Humboldt*

Humboldt County Staff Report – Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) Allocations. *County of Humboldt, FY 2024–25 & FY 2025–26 projections*

Humboldt County Competitive Analysis. *JayRay, 2025*

Humboldt County Economic Forecast. *County of Humboldt, 2023*

Humboldt County Industry Partner Interview Themes. *JayRay, 2025-26*

Humboldt County Industry Partner Survey. *JayRay, 2025-26*

Humboldt County Marketing Materials Analysis & Audit. *JayRay, 2025*

Humboldt County Tourism Strategy Workshop Meeting Recaps. *JayRay, 2025-26*

Humboldt County Visitors Bureau Marketing Strategy. *HCVB, 2021-2024*

Project Rebound – Target Industry Analysis for Humboldt County. *TPMA, 2026*

9.3 Airport & Air Service Data

California Redwood Coast - Humboldt County Airport (ACV) Passenger & Leakage Study. *YE 2Q 2024*

ACV Leakage & Retention Study. *January 2025 Update*

Volaire Aviation Contracts. *County of Humboldt, FY 2024-25*

9.4 State & Regional Visitor & Economic Data

California Lodging Performance Report. *Dean Runyan/Visit California, December 2025*

California North Coast Visitor Profile. *Visit California, 2024*

California Travel & Tourism Economic Impact Report. *Tourism Economics/Visit California, 2024*

California Visitation and Spend Forecast. *Visit California/Tourism Economics, 2025*

Humboldt Lodging Data, *Visit California/ CoStar*, 2025

Travel Matters Statewide & North Coast Regional Plans. *Visit California*

9.5 National DMO Research & Benchmarking

A Catalyst for Community Vitality: Defining the 21st Century Destination Organization. *Destinations International Industry Brief*

Community Vitality Wheel Framework. *Destinations International*

Destination Organization Performance Reporting (DOPR) Data. *Destinations International, 2025*

DMAI DMO Financial Profile Study. *Destinations International, 2015*

Funding Futures Report. *Miles Partnership/ Civitas Advisors/Tourism Economics, 2025*

National DMO Funding Report. *Civitas Advisors, 2021-2022*

9.6 Marketing & Industry Trend Data

Unpack '26. *Expedia, 2026*

Portrait of American Travelers. *MMGY, Fall 2025 & Winter 2026*

Skift Travel Health Index. *January 2026*

State of the American Traveler. *Future Partners, 2026*

The U.S. Travel Insights Dashboard. *U.S. Travel Association, 2026*

What's News? 2026 — The Big Picture. *Datafy, January 2026*

Travel Marketing Outlook. *Advanced Travel & Tourism, 2026*

These Are the Biggest Travel Trends for 2026. *Travel + Leisure, 2026*

9.7 Supplemental Research & Contextual Reports

Orick Rising: Assessing the Tourism Potential of Orick, California. *Cal Poly Humboldt, 2025*

Project Rebound — Target Industry Analysis for Humboldt County. *TPMA, 2026*

Redwood Region RISE: Implementing Our 10-Year Regional Economic Roadmap. *Cal Poly Humboldt*

Section 10: RFP Compliance

10.1 RFP Compliance Matrix

10.1 RFP Compliance Matrix

RFP Requirement	Location in Strategy (by Section)
Governance Framework	Section 3 – DSO Model, Governance Structure, Safeguards
Research and Data Analysis	Section 1.2 Economic Context; Section 1.3 Industry Benchmarking; Section 9 Sources
Tourism Asset Inventory	Section 2.2 Asset Inventory & Regional Analysis; Appendix A
Brand Positioning Statement	Section 4.4 Brand Platform & Storytelling Architecture
Visitor Personas	Section 1.2 North Coast Visitor Personas; Section 9.4 California North Coast Visitor Profile
Strategic Framework	Section 6 CEDS Crosswalk; Section 8 Five-Year Roadmap
Industry Partner Engagement	Section 1 Methodology; Appendix G & H; Workshop Documentation
Identification of Key Marketing Channels	Section 4.6 Marketing Channel Strategy
Marketing Budget Framework	Section 4.7 Marketing Investment & Budget Framework; Section 3 Funding Model
Implementation Timeline	Section 8 Five-Year Phased Roadmap
Performance Measurement	Section 8 DSO Performance Measurement; Section 6 Strategy KPIs
Air Service Strategy	Section 4 Fly-Market Activation; Section 6 Strategy 4
Regional Equity Approach	Section 2 Tourism Regions; Section 3 Tourism Region Fund; Section 6 Strategy 7
Funding Allocation Structure	Section 3 Funding & Staffing Framework
DSO RFP Structure	Section 7 DSO RFP Structure
Risk Mitigation	Section 8 Risk Mitigation
Events Strategy	Section 8 Events & Experience Development Framework