



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

For the meeting of: 10/27/2026

File #: 26-997

To: Board of Supervisors

From: Supervisor Michelle Bushnell

Agenda Section: Time Certain Matter

Vote Requirement: Majority

SUBJECT:

10:00 A.M. - Consideration of Refinements to the Transient Occupancy Tax and Measure J Funded Tourism Funding Model to Provide Base Funding for Historically Funded Tourism Partners

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Consider establishing a base allocation of \$20,000 to \$30,000 annually, beginning in Fiscal Year 2027-28, for each gateway chamber and visitors bureau that has historically received tourism funding from the County of Humboldt, recognizing the ongoing visitor-serving functions provided by these organizations; and
2. Consider providing the same base funding to Ink People Center for the Arts and Redwood Region Entertainment and Education Liaisons, Inc. (RREEL) annually, beginning in Fiscal Year 2027-28, recognizing their historical partnership with the county and their role in supporting tourism-related activities and visitor experiences; and
3. Affirm the Board's prior direction to maintain the balance of available tourism funding for regional, collaborative, strategic and competitive tourism initiatives consistent with the county's Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy; and
4. Direct staff to return to the Board with recommendations from the Tourism Advisory Board (TAB) regarding proposed eligibility criteria, funding levels, application requirements and performance measures, for Board consideration and final adoption prior to implementation county's Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy; and
5. Provide any additional direction as deemed appropriate by the Board of Supervisors.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

This action supports the following areas of your Board's Strategic Plan.

Area of Focus: A Diverse, Equitable & Robust Economy

Strategic Plan Category: 2001 - Promote strong economic resiliency and growth

DISCUSSION:

Over the past year, the county has undertaken an evaluation of its historical approach to tourism funding with the goal of developing a more strategic, collaborative and regional approach to destination marketing and visitor services. A central objective of this effort has been to transition from legacy funding allocations based largely on historical practice toward investments that demonstrate regional benefit, collaboration, measurable outcomes and alignment with the county's five-year Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy.

On April 28, 2026, the Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy was presented to the Board of Supervisors. The strategy established a framework under which organizations seeking tourism funding would participate in an application process based upon specific activities, outcomes and alignment with regional tourism priorities. Applications would be reviewed and analyzed by the Tourism Advisory Board (TAB), subsequently established by the Board on Aug. 18, 2026, with funding recommendations ultimately presented to the Board of Supervisors for final approval.

As implementation of the new tourism funding model moves forward, an opportunity exists to further refine the approach as it relates to organizations that have historically received annual tourism allocations from the county.

The purpose of today's item is not to reconsider the broader direction or objectives of the Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy. Rather, the Board is being asked to consider whether providing a limited and predictable base level of funding to certain historically funded tourism partners would complement that strategy by maintaining established visitor-serving capacity while the county continues its transition toward a more regional, strategic and performance-driven funding model.

Historically Funded Tourism Partners

The county has historically supported a variety of organizations that contribute to Humboldt County's tourism economy in different but complementary ways. These include gateway chambers and visitors bureaus that provide community-based visitor services, as well as organizations such as Ink People Center for the Arts and RREEL, doing business as the Humboldt-Del Norte Film Commission, that support arts, culture, events and film-related economic and tourism activity.

Gateway chambers and visitors bureaus occupy a unique position within Humboldt County's tourism infrastructure. In addition to traditional activities supporting local businesses and community economic development, these organizations often serve as a direct point of contact between visitors and the communities they represent.

Depending upon the organization and community, these activities may include providing visitor information, maintaining a physical or online visitor presence, responding to visitor inquiries, distributing tourism materials, promoting local attractions and businesses, supporting community events, providing destination information and serving as a connection between visitors, businesses and the broader regional tourism effort.

These functions can be particularly important in Humboldt County's smaller and geographically dispersed communities where chambers and visitors bureaus may provide a level of local visitor information and community presence that is not otherwise readily available.

The county has also historically supported Ink People Center for the Arts as part of its investment in arts and cultural activities that contribute to economic development and the visitor experience. Similarly, RREEL, has historically received county tourism funding to support film and digital media production and the associated promotion and economic activity generated by that industry, such as film related events and film tourism.

Although these organizations provide different services, each represents an established component of Humboldt County's broader tourism and visitor economy.

It is also important to consider that county tourism funding has also historically represented a meaningful component of the operating revenue of these organizations. As the county transitions to the new tourism funding model, the Board may therefore wish to distinguish between baseline support for established visitor-serving infrastructure and funding for specific tourism marketing activities, projects, programs and strategic initiatives.

Making this distinction would allow the county to preserve a modest level of stability and visitor-serving capacity throughout its gateway communities while continuing to move toward greater regional collaboration, measurable outcomes and strategic

investment.

As the county transitions to the new tourism funding model, the Board may therefore wish to distinguish between baseline support for established tourism partners and visitor-serving infrastructure and additional funding for specific tourism marketing activities, projects, programs and strategic initiatives.

Current Funding Levels

For FY 2026-27, the Board approved continuation of funding for nine existing tourism partner contracts totaling \$759,940 as a transitional measure while the county implements the Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy. With the exception of RREEL, funding was maintained at FY 2025-26 levels. RREEL's allocation was adjusted pursuant to the percentage-based funding formula contained in its existing agreement.

Current FY 2026-27 funding is as follows:

Tourism Partner	FY 2026-27 Funding	Proposed Future Base Funding
Southern Humboldt Visitors Bureau	\$71,079	\$20,000–\$30,000
Garberville Chamber of Commerce	\$130,786	\$20,000–\$30,000
Orick Chamber of Commerce	\$34,118	\$20,000–\$30,000
Willow Creek Chamber of Commerce	\$34,118	\$20,000–\$30,000
Arcata Chamber of Commerce	\$28,432	\$20,000–\$30,000
McKinleyville Chamber of Commerce	\$25,000	\$20,000–\$30,000
Loleta Chamber of Commerce	\$10,000	\$20,000–\$30,000
Ink People Center for the Arts	\$150,000	\$20,000–\$30,000
RREEL/Humboldt-Del Norte Film Commission	\$276,407	\$20,000–\$30,000 following expiration of existing agreement
TOTAL	\$759,940	\$180,000–\$270,000

The current allocations illustrate the significant variation in historical funding levels and funding structures among these organizations. The proposed base-funding model would establish a more consistent baseline while preserving the ability of each organization to seek additional funding through the TAB process based on specific activities, outcomes and alignment with regional tourism priorities.

Proposed Base Funding

Under the refinement presented for consideration, the following historically funded tourism partners would each be eligible for an annual base allocation of between \$20,000 and \$30,000, with the final amount determined by the Board:

- Southern Humboldt Visitors Bureau;
- Garberville Chamber of Commerce;

- Orick Chamber of Commerce;
- Willow Creek Chamber of Commerce;
- Arcata Chamber of Commerce;
- McKinleyville Chamber of Commerce;
- Loleta Chamber of Commerce;
- Ink People Center for the Arts; and
- RREEL/Humboldt-Del Norte Film Commission.

The intent of this base funding would not be to restore historical allocation levels or establish an indefinite funding commitment. Rather, it would recognize the baseline tourism-related functions provided by these established organizations and offer a reasonable degree of operational stability as the county implements its broader tourism strategy.

If approved by your Board, consideration should be given to establishing a defined funding term. A four-year term would align with the anticipated completion of the county's five-year Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy, while a shorter term of one or two years could provide a transitional period for partner organizations to diversify revenue sources, adjust operations and prepare for potential reductions or the elimination of county funding. Ultimately, the length of the funding commitment would be at your Board's discretion, balancing the desire to provide stability to community partners with the county's broader fiscal priorities. Any funding commitment would remain subject to annual appropriation and the availability of funding.

This approach also creates an equitable baseline among historically funded tourism partners while recognizing that the services and activities provided by each organization may differ.

Organizations receiving base funding would be expected to demonstrate an active tourism-related or visitor-serving role, maintain appropriate organizational and financial capacity, coordinate with regional destination marketing efforts where appropriate, and provide annual reporting regarding activities, performance and use of county funds.

The base funding process should be structured to provide appropriate accountability for public funds without requiring historically funded organizations to compete annually for the entirety of the funding necessary to maintain their baseline tourism-related operations.

RREEL is distinguishable from the other historically funded partners because its current county funding is governed by an existing contractual formula rather than solely by an annual discretionary allocation. For FY 2026-27, the Board previously approved continued funding for nine existing contractual tourism partners and specifically recognized that RREEL's allocation would be adjusted based upon the percentage established in its existing agreement. Accordingly, the proposed \$20,000 to \$30,000 base-funding structure is intended to establish the Board's policy direction for RREEL following expiration of the existing contractual arrangement and should not be interpreted as modifying the county's obligations under that agreement.

Upon expiration of the current agreement, RREEL would transition to the same base-funding framework applicable to the other historically funded tourism partners and would be eligible to seek additional strategic funding through the TAB process. This provides a consistent long-term funding process while recognizing the county's existing contractual commitments.

Strategic and Competitive Tourism Funding

Establishing a base allocation would not replace the competitive funding process contemplated by the Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy or the role of the TAB.

Rather, funding beyond the established base allocation would remain available through the application and review process for activities that advance countywide or regional tourism objectives.

Historically funded partners receiving a base allocation would remain eligible to apply for additional funding through the TAB process. Additional funding would be based upon the proposed activity, anticipated outcomes, alignment with county tourism priorities and other criteria established through implementation of the Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy.

This would create two complementary funding purposes:

Base Funding: A limited and predictable level of support for historically funded organizations that provide established tourism-related services, visitor-serving infrastructure, arts and cultural activities, film promotion or other activities that contribute to Humboldt County's visitor economy.

Strategic Funding: Funding awarded through the TAB application and review process for projects, programs, marketing activities, events and partnerships that demonstrate measurable tourism impact, regional collaboration and alignment with countywide tourism priorities.

This refinement preserves the fundamental objectives of the county's Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy. It does not represent a return to the prior tourism funding model. Instead, it further defines how the new model could operate by distinguishing between maintaining a baseline level of established tourism capacity and investing additional resources in strategic activities.

The approach also provides greater predictability for established community partners while preserving the opportunity for the TAB and Board to direct additional resources toward the highest-impact regional tourism initiatives.

Implementation and Future Review

If the Board supports the concept presented today, staff will return with final recommendations regarding the specific base allocation, eligibility requirements, allowable uses, reporting requirements, performance measures and associated agreements.

The TAB would continue to serve the role established by the Board in evaluating strategic tourism funding proposals and making recommendations regarding funding beyond the base allocations.

The Board could also consider reviewing the base funding component after an initial period, as determined by your Board, to evaluate whether the funding continues to provide an appropriate public benefit, whether participating organizations continue to perform identifiable tourism-related functions, and how the base funding structure relates to the county's broader regional tourism strategy.

SOURCE OF FUNDING:

General Fund 1100

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Narrative Explanation of Financial Impact:

Nine historically funded tourism partners currently receive a combined \$759,940 in FY 2026-27, as detailed in the table above.

Under the proposed long-term base-funding framework, a uniform annual allocation of \$20,000 for each of the nine organizations would result in annual base funding of \$180,000. At \$25,000 per organization, annual base funding would total \$225,000, and at \$30,000 per organization, annual base funding would total \$270,000.

These amounts represent the potential long-term cost of the base-funding component and should not be interpreted as the immediate FY 2026-27 fiscal impact. The county would not transition to the proposed \$20,000 to \$30,000 base allocation until expiration of the agreements with all of the tourism partners, currently set to expire on June 30, 2027. Accordingly, the Board direction would be implemented in FY 2027-28.

The base allocation would also not necessarily represent the total tourism funding ultimately received by these organizations. Each organization would remain eligible to seek additional strategic funding through the TAB application process.

Any reduction in base allocations from current contractual funding levels would increase the amount potentially available for strategic and competitive tourism investments, subject to future Board budget decisions and the availability of TOT revenues.

Staff would return with the final recommended base allocation, timing of implementation and corresponding impact on funding available for strategic tourism investments prior to implementation.

STAFFING IMPACT:

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impact:

Each entity approved for base funding would be required to execute an agreement with the county and provide annual reporting regarding performance measures, activities and funding outcomes. Administration of these agreements and review of associated reporting will require staff support.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

None

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Board could choose to maintain its prior direction and require historically funded organizations to seek future tourism funding through the TAB application and competitive review process without establishing a base allocation.

The Board could also establish a different uniform base allocation, establish different base funding levels based upon the type or scope of tourism-related services provided, limit base funding to a defined transition period, or direct staff and the TAB to develop an alternative funding framework for future Board consideration.

ATTACHMENTS:

Countywide Travel and Tourism and Marketing Strategy
Tourism Advisory Board Resolution
Tourism Advisory Board Bylaws

PREVIOUS ACTION/REFERRAL:

Meeting of: April 28, 2026 and Aug. 18, 2026
File No.: 26-70, 26-742