

Redwood Region RISE Arts, Culture, and Tourism Activation Plan



California's Redwood Region
Tribal Lands, Del Norte, Humboldt,
Lake, and Mendocino Counties

A Product of Redwood Region RISE
The California Center for Rural Policy
at Cal Poly Humboldt

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Executive Summary

Arts, Culture, and Tourism: A Regenerative Path

Visit California identifies the Redwood Region as a "Dawning Developer" — rich with untapped potential due to our natural beauty, active arts scenes, and cultural heritage. Our emerging status positions us to steward a regenerative Arts, Culture, and Tourism (ACT) model that enhances rather than exploits our communities and landscapes. Current challenges of underinvestment, fragmentation, seasonal employment, and infrastructure gaps become opportunities to chart a sustainable course forward.

This updated Activation Plan lays out a regional networking strategy serving partners and residents across Outdoor Recreation, Arts & Culture, and Destination Marketing/Hospitality through five integrated tactics:

- **Regional Sector Development:** Monthly Sector Working Group meetings, quarterly public reporting sessions, and a phased Sector Development Report.
- **Project Support Network:** Technical assistance, resource sharing, and a Mutual Aid Network to advance projects across the Redwood Region.
- **Regional Branding:** Tribal-inclusive Branding Advisory Group (RBAG) developing strategic recommendations for regional identity.
- **Sector Advocacy:** Government engagement, an advocacy toolkit, and capital absorption ecosystem development.
- **Statewide Networks:** Best practice exchange with regions across California, including through the Inaugural California Outdoor Economy Summit.

Anticipated Impact

Our goal is a sector where our "product" is optimism — vibrant communities interwoven with natural splendor. Expected outcomes by September 2026 include:

- Enhanced regional collaboration capacity across the diverse ACT sector.
- Strengthened regional identity supporting tourism and workforce recruitment.
- Increased sustainable career pathways and living wage opportunities.
- Equitable benefit distribution emphasizing rural and Tribal communities.

- Environmental stewardship ensuring tourism enhances natural assets.

Success will be measured through both traditional economic indicators and quality-of-life metrics for sector workers, recognizing the sector's seasonal and entrepreneurial nature.

Regional Partners

Key collaborators include Catalyst project leaders (Blue Lake Rancheria, Del Norte Partnership for the Performing Arts), state partners (North Coast Tourism Council, Visit California, CalTrans), regional allies (Humboldt County, Eastern Sierra, LA County), and local Tribal governments plus arts organizations and industry representatives. Increased Tribal participation is a priority, recognizing Indigenous communities' essential role in cultural preservation and sustainable tourism.

This living document will evolve as our work advances. Calder Johnson, Arts, Culture, and Tourism Sector Investment Coordinator, and his team — Sabrina Clement and Cynthia Martells — will collaborate with the Redwood Region RISE Collaborative, Sector Advisory Council, and community partners to conduct semi-annual comprehensive reviews. An upcoming update will be provided as a Final Impact Report as California Jobs First's State-funded activities of RRRISE sunset.

Redwood Region RISE Shared Values

1. Our work contributes to the good of the community and the good of the environment.
2. Our educational (training) opportunities align with our regional needs.
3. We advocate for equitable access to resources to ensure our region is economically resilient.

Our Cross-Cutting Principles

These cross-cutting principles will be woven into the various programs and policies created by this sector table, guiding decision-making to ensure alignment with our regional economic goals as specified in our [Regional Roadmap](#):

- **Economic Resilience:** Building resilience in California's northern rural economy by investing in sectors essential for long-term growth and stability.
- **Equity and Inclusion:** Ensuring that the benefits of economic recovery are distributed equitably across communities, including historically marginalized groups.
- **Innovation and Adaptation:** Leveraging our region's demonstrated innovative capacity to create resilient, lasting economic growth.
- **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Centering collaboration across government agencies, private sector, non-profits, and community groups.
- **Sustainability and Environmental Stewardship:** Adhering to regenerative and sustainable principles across all sector activities.
- **Workforce Development:** Enhancing the skills and capabilities of the local workforce across legacy and emerging industries.
- **Investing in Infrastructure:** Advocating for every county in our region to secure funds for improved transportation, energy, and digital infrastructure.

Introduction of Arts, Culture, and Tourism Sector

The work presented in this Activation Plan was completed by Redwood Region RISE's Sector Investment Coordinator Calder Johnson, with his team, Sabrina Clement and Cynthia Martells.

The Redwood Region faces real challenges in building an equitable, sustainable ACT sector: underinvestment and fragmentation, infrastructure shortfalls in transportation and lodging, seasonality and gig work instability, limited career advancement, and the risks of over-tourism and cultural commodification.

But we have a significant advantage. The future development of the sector is wide open, and we have the vital infrastructure of our relationships and our ideas.

Visit California's Regional Reports describe this region as a "Dawning Developer" – full of potential due to our unique blend of natural beauty, active arts scenes, and deep cultural heritage. Our under-development is a blessing in disguise, allowing us to chart a course toward a regenerative model built around the simple principle of making a place better than when you arrived – in alignment with RISE core principles and Visit California's statewide sustainable tourism guidance.

In a regenerative ACT sector, our primary "product" is optimism – a regional identity built around vibrant communities interwoven with natural splendor, populated by passionate, creative people capable of extraordinary things. We believe in utilizing the responsive, flexible, and innovative industries of arts & culture, outdoor recreation, and tourism to stimulate economic activity, create sustainable livelihoods, serve our communities, and promote hope, joy, equity, exploration, and creativity.

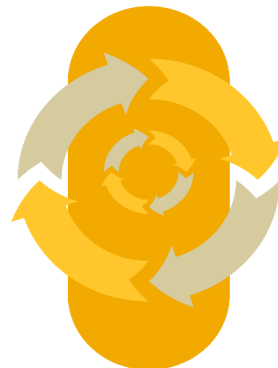
Regenerative Cycle

Sustainable - Long-term Growth - Security



Extractive Cycle

Temporary - Short-term Gains - 'Boom and Bust'



Arts, Culture, Tourism Sector Overview

The ACT Sector encompasses over 110 distinct six-digit NAICS codes. For the purposes of this Activation Plan, we organize the sector into three sub-sector industry clusters: Outdoor Recreation, Arts & Culture, and Destination Marketing/Hospitality/Service. These map to the officially identified sectors within the California Jobs First State Economic Blueprint: Creative Economy (Arts & Culture) and Tourism & Outdoor Recreation (Outdoor Recreation, Destination Marketing/Hospitality/Service).

Sector Prioritization

The ACT Sector is prioritized because, while relatively underdeveloped compared to other California regions, it has an exceptionally high ceiling for conscientious future growth – driven by a powerful combination of natural resources and cultural assets. Strategic development, particularly in regional branding, can also produce strong ancillary effects across other sectors, enhancing workforce recruitment and attracting new businesses and investment.

Operating Structure

The ACT Sector Investment Coordinator and team are contracted through the California Center for Rural Policy at Cal Poly Humboldt, one of RISE's convening agencies and the SIC's direct supervisor.

This Activation Plan is organized around the Sector Working Group (SWG) – a body of industry leaders convening monthly to guide SIC priorities and coordinate implementation. The SWG supports execution across all five tactics and informs the formation of focused sub-groups, including the Branding Advisory Group (RBAG). Quarterly public reporting sessions ensure transparency and community feedback loops throughout. This work culminates in a phased Sector Development Report: a public draft in June 2026 and a final version in August 2026, detailing findings and recommendations for sustainable ongoing activity in the sector.

Resourcing Across Strategies

Activation Plan implementation is resourced across three categories:

- The majority of tasks are resourced through the SIC Team's contract with Redwood Region RISE/California Jobs First via the California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP) at Cal Poly Humboldt.
- Several tasks are resourced through RRRISE Catalyst project awards, with funding allocations and gaps identified individually in each project's workplan.
- Some tasks require supplemental funding without a currently identified source – including design and print costs for the Sector Development Report, marketing support for the RBAG, and the capital absorption ecosystem. Potential sources include foundation grants and local or state funding, though expectations must be tempered given current federal funding reductions and state and local budget constraints.

Goals and Metrics

Visit California provides the most thorough region-specific data on tourism-related jobs and the economy through their annual economic reports. State data on the creative economy is harder to come by, with recent iterations of the Otis College Report on the Creative Economy lacking datasets for most of rural Northern California.

Given the seasonal, gig-based, and entrepreneurial nature of the sector, traditional metrics like job counts can present an incomplete picture. It is therefore a sector development priority to address the urban-rural disparity in data collection and to include holistic quality-of-life indicators alongside traditional economic measures:

- Living wages and safety nets (insurance, housing security, healthcare).
- Economic resilience in a gig/seasonal economy.
- Viable pathways for career advancement.
- Equitable distribution of economic growth benefits across the workforce and across communities – including the most rural, isolated, and Tribal communities.
- Environmental impact and progress toward regenerative models.

Dependencies and Challenges

The sector faces a significant shortfall of investment in both physical and human infrastructure. Travel and lodging options are limited. Community organizations and businesses that are essential partners are typically understaffed and underfunded — enthusiastic for regional collaboration but stretched thin. This is why most tactics in this plan center on capacity-building, networking, and the creation of regional partnerships, in alignment with both the RISE Regional Plan Part 2 and Visit California's North Coast Regional Strategic Tourism Plan.

The sector's diversity is both a challenge and an opportunity — the needs of a studio artist differ considerably from those of a restaurant owner, and maintaining balanced representation will be ongoing work. Most current participants are drawn from the region's more urban centers (Ukiah, Eureka/Arcata, Crescent City), and expanding participation from smaller and more isolated communities — and increasing Tribal participation — remains a high priority.

The positive side: this region is full of dedicated, passionate, innovative people who are practiced at creative problem-solving with limited resources. There is also a genuinely synergistic moment emerging, with statewide priorities (Visit California's regenerative tourism agenda, the CA Jobs First framework) aligning with RISE core values and regional momentum — including Humboldt County's active tourism strategy realignment, now a formalized area of collaboration within this plan. Seizing this moment is the crucial element in accomplishing the work set out in the following section.

Strategy

Strategy: Regional Networking & Advocacy

Tactic 1.1: Regional Sector Development Strategization

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TASK	RESPONSIBLE ENTITY	TIMELINE	FUNDING SOURCE & GAPS	KEY OUTPUTS & METRICS
Convene monthly Sector Working Group meetings	Sector Investment Coordinator & Team (SIC), Sector Working Group (SWG)	June 2025 – Aug 2026	SIC Contract (RRRISE/ CCRP)	Monthly convenings guiding sector priorities and coordinating implementation.
Quarterly Sector Reporting Sessions	SIC Team & SWG	Aug 2025 – Aug 2026	SIC Contract	Public reporting sessions to ensure transparency and feedback loops.
Catalyst Project – Carving a Legacy (Blue Lake Rancheria)	Blue Lake Rancheria	May 2025 – Aug 2026	RRRISE Catalyst Award: \$740,907	Feasibility and implementation per approved project workplan.
Catalyst Project – Del Norte Performing Arts Center	Del Norte Partnership for the Performing Arts	May 2025 – Aug 2026	RRRISE Catalyst Award: \$268,250	Feasibility and implementation per approved project workplan.
Sector Development Report	SIC Team & SWG	Draft: June 2026 Final: Aug 2026 Public Draft: June 2026	SIC Contract; design/print supplemental funds may be required	Regional and county-level development roadmap aligned with CA Jobs First.

Tactic 1.2: Project Support Network

Tactic 1.2: Project Support Network				
TASK	RESPONSIBLE ENTITY	TIMELINE	FUNDING SOURCE & GAPS	KEY OUTPUTS & METRICS
General Technical Assistance & Project Support	SIC Team	Ongoing	SIC Contract (CA Jobs First).	Direct support to sector projects logged through SIC toolkit.
Mutual Aid Network Development & Implementation	SIC Team & SWG	June 2025 – January 2026	SIC Contract; long-term sustainability funding TBD.	Resource-sharing system designed to extend beyond CA Jobs First timeline.
Sustainability Planning	SIC Team & SWG	May 2026	SIC Contract	

Tactic 1.3: Regional Branding

Tactic 1.3: Regional Branding				
TASK	RESPONSIBLE ENTITY	TIMELINE	FUNDING SOURCE & GAPS	KEY OUTPUTS & METRICS
Branding Advisory Group (RBAG)	SIC, SWG, NCTC, Visit CA	July 2025 – Sept 2026	SIC Contract; additional marketing funds TBD.	Tribal-inclusive strategic recommendations for regional branding.
Humboldt Tourism Strategy Alignment	SIC Team & SWG	July 2025 – September 2026	SIC Contract	

Tactic 1.4: Sector Advocacy & Investment

Tactic 1.4: Sector Advocacy & Investment				
TASK	RESPONSIBLE ENTITY	TIMELINE	FUNDING SOURCE & GAPS	KEY OUTPUTS & METRICS
Collaborate with RISE Policy Group on press kit & resource suite	SIC Team	July – Summer 2026	SIC Contract; printing/design may require supplemental funds.	Advocacy toolkit for industry representatives.
Capital Absorption Ecosystem	SIC Team	July 2025 – TBD	Currently unfunded beyond staff time; future grant support may be required.	Investment readiness framework for sector growth.
Great Redwood Trail Arts Commission & Public Art Funding		January 2026– August 2026		
Ongoing legislative engagement		Ongoing– September 2026	SIC Contract	

Tactic 1.5: State-wide Sector Networks

Tactic 1.5: State-wide Sector Networks				
TASK	RESPONSIBLE ENTITY	TIMELINE	FUNDING SOURCE & GAPS	KEY OUTPUTS & METRICS
Eastern Sierra Collaboration	SIC Team	Jan 2025 – Sept 2026	CA Jobs First Cohort Funding; travel supplementation may be required.	Statewide Tourism Cohort development and best-practice exchange.

Tactic 1.5: State-wide Sector Networks

TASK	RESPONSIBLE ENTITY	TIMELINE	FUNDING SOURCE & GAPS	KEY OUTPUTS & METRICS
Inaugural California Outdoor Economy Summit	Cal Poly Humboldt	Nov 2025- Jun 2026	SIC Contract; travel dependent on availability.	Strengthen cross-regional creative industry partnerships.
Redwood–Eastern Sierra Outdoor Recreation exchange	SIC Team	June 2025 – September 2026	SIC Contract	
Ongoing representation at statewide conferences	SIC	Ongoing - September 2026	SIC Contract; travel dependent on availability.	

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