REDWOOD REGION RISE

Economic Development Finance Working Group

Expert Sessions Compendium

Twenty Sessions in Economic Development Finance

April 2024 – May 2026

Del Norte · Humboldt · Mendocino · Lake Counties

SESSIONS

20 Expert Sessions

PREPARED FOR

RRRISE

PREPARED BY

Regional Government Services

Under contract with North Edge Finance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over 26 months — from April 2024 through May 2026 — the RISE Redwood Region Economic Development Funding and Financing Working Group (EDFWG) convened 20 Expert Sessions spanning the full landscape of economic development finance. Participants representing tribes, local governments, county agencies, philanthropy, non-governmental organizations, and industry gathered to explore a pressing challenge facing the region: how to move from planning and strategy to durable, capital-ready implementation that can sustain economic development momentum after California Jobs First concludes.

The sessions covered the full range of tools available to the region: tax increment financing and Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts (April 2024), funding considerations specific to projects on Tribal lands (May 2024), New Markets Tax Credits (June 2024), the foundational role of philanthropy in regional economic development (August 2024), climate financing tools spanning forest, energy, and state capital sources (September 2024), regional collaboration on grants and debt finance (October 2024), Community Development Block Grant fundamentals (November 2024), and Opportunity Zones (December 2024), before turning in 2025 to early-stage venture capital and rural startup ecosystems (February and April 2025), grant strategy and federal landscape analysis (March 2025), health and caregiving finance (April 2025), arts and tourism sector economics and cross-sector partnership building (May 2025), investment readiness tools (October 2025), tribal clean energy finance (December 2025), the Capital Absorption Framework (February 2026), project finance fundamentals (March 2026), working lands and blue economy capital readiness (April 2026), and trail infrastructure as long-term economic development (May 2026). Together they built a curriculum — a body of shared knowledge, frameworks, and collaborations that constitutes the EDFWG's most durable contribution to the region.

Across all twenty sessions, five cross-cutting themes emerged with particular relevance:

> **Grant dependency is a structural vulnerability.** Every session pointed toward a broader portfolio of tools — Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), tax credits, ecosystem services markets, impact investment, philanthropic capital, Tax Incremental Districts (TIDs), Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), and blended capital stacks — that more resilient regions deploy alongside competitive grants. The August philanthropy session and the November CDBG 101 session added direct texture on this point: philanthropic first-in capital and credit enhancement, and CDBG's own significant administrative burden, both underscore why the region cannot rely on any single competitive grant program as its primary strategy.

> **Systems thinking over isolated efforts.** The Capital Absorption Framework's three functions — Shared Priority, Pipeline, and Enabling Environment — reinforced a central insight that emerged throughout the series: transformative regional investment requires coordinating a system, not winning individual competitions. October's Regional Collaboration for Funding session made the federal grant version of this case explicit, pointing to the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency's decades-long, systematically coordinated Army Corps of Engineers relationship as the model the region should build toward.

Tribal sovereignty is a central requirement, not a consulting consideration. Effective economic development in this region means building governance structures, financing tools, and partnerships that align with how tribes actually govern — from Native CDFIs to co-leadership models to tribally owned assets. The December Opportunity Zones session surfaced a stark version of this gap: no confirmed Opportunity Zone investment has reached tribal trust land nationally, and any future deal will require resolving the same sovereign immunity and jurisdictional questions raised across multiple sessions in this series.

Operational sustainability is the question often missing from the discussion. It is also the one that determines whether a project lives or dies. Projects that begin with design and delay asking "how do we pay for this?" are the projects that fail. Those that begin with that question are the ones that endure.

This is generational work. Every durable regional asset discussed across the year required intentional, patient, multi-stakeholder commitment that outlasted any funding cycle. The EDFWG's institutional memory, relationships, and shared frameworks are the preconditions for ongoing sustainability and success.

About the RISE EDFWG Expert Sessions

The RISE Redwood Region Economic Development Funding and Financing Working Group (EDFWG) is a multi-stakeholder body convened as part of the California Jobs First / Redwood Region RISE initiative. Participants include representatives from the region's tribal nations, local and county governments, philanthropy, non-governmental organizations, and industry across Del Norte, Humboldt, Mendocino, and Lake Counties.

The Expert Sessions were designed to build shared knowledge and vocabulary around economic development finance — equipping EDFWG members with the tools, frameworks, and relationships needed to move RISE priority projects from planning into implementation and from grant dependency to durable capital readiness. Sessions were recorded and posted on the RISE EDFWG webpage for use by the broader regional community.

> Video recordings of every session, with slide decks and supporting materials, can be viewed on the Redwood Region RISE website at **humboldt.edu/ccrp/projects/redwood-region-rise/resource-hub/economic-development-finance**

SESSION INDEX

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Apr 2024	Tax Increment Financing & Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts
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Jun 2024	New Markets Tax Credits
Aug 2024	The Role of Philanthropy
Sep 2024	Climate Financing
Oct 2024	Regional Collaboration for Funding: Grants & Debt Finance
Nov 2024	Community Development Block Grants 101
Dec 2024	Opportunity Zones
Feb 2025	Rural Venture Capital & Startup Ecosystems
Mar 2025	Grant Writing Strategy & the Shifting Federal Funding Landscape
Apr 2025	Startup Ecosystems, Innovation Hubs & Business Accelerators
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Feb 2026	Capital Absorption Framework: From Transactional Deals to Investment Ecosystems
Mar 2026	What Makes a Project Finance-Ready? Feasibility, Sustainability & the Capital Question
Apr 2026	Working Lands & the Blue Economy: From Regional Vision to Capital Readiness
May 2026	Trail as Economic Infrastructure: The Great Redwood Trail & the Vine Trail Coalition

For individual session reports, recordings, and supporting materials, visit the RISE EDFWG webpage or contact the coordination team.

CROSS-CUTTING THEMES

Five strategic themes emerged consistently across all twenty sessions. Each represents a finding that transcends any single topic and speaks to the underlying conditions the RISE region must address to build durable economic development capacity.

From Grant Dependency to Capital Diversification

Across every session, a single message recurred: the region's near-total reliance on competitive grants is a structural vulnerability, not a funding strategy. Across the sessions, a consistent theme pointed toward the same portfolio of alternatives — CDFIs, ecosystem services markets, Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts (EIFDs), tax credits, philanthropic capital (grants, recoverable grants, and mission-related investing), impact investment, TIDs/BIDs, and blended capital stacks — that more resilient regions employ alongside grants. The EDFWG's most important legacy may be the exposure and framework it has given the region for understanding the full spectrum of community investment tools.

Shared Priority + Pipeline + Enabling Environment

The Capital Absorption Framework session crystallized a concept that had been implicit throughout the year: the region needs a systems-level approach to investment, not just better individual projects. Regions that consistently attract capital share three characteristics: a clear and compelling priority, a transparent pipeline tracker that exposes bottlenecks, and enabling-environment interventions designed to address those bottlenecks. The October 2024 Regional Collaboration session showed what this looks like in the federal grant context specifically, pointing to the Army Corps of Engineers relationship-building model as a decades-long systems investment, not a single application.

Tribal Sovereignty as Economic Development Asset

The centrality of Tribal nations highlighted a consistent message: effective engagement with tribal nations requires recognizing sovereignty and designing structures that align with how tribes govern. The North Coast Resource Partnership's (NCRP) tribal-county co-leadership model, the Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy's (ATCE) pro bono tribal energy finance tools, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) guarantee toolkit used by North Edge, and Blue Lake Rancheria's tribally-led microgrid and direct-pay tax credit work are all examples of structures designed around tribal reality rather than imposed on it.

Operational Sustainability: The Question Often Missing from the Discussion

A persistent theme was that long-term operational sustainability is often the true test of project viability. The central challenge is not whether a project can be financed or built, but whether it can be successfully operated, maintained, and funded over time. Examples discussed throughout the year illustrated how unanticipated operating costs can threaten otherwise promising projects, underscoring the importance of evaluating long-term sustainability from the outset. It appeared in multiple forms: the Fort Bragg aquatic center nearly bankrupted by unforeseen operating costs;

California's land-secured debt tools, which the October 2024 session showed cannot legally fund the ongoing operating costs (like ladder fuel maintenance) that wildfire resilience actually requires; the Coachella Valley's denominator exercise revealing how little individual project development was moving the needle on regional housing need; Great Redwood Trail Agency's (GRTA) ongoing search for durable maintenance revenue beyond one-time state allocations. Every economic development investment that creates something — a building, a trail, a program, a business — requires an operational sustainability answer from day one. The EDFWG's project readiness framework should make this question unavoidable.

The Long Arc: Patient, Multi-Stakeholder, Place-Based

Fort Ord took 35 years from military base to advanced aviation innovation hub — and its philanthropically-funded workforce apprenticeship model, discussed in the August 2024 session, is itself a multi-year proof of concept still being scaled. The Great Redwood Trail has been in development since 2021 and will be built over decades. The Vine Trail Coalition took 15 years to complete three sections. Every major regional asset discussed across the year's sessions shared one characteristic: it required patient, multi-stakeholder commitment that outlasted any particular funding cycle. As California Jobs First winds down, the EDFWG's most valuable contribution to the region is the institutional memory, relationships, and shared frameworks that will sustain this kind of long-arc work through the next phase.

SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

April 2024 | Tax Increment Financing & Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts

Speakers: *Scott Adair — County of Humboldt, Director of Economic Development · Joseph Dieguez — Kosmont Companies, Vice President*

The series opened with the region's most locally proven value-capture tool. Joseph Dieguez of Kosmont Companies gave an overview of California financing districts — the mechanics by which a district captures the growth in property tax revenue that new development generates and pledges it against the infrastructure that makes the development possible in the first place. Scott Adair, Humboldt County's Director of Economic Development, walked through the Samoa Peninsula Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District, which the County established with Kosmont's support and which remains the region's working example of the tool in practice. The session covered both the value of establishing a financing district and the process of getting one in place. It also set down a reference point the series returned to: the Samoa Peninsula EIFD resurfaced in the December 2024 Opportunity Zones discussion as one of the few places in the region where a designated zone and an existing financing district overlap.

May 2024 | Tribal Funding Considerations

Speakers: *Sara Barbour — Yurok Economic Development Corporation (YEDC), Deputy Director · Jason Ramos — Blue Lake Rancheria, Tribal Administrator, CEO of Tribal Business Enterprises, and Tribal Council · Ross Welch — Arcata Economic Development Corporation (now North Edge), Executive Director*

The May session addressed the distinct challenges and opportunities Tribal entities face in securing funding for projects on Tribal lands, where processes are complex and require a working understanding of Tribal governance, sovereignty, eligibility requirements, and funder expectations. Panelists drew on direct experience to describe both the approaches that had worked and the obstacles that recur. Much of the discussion turned on business structure: the organizational form a Tribal entity selects materially affects a project's eligibility for and access to different funding and financing sources, and choosing well means weighing the specific project, the funding source in view, long-term objectives, and ongoing management needs together rather than in sequence. The practical implication drawn out repeatedly was one of timing — understanding these structures early positions a project far better than resolving them once a funding pursuit is already underway. On strategy, the session emphasized that different funding mechanisms carry distinct requirements and implications for Tribal entities, and that strong projects benefit from a deliberate approach to identifying, securing, combining, and managing funds, with planning extending past how funding is obtained to how it will sustain the project over time. Supporting materials included the IRS Tribal Business Structure Handbook, the Bureau of Indian Affairs guide to choosing a Tribal business structure, the Guidebook to the Inflation Reduction Act's Clean Energy and Climate Investment in Indian Country, and the Tribal Energy Loan Guarantee Program.

June 2024 | New Markets Tax Credits

Speakers: *Jon Penkower — Bridge Strategic Partners, Principal*

Jon Penkower led the group through the New Markets Tax Credit program, a federal incentive built to draw private investment into economically distressed communities — an eligibility profile much of the Redwood Region meets. Administered by the CDFI Fund at the U.S. Treasury, the program allocates credit authority not to project sponsors but to certified Community Development Entities, typically financial institutions, community-based lenders, municipalities, economic development agencies, or developers, each exercising its own discretion over which projects receive the subsidy. Every federal dollar invested generates more than eight dollars of private investment. Eligibility turns on census tract and business type: a project must sit in a low-income community and qualify as a Qualified Active Low Income Community Business, with qualifying tracts defined by poverty above 30 percent, median income below 60 percent of area median, unemployment above 1.5 times the national average, or non-metropolitan county designation. The session's most practically useful segment concerned limitations. The lender must forbear its foreclosure rights across the seven-year compliance period, which sharply narrows the pool of institutions willing to participate; refinancing potential is limited during that window and the property cannot be sold. For mixed-use projects, at least 20 percent of gross income must come from the commercial component, a master lease is likely to be required, and NMTC cannot be paired with Low Income Housing Tax Credits. The session closed with a deep dive into a North Coast project financed with the credit. The practical question for a rural region, as the discussion made clear, is less whether a project qualifies than which Community Development Entity can be brought to the table, and when.

August 2024 | The Role of Philanthropy

Speakers: *Leila Roberts — Humboldt Area Foundation / Wild Rivers Community Foundation · Jim Mayfield — Community Foundation of Mendocino County · Josh Metz — Regional Government Services (RGS)*

The series opened by examining philanthropy's distinct capital toolkit: grants, but also recoverable grants, program-related investments, and mission-related investing through an endowment corpus. Leila Roberts of Humboldt Area Foundation outlined the mechanics IRS payout requirements create for private foundations versus community foundations, and the practical questions — investment policy fit, foundation priorities, donor intent — that determine whether an ask will land. Jim Mayfield grounded the discussion in the realities of a sub-$60 million, donor-directed community foundation working at Mendocino County's scale. Josh Metz closed with the session's most concrete case study: the Fort Ord / Joby Aviation advanced aviation ecosystem in Monterey County, where a nonprofit convener formed after a 2020 public agency closure used Irvine Foundation Priority Communities Initiative funding to build an apprenticeship pipeline achieving 100% certificate completion, later supporting a $10 million Cal Competes grant paired with $40 million in private investment. The session's throughline: philanthropic capital moves faster and more flexibly than public financing, making it best suited to first-in capital, credit enhancement, and the workforce pilots that make an industry cluster's public and private capital stack possible.

September 2024 | Climate Financing

Speakers: *Phil Saksa — Blue Forest Conservation · Matthew Marshall — Blue Lake Rancheria (formerly Redwood Coast Energy Authority) · Daniel Adomian — California IBank*

September's session spanned climate finance at three distinct scales. Phil Saksa of Blue Forest Conservation presented the Forest Resilience Bond, a financing vehicle that wraps grant commitments and long-term beneficiary contracts into upfront capital for forest restoration — deployed at $4 million and $25 million scale in the North Yuba River watershed and expanding toward a first North Coast pilot. Matthew Marshall, drawing on 15 years at the Redwood Coast Energy Authority and his current role at Blue Lake Rancheria, walked through the practical financing tools available for small business and tribal energy projects, from zero-interest PG&E on-bill financing to the Investment Tax Credit's new direct-pay option for tribes, alongside Blue Lake Rancheria's replicable convenience-store microgrid model and the $88 million DOE-funded four-tribe Highway 96 microgrid initiative. Daniel Adomian introduced IBank's newly created climate financing unit and its three forthcoming products — a climate loan guarantee, loan participation, and incentives bridge loan — all still open to regional input through an active Request for Information. The session's collective message was that climate capital exists at every scale, from a single small business lighting retrofit to a multi-tribe microgrid, but accessing it requires matching the right tool, and often the right aggregator partner, to the project.

October 2024 | Regional Collaboration for Funding: Grants & Debt Finance

Speakers: *Mark Northcross — NHA Advisors · Josh Metz — Regional Government Services (RGS) · Walter — Hoopa Valley Tribe area*

Mark Northcross, a municipal advisor with over 40 years structuring public debt, used October's session to make a deliberately counterintuitive case: despite opening with a review of California's land-secured debt tools — general obligation bonds, parcel taxes, assessment districts, and Mello-Roos districts — his central conclusion was that coordinated grant funding, not local debt, is the region's most important lever, and that flat per-parcel taxes for large-scale climate adaptation are acutely regressive when modeled against real Bay Area data. His central recommendation was direct: build a long-term relationship with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, whose roughly 65% cost-shared, uncapped funding dwarfs any local revenue measure the region could pass, following the model of the Sacramento Area Flood Control Agency, which has delivered $3.5 billion through a 160-year relationship and a $9 million annual staff investment in sustaining it. Walter of the Hoopa Valley Tribe area offered a candid counterpoint on tribal capacity constraints, noting the region's tribes face a genuinely unlevel playing field in bond and grant access and proposing project-specific rather than structural engagement. The session's clearest unresolved question, posed directly by Mark Northcross: can Redwood Region RISE itself become the coordinating entity that bundles smaller applications into a single, well-administered regional grant strategy?

November 2024 | Community Development Block Grants 101

Speakers: *Kelly Hansen — County of Mendocino, Grants Unit · Jeff Lucas — Community Development Services*

November's session paired Kelly Hansen of Mendocino County's Grants Unit with longtime CDBG consultant Jeff Lucas for a detailed walkthrough of a program both described as powerful and genuinely burdensome to administer. Every CDBG project must satisfy both a national objective (benefiting low- and moderate-income residents through an area, limited-clientele, housing, or job-creation pathway) and an eligible activity, cross-referenced against a matrix that Kelly Hansen noted has tightened significantly in the past year following federal monitoring of the state. Concrete regional examples grounded the discussion: a Lake County water system consolidation after the 2015 Valley Fire, a job-saving loan restructuring for a Mendocino-area lumber company that grew from 45 to roughly 85 employees, and ongoing ADA and community cleanup projects. Both speakers were candid about the program's administrative weight — a roughly one-year runway to a shovel-ready application, NOFA windows that can close within 24 hours, and program income rules so complex that even reusing a jurisdiction's own previously awarded funds requires a full new application. The session's most substantive strategic idea, raised independently by multiple participants, was a shared regional CDBG (and broader grants) technical assistance function — and, more speculatively, whether the four-county region might someday pursue federal entitlement community status collectively.

December 2024 | Opportunity Zones

Speakers: *Mark Northcross — NHA Advisors · Brian Coleman — GO-Biz*

The final session of 2024 examined whether Opportunity Zones — the 2017 federal capital gains tax incentive tied to designated census tracts — offer a realistic tool for the Redwood Region, a question that emerged directly from preparation for the September Climate Financing session. Mark Northcross and Brian Coleman walked through the mechanics (full capital gains elimination after a 10-year hold) alongside sobering national data: roughly 95% of OZ investment flows to urban tracts, with 1% of all designated tracts capturing 42% of total investment, and no confirmed OZ investment had reached the Redwood Region, including Trinity County, since the program's 2018 launch. A geographic quirk offered a genuine opening: unlike city or county boundaries, census tracts extend into open water, placing portions of Humboldt Bay near planned offshore wind infrastructure inside a designated zone, alongside the Samoa Peninsula's existing Enhanced Infrastructure Financing District. Discussion with Walter of the Hoopa Valley Tribe area surfaced both the opportunity and the absence of any known OZ investment on tribal trust land nationally, and the sovereign immunity and jurisdictional questions any such deal would need to resolve. The session's throughline echoed the region's broader capital strategy conversation: before pursuing OZ investors, the region must first define specifically what it wants built, then identify the specific fund-developer partnership — not a generic pitch — willing to build it.

February 2025 | Rural Venture Capital & Startup Ecosystems

Speakers: *John Ballard & Dan Phillips — Lost Coast Ventures · Jay Bockhaus — Center on Rural Innovation / CORI Ignite Funds · Danny Bernstein — The Reservoir*

The February session addressed a foundational challenge of the "scalability gap" between the isolated projects that characterize much of North Coast entrepreneurship and the growth-oriented ventures that private investment requires. Jay Bockhaus of CORI showed that rural counties receive less than 2% of US venture capital despite holding 15% of the population, and outlined a national rural innovation network model built around coworking hubs and seed funds. Danny Bernstein of The Reservoir introduced a place-based incubator model centered on regional industry strengths — specialty crops and robotics in Salinas Valley — that the North Coast could replicate around forestry, fisheries, and the blue economy. The simultaneous launch of Startup Humboldt, a 7,000 sq ft innovation hub in Arcata anchored by Cal Poly Humboldt, College of the Redwoods, and Lost Coast Ventures, was presented as a generational infrastructure investment with the potential to reverse the region's longstanding pattern of talent export.

March 2025 | Grant Writing Strategy & the Shifting Federal Funding Landscape

Speakers: *Jim Robbins & Andrea Trincado — City of Ukiah Community Development · Kristin Cooper Carter — Grant Management Associates*

With federal funding programs facing unprecedented disruption, the March session offered both practical grant strategy and a forward-looking assessment of what would and would not remain available. Jim Robbins and Andrea Trincado of the City of Ukiah presented two case studies: a coordinated three-grant Community Development Block grant (CDBG) housing program and a $5.6 million California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) Fiber for All award that will deliver 10 GB symmetrical broadband to 350+ underserved Ukiah locations through a city-owned public-private partnership — projected to save the city $100,000+ annually. Kristin Cooper Carter of Grant Management Associates offered her firm's "Key Considerations Analysis" — a pre-application alignment diagnostic that underpins her firm's 90%+ award success rate — alongside an analysis of the Trump administration's emerging funding priorities: infrastructure, manufacturing, AI, agriculture, and some energy. Her most urgent message: Proposition 4's $10 billion California climate bond is among the only large-scale climate funding the North Coast will see, and competitive positioning requires early engagement with NCRP and the Coastal Conservancy before RFPs are issued.

April 2025 | Startup Ecosystems, Innovation Hubs & Business Accelerators

Speakers: *Kacie Flynn — Cal Poly Humboldt (Startup Humboldt) · Paloma Patterson & Mary Anne Petrillo — West Center / Startup Mendocino · Mike Sholin — West Center (lending)*

The April session deepened the February startup ecosystem conversation with detailed presentations on two distinct regional models. Kacie Flynn of Cal Poly Humboldt described Startup Humboldt's evolution from a decade of smaller attempts to the current multi-institution consortium — Cal Poly, Small Business Development Center (SBDC), College of the Redwoods, and Lost Coast Ventures — housed in a renovated 7,000 sq ft space in Arcata. The critical innovation is co-location: a student or community entrepreneur can now find mentorship, SBDC consulting, university connections, and venture capital access under one roof. Paloma Patterson and Mary Anne Petrillo of the West Center presented Startup Mendocino's five-year evolution from a pitch competition to a 24-26 week collaborative cohort program — a pivot driven by post-COVID feedback that rural entrepreneurs need peer community, not competition. Mike Sholin's observation that rural social DNA (community looking after itself) can be redirected into business peer learning proved to be one of the year's most transferable insights. The session also surfaced an underrecognized regional crisis: established businesses 25-30 years old whose owners are retiring with no buyers and no succession mechanism, quietly removing economic activity and employment from communities.

April 2025 | Health & Caregiving Finance

Speakers: *Rod Grainger — Mendocino Community Health Center · Miranda Ramos — Alliance for Rural Community Health · Connie Stewart — Cal Poly Humboldt · Summer Nishio & Brock Lewis — California Health Facilities Financing Authority (CHFFA)*

The second April session turned to a sector where the region's need is acute and the financing landscape is unusually specialized. Rod Grainger and Miranda Ramos presented the Incubate program, a collaborative investment model for caregiving workforce development that pools effort across organizations rather than leaving each provider to build a pipeline alone. Connie Stewart traced the creation of a Behavioral Health Crisis Center financed through a public-private partnership, an example of braided capital in practice — multiple sources, each with its own rules and reporting, assembled into a single facility. Summer Nishio and Brock Lewis outlined the funding and financing programs available through the California Health Facilities Financing Authority, a state resource that rural health providers in the region have historically underused. Taken together the session offered a sector-specific version of the series' recurring lesson: the capital exists, but reaching it depends on knowing which instrument fits and finding partners willing to aggregate demand that no single rural provider carries alone.

May 2025 | Arts, Culture, Tourism & the Creative Economy

Speakers: *Anne Bown-Crawford — Former Executive Director, California Arts Council; Artist in Residence, Google Quantum AI · Sal Muñoz Moreno — Executive Director, Redwood Parks Conservancy · Calder Johnson — RISE Arts, Culture & Tourism Sector Investment Coordinator*

Calder Johnson opened the May session with a candid accounting of the sector's external headwinds — the National Endowment for Arts' (NEA's) effective elimination, a 22% film and TV production decline, the "Trump Slump" projecting 9.2% fewer international tourists, and the risk of federal land sell-offs across the region's 25% federally owned land base. Against this backdrop, Anne Bown-Crawford made the case for arts as economic infrastructure rather than cultural amenity, drawing on her experience as former California Arts Council Director, founding the Arcata Arts Institute, and working as Artist in Residence at Google Quantum AI — where she demonstrated that scientific innovation is measurably enhanced by artist collaboration. She presented California's Creative Corps model, the cultural districts program, and the concept of expanding cultural district designations to include agricultural heritage sites. Sal Muñoz Moreno of the Redwood Parks Conservancy (RPC) provided a case study of: a highly practical major donor prospecting methodology using iWave and Candid databases that any regional nonprofit can deploy for roughly $3,000/year — illustrating how RPC funds 98% of its operations privately, with minimal government dependency and minimal compliance overhead.

May 2025 | Working Lands & the Blue Economy: Building Strategic Alliances

Speakers: *Karen Gaffney — North Coast Resource Partnership · Andy Yu Riemer — Side Porch · Monica Stein-Olson — retired, USAID · Pedar Bruce — Umpqua Bank*

The second May session brought together philanthropy, government, banking, and international development perspectives on a question that had been implicit across the series: how cross-sector partnerships actually get built and sustained in rural places. Rather than surveying financing instruments, the panel focused on the conditions that make collaboration hold — trust established before it is needed, genuine alignment on outcomes rather than nominal agreement, and shared measures of success that survive changes in staff and funding cycle. Panelists drew on real partnerships to show how strategic alliances unlock funding that no single organization could access, scale impact beyond what any one budget supports, and build the kind of community resilience that outlasts a grant period. Supporting materials pointed participants toward the Cynefin framework for working in complexity, the North Coast Resource Partnership's resilience plan and adaptive framework, the UC Berkeley Possibility Lab, and Side Porch's work on economic reconciliation. The session pairs directly with April 2026, where Karen Gaffney returned with NCRP's project pipeline and tracker — the operational expression of the partnership principles set out here.

October 2025 | Investment Readiness: Feasibility Studies, Pro Formas & Project Pipelines

Speakers: *Josh Metz — Regional Government Services (RGS) / RISE EDFWG Technical Assistance Lead · Xenia Bradford — RGS · Tracy Fuller — RGS*

The October session shifted from external expert presentations to internal capacity-building, with the RGS team delivering practical tools for project proponents ahead of the November 5th RISE convening in Lake County. Xenia Bradford presented a nonprofit feasibility study framework — the structured stakeholder survey and financial assessment process that determines a project's viability before capital campaign launch. Tracy Fuller introduced pro forma financial planning, emphasizing the three statements every project proponent needs (activities, financial position, and cash flows) and providing a shared Excel template. Josh Metz provided a grounding 35-year case study: the Fort Ord / Joby Aviation advanced aviation ecosystem in Monterey County, where a public agency closure in 2020 spawned a nonprofit (DART), which collaborated with UC Santa Cruz, Joby Aviation's private sector growth, and the Monterey Bay Economic Partnership to win a $7.4 million Jobs First implementation award for electric aviation infrastructure. The lesson: transformative economic development in regions like the North Coast requires 20-30 year horizons, multi-actor coordination, and investment readiness tools.

December 2025 | Tribal & Regional Clean Energy Finance

Speakers: *Matthew Marshall — Blue Lake Rancheria · Todd Halvorsen — Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy (ATCE) · Craig Lammlin — Baker Tilly (formerly Moss Adams) · Rich Felice — Mendocino Council of Governments / Northern Rural Energy Network*

The final session of 2025 tackled clean energy finance in a rapidly shifting policy environment. Todd Halvorsen of the Alliance for Tribal Clean Energy introduced ATCE's fully pro bono services for tribal communities: the Weaver financial modeling platform, a growing template document library, Renewable Energy Certificates (REC) and carbon market strategy, Energy Investment Tax Credit (ITC) structuring, and the Indigenous Power and Light Fund (grants up to $500K/year, loans up to $1M per tribe). Craig Lammlin of Baker Tilly walked through the significant changes to clean energy tax credits under the One Big Beautiful Bill — tightening solar and wind timelines while leaving battery, hydro, geothermal, and fuel cells largely intact. Rich Felice introduced the Northern Rural Energy Network (NREN), a new CPUC-funded program delivering no-cost energy efficiency services to PG&E customers in Humboldt, Mendocino, and Lake Counties. Matthew Marshall of Blue Lake Rancheria, who organized the panel, closed with the session's guiding principle: tribal energy projects are most powerful when structured around community ownership — keeping operations and maintenance jobs, capital flows, and long-term asset value inside the tribal economy.

February 2026 | Capital Absorption Framework: From Transactional Deals to Investment Ecosystems

Speakers: *Omar Carrillo Tinajero — Center for Community Investment*

The February 2026 session introduced the Capital Absorption Framework (CAF), a systems-level model for moving from project-by-project fundraising to coordinated regional investment ecosystems. Omar Carrillo Tinajero of the Center for Community Investment presented the CAF's three interconnected functions — a Shared Priority (clear aspiration + specific measurable result), a Pipeline (a regional view of all investable projects revealing where they stall), and an Enabling Environment (seven dimensions from policy to narrative to relationships). Two case studies brought the framework to life: the Coachella Valley's housing ecosystem, which grew from 38 affordable units per year to over 1,500 through the $80 million Lift to Rise Catalyst Fund; and Invest Appalachia, which built a $35 million multi-state impact investment fund after identifying the missing "framer" capacity in its regional project development pipeline. Ross Welch of North Edge drew powerful parallels to the North Coast's existing toolkit — BIA guarantees, Headwaters Fund, iBank guarantees, CDFI lending — suggesting the region already has many of the ingredients for a capital absorption system and needs primarily a shared pipeline and coordinating priority to activate them.

March 2026 | What Makes a Project Finance-Ready? Feasibility, Sustainability & the Capital Question

Speakers: *Kirk Cohune — Greenway Partners · Ross Welch — North Edge / RREDC*

March 2026 provided a deep dive into why projects fail and what actually makes them work, drawn from decades of combined experience financing and planning community facilities across the North Coast. A recurring theme throughout the discussion was that the greatest barriers to project implementation are often not technical, design, or construction challenges, but rather the capital structures and organizational capacity required to sustain projects over time. Kirk emphasized the importance of beginning with operational and financial feasibility—ensuring that a project can be successfully owned, managed, and maintained—before advancing into design and development decisions. He and Ross Welch highlighted the Hoopa Valley grocery store (a multi-CDFI capital stack that put food access back in a tribal community) and the Carson Block building (BIA guarantee unlocking a complex historic tax credit and NMTC deal). A consistent message was that early feasibility screening is an act of stewardship, not pessimism. Projects without a realistic path to funding are best identified early, before scarce resources are committed. Speakers also highlighted the importance of understanding regulatory and cost implications at the outset of project development. For example, the introduction of public funding into a construction project can trigger prevailing wage requirements, substantially increasing total project costs and affecting overall feasibility. The session concluded with a call for a regional "Project Health" program: low-cost early feasibility consultations that break bad projects before they consume organizational resources.

April 2026 | Working Lands & the Blue Economy: From Regional Vision to Capital Readiness

Speakers: *Karen Gaffney — North Coast Resource Partnership / West Coast Watershed · Stewart Sarkozy-Banoczy — World Ocean Council / Octopus / Precovery Labs*

The April 2026 session brought together two of the region's most experienced practitioners in working lands and blue economy finance to address the central transition facing the EDFWG: from planning and strategy into capital-ready implementation. Karen Gaffney of NCRP presented the organization's project pipeline and tracker system — 542 projects at $3+ billion in total investment need, managed with a $2M technical assistance (TA) investment that has returned $84M in on-the-ground funding (42:1 ratio). She catalogued financing tools the region has not yet fully activated: EIFDs, ecosystem services markets, Blue Bonds, and insurance innovations being developed with the Governor's Office. Stewart Sarkozy-Banoczy introduced his Resilience Triangulation Framework — mapping enablers, innovators, and funders for any sector — and described CDFIs (including Native CDFIs) as the most critical and underutilized tool for translating plans into funded projects. Both speakers emphasized that tribal sovereignty must be designed into governance structures as decision-making authority, not advisory status, and that NCRP's nationally unique tribal-county co-leadership model offers a direct replication template for the RISE successor structure.

May 2026 | Trail as Economic Infrastructure: The Great Redwood Trail & the Vine Trail Coalition

Speakers: *Elaine Hogan & Bridget Nichols — Great Redwood Trail Agency (GRTA) · Shawn Casey-White — Napa Valley Vine Trail Coalition*

The May 2026 session explored the Great Redwood Trail as a form of long-term regional economic infrastructure. Spanning 307 miles of state-owned right-of-way, the rail-to-trail project is projected to generate substantial economic, recreational, and community benefits upon completion. Representatives from the Great Redwood Trail Agency presented the recently adopted Master Plan, highlighting its phased implementation framework and the availability of new state funding to advance priority segments beginning in FY 2026–27. The session also examined the organizational structures required to deliver large-scale trail projects over time. Drawing on 15 years of experience with the Napa Valley Vine Trail, Shawn Casey-White described the role of a companion nonprofit in accelerating project delivery, coordinating stakeholders, securing matching funds, managing landowner relationships, and supporting long-term stewardship. Together, the presentations illustrated how ambitious regional infrastructure projects depend not only on a compelling vision, but also on durable governance, funding, and partnership models. The session emphasized the ways in which the GRTA is a durable, decades-long anchor for regional economic development, making it the ideal organizing spine for the post-RISE sustainability.

> Recordings and supporting materials for every session listed here are posted on the Redwood Region RISE website at **humboldt.edu/ccrp/projects/redwood-region-rise/resource-hub/economic-development-finance**