Organizational Sustainability Report

Redwood Region RISE

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For the California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP), RRRISE Convener

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Executive Summary

In partnership with the California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP) of Cal Poly Humboldt, Organizational Learning Partners has prepared this Organizational Sustainability Report to guide the RRRISE collaborative's leadership and community partners in designing a lasting, impactful organizational structure for the future. Our project problem statement is shown in Appendix A.

The organizing methodology and design for this project are based in systems thinking and innovation. Understanding a regional collaborative like RRRISE through a systems lens allows us to see how regional actors can best work together to create something new. Systems thinking reveals the invisible structures and forces that shape behavior, the reinforcing patterns that generate momentum, and the balancing forces that constrain progress. For a collaborative that emerged from a single impetus – California's Jobs First funding – to convene diverse actors and coordinate across four counties with distinct capacities and histories, systems thinking illuminates how outcomes are generated through the interaction of relationships, roles, incentives, and flows of information and resources. It allows partners to see not only what is happening, but why it happens; this understanding enables us to imagine the system's potential for the future. Most importantly, a systems lens compels us to designate a specific purpose, or approach, to regional economic development and ensure that RRRISE is designed to effectively deliver.

As RRRISE prepares to enter a post state-funded period, partners need a grounded, realistic vision of what the collaborative can become. Without its existing operating dollars, sustaining RRRISE's relationships and convening structures requires an understanding of which aspects of the system generate their own energy and which require ongoing investment. Systems thinking helps highlight the elements that hold the greatest leverage for shifting the region toward more coordinated, impactful economic development, and the patterns that, if unaddressed, will continue to diminish regional progress. The systems perspective allows us to clarify where a small change in structure or governance could substantially increase the collaborative's ability to deliver meaningful outcomes.

Most importantly, systems thinking addresses RRRISE not as a single program that began and ended with state dollars, but as an evolving regional system of people, institutions, and shared aspirations. By mapping the themes and dynamics revealed in more than 30 interviews, three focus groups, and a partner survey, our synthesis identifies the core strengths that the collaborative can build upon, the structural barriers it must resolve, and the opportunities available if the region wishes to evolve the system into a more durable and effective regional economic development platform.

Shared Experiences Across the Region

Across counties, sectors, and organizational types, participants consistently described RRRISE's greatest achievement as the creation of a regional relationship infrastructure. Longstanding barriers between counties were reduced, and new lines of communication and cooperation opened between organizations that had previously worked in silos or in parallel. Partners repeatedly emphasized the importance of simply being in the same room. These interactions generated trust, expanded networks, and established a culture of collaboration that many interviewees described as rare in the region's history. Tribal engagement was especially valued, and several participants pointed to the Tribal Table as a significant innovation that elevated voices often excluded from regional economic discussions.

Convening was another universally valued function. Regular meetings, sector tables, ongoing communications such as the RRRISE newsletter, and the dedicated RRRISE website created regional touchpoints where information flowed freely. Several participants emphasized that, without RRRISE's convenings, cross-county collaboration would likely fall apart because no other entity has the mandate to maintain it. The convening platform also gave less resourced counties a stronger regional voice, increasing visibility and helping partners be recognized and included. Finally, RRRISE convenings allowed community wisdom specific to the Redwood Region to emerge as a valuable, perhaps even marketable, regional asset.

RRRISE partners valued the legitimacy and shared identity the collaborative provided. For many organizations, especially in the smaller counties, regional participation signaled seriousness to funders, strengthened credibility, and expanded access to partnerships that supported new projects or funding. The collaborative also helped normalize the idea that counties in the region share common challenges and, in many cases, common opportunities to be pursued together.

However, partners also identified structural barriers that constrained RRRISE's ability to translate goodwill into sustained economic outcomes. Decisions around funding distribution created tension, especially with regard to geographic equity versus need-based investment. Many participants felt the collaborative became heavy in process. Conditions led to shifting rubrics or complexity that made it difficult for some partners to fully engage. For example, the "bottom up" approach to planning prescribed by the state called for participatory design, a process inherently iterative, time intensive, and messy. Creating further ambiguity, the state's funding mandates shifted in their focus and ambition throughout the planning process, causing some participants who had invested time and energy the need to regroup and rework their plans. Several organizations, particularly local governments and private sector interest holders, felt the processes were not well aligned with their day-to-day responsibilities or decision-making structures.

Capacity asymmetries across counties were a recurring theme. Larger organizations or counties with more staff could participate fully, while less resourced partners were more challenged. Industry involvement was thin. Finance, developers, timber and fisheries representatives, and many business owners did not remain engaged, leaving economic planning heavily weighted toward nonprofits and public agencies. Finally, a strong theme across interviews was the need for clarity in leadership, formalized governance rules, and greater execution capacity. Participants widely believe that designated backbone staffing will be required for RRRISE to shift from planning and convening into implementation and long-term effectiveness.

How the RRRISE System Operates Today

The RRRISE collaborative functions as an interconnected system of people, organizations, communication channels, and shared expectations. Social capital is the strongest reinforcing force in this system. Trust leads to participation and encourages collaboration. Visibility and legitimacy form reinforcing patterns; the more partners see themselves as part of a regional effort, the more they invest in it, which strengthens the collaborative's regional presence. Several balancing processes constrain the system's momentum, however. Administrative complexity reduces engagement, and competition for funding has weakened trust and collective focus. Capacity disparities across counties restrict equal participation, and industry disengagement prevents the system from generating deeper economic impact. Finally, the absence of a clearly empowered governance structure causes some confusion, slows decisions, and limits implementation.

Opportunities for System Evolution

RRRISE partners identified several points of leverage that could shift the collaborative system toward greater impact. Clarifying governance could dramatically improve alignment, decision-making, and accountability. Formalizing the collaborative's backbone, even modestly, would create the continuity required to shepherd projects and maintain convening functions. Integrating local governments more cohesively into the structure would deepen legitimacy and fill the existing gaps of missing partners. Strengthening reporting and outcome measurement would reinforce trust and provide a narrative capable of attracting future funding from both inside and outside of the region.

Several interviewees suggested that collaboration does not require all partners to participate equally in every activity. A coalition-of-the-willing model, resting on a small set of shared regional strategies, could make implementation more feasible. Others saw promise in embedding RRRISE within an existing regional entity with administrative capacity, creating a hybrid structure that combines government, nonprofit, and philanthropic funding.

Participants were realistic in noting that no single funding source will sustain the next phase. A blended model that includes philanthropy, earned income, grant overhead, project-based program income, and proportional membership contributions appears more viable. Many partners also emphasized that the collaborative should focus on a small number of clearly articulated projects with visible regional benefit to build credibility and attract continued investment.

RRRISE partner interviews reveal a region that wants to keep working together and sees value in doing so. The collaborative's strongest accomplishments lie in the social infrastructure it has built, the trust it has generated, and the regional identity it has begun to cultivate: achievements that represent the necessary conditions for any lasting regional economic development effort. To capitalize on these foundational assets, RRRISE's next iteration will require clearer governance, stronger designations of responsibility, deeper alignment with local governments, and a more diversified funding model.

Organizational Modeling

Every system is comprised of three components: its elements, the interactions between them, and its purpose. As a result of its origin, the RRRISE system is well oriented to capture and distribute state dollars. As RRRISE prepares to evolve past Jobs First funding, the collaborative must reconsider and confirm its economic development strategy. To instigate this process, we distributed an electronic survey to 65 partners. 34 responded and named economic development through regional alignment and coordination as RRRISE's future primary purpose, with the capture of external investments as a secondary goal. The objective of regional alignment and coordination thus guided our next phase of inquiry: a scan of organizations across the U.S. that align and coordinate disparate actors toward regional development.

Peer Landscape Analysis

The Redwood Region is unique in many ways. Our evaluation of 26 peer regional collaboratives was not to limit RRRISE partners' creativity or capacity to design a bespoke organization. Rather, we sought to learn from the preceding work of other regions and account for the legal, structural, and revenue realities RRRISE will face as it approaches its funding transition.

Our scan revealed six organizational archetypes and several distinct patterns in operations. First, successful collaboratives assign collective decision-making responsibilities to designated bodies. These steering committees, boards of directors, or leadership assemblies consist of regional representatives authorized to act on behalf of their area or sector while advancing a unified regional strategy. Management structures largely fall into one of three shapes, including a hosted backbone within a pre-existing entity, an independent nonprofit, or an intergovernmental structure established through public agreements. For resource-limited rural regions, the choice of these structures is heavily shaped by local administrative capacity and the presence of a stable funding base, often favoring hosted models or state-enabled designs to balance administrative requirements.

Sustaining these operations over time usually requires a diversified revenue stream. 21 of the 26 studied organizations utilize a funding stack of private philanthropy, government appropriations, membership dues, corporate sponsorships, or earned income. The organizations also split evenly between platforms that function strictly as coordination and readiness networks and those that operate as capital-deploying intermediaries. The organizations that limit their focus to coordination provide strategy alignment, technical assistance, or project packaging without deploying dollars directly. Conversely, the intermediary organizations re-grant funds, manage pooled capital, or administer pass-through dollars – functions that depend on a public mandate or an established institution with the systems and risk tolerance necessary to move money adeptly. Regardless of the capital structure, long-term partner engagement depends on members receiving concrete benefits they cannot obtain elsewhere, such as specialized data products, technical assistance, policy influence, or regional matchmaking sessions.

Strategic Implications for RRRISE

The Redwood Region is a micropolitan area, meaning it features a more dispersed population with fewer corporate headquarters than a metropolitan zone. Traditional corporate attraction strategies are less effective in this context, so RRRISE must supplement such efforts with economic gardening, which stimulates economic activity from within by building on existing local assets.

Large-scale regional collaboratives typically start small and build credibility, engagement, and resources as they demonstrate results. RRRISE can implement an organizational model that progressively evolves rather than adopting a more fixed structure immediately. This approach grants the region time to stabilize relationships, attract absent partners, and strengthen Tribal co-design before taking on higher overhead requirements.

Organizational Models for Consideration

Our report indicates three potential pathways for RRRISE, using two structural frameworks. The first framework is a hub-and-spoke design that centralizes strategy and decision-making in the hub while distributing specialized or relationship-based activities to local spokes. RRRISE hub-and-spoke Model 1 is built in two phases and begins with a decision-making hub of willing partners and operating backbone duties distributed across existing organizations. In this “coalition of the willing” model, costs are absorbed by the participating organizations or funded through short-term philanthropy. In Model 1’s second phase, RRRISE graduates into an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a decision-making board of directors, a management staff, and a diversified revenue stack.

RRRISE hub-and-spoke Model 2 places the collaborative's management in an administrative host that handles coordination functions as a community service or one of its programs. A written agreement separates host process decisions from collaborative strategic decisions, which are managed by a regional leadership council. This model can either maintain its hosted setup as RRRISE grows, or transition into an independent nonprofit during its second phase.

The second structural framework is a hybrid of a joint powers authority (JPA) and a nonprofit organization. Utilizing this framework, Model 3 is comprised of two legally connected bodies: a public joint powers authority formed by cities, counties, or special districts; and a paired nonprofit entity. The public authority handles government engagement and relations and provides tax-supported funds, while the nonprofit runs daily programming and manages revenue production, including fundraising. Governance is split between a public board of elected officials and a nonprofit board of directors.

Comparative Assessment of Models

Each model presented carries organizational trade-offs that partners must weigh against regional capacity. A coalition of the willing demands minimal operating costs and keeps local ownership high, but it remains highly vulnerable to partner drop-offs and struggles to sustain project execution without dedicated staff. A hosted backbone allows for a fast administrative transition and low initial overhead by capitalizing on an existing organization's infrastructure, but it risks a potential loss of community ownership and can cause the network's neutrality to be questioned. An independent nonprofit creates a single interface for external actors and provides maximal flexibility for revenue production, yet carries a notable administrative load and requires consistent funding to survive. Finally, the hybrid model integrates RRRISE directly into local government channels and expands public funding pathways, but it introduces high administrative complexity by requiring staff to manage two sets of legal authority and compliance.

Tribal Participation Across Models

RRRISE's selected organizational structure will require co-design with Tribal partners to ensure decision rights and clarify participation norms. Peer models accommodate Tribal sovereignty in distinct ways, depending on the framework. In the independent nonprofit model, the Tribal Table holds decision-making power equitable to any other regional partner or entity within the network. In a hosted backbone model, equity for Tribal leadership must be built into the governance charter and designated by the hosting organization. Finally, in the hybrid model, sovereign Tribal nations hold a dual right of participation where Tribal leaders can interface directly with the public JPA on a government-to-government basis while simultaneously participating in the nonprofit's board or sector tables to shape local projects.

Case Building and Evaluation Metrics

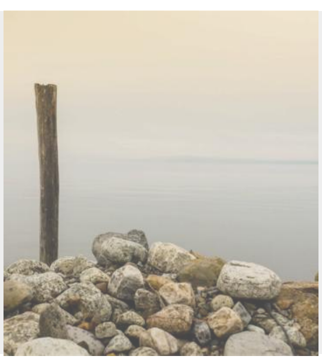
Attracting philanthropic investors, securing government allocations, and maintaining private sector engagement require demonstrated evidence of organizational effectiveness. Because economic development timelines span years, RRRISE must use tools such as logic modeling and analysis of short-term outputs and outcomes to track organizational performance while long-term indicators are still developing. As RRRISE's efforts mature, regional impact including the economic participation levels of historically excluded communities, the number of new jobs created, the total monetary investment captured for the region, and the number of new businesses and industries created can be measured. Documentation of outcomes will be crucial to growing the collaborative's capacity, so the collection, analysis, and publication of key outcomes data should be a priority and assigned with accountability.

Funding Options

To support its operations, RRRISE can cultivate a diversified revenue strategy through a variety of public or private funding pathways. Philanthropy, including through local or national foundations, could provide early-stage termed funding to support RRRISE's transition to a more sustainable model. Establishing intergovernmental contracts by identifying shared objectives with Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, or Mendocino counties could build an ongoing funding base, and will require bringing county representatives into planning sessions to uncover mutual goals. As the collaborative's new structure takes further shape, RRRISE could generate earned income by collecting modest fees for packaging projects, writing grants, conducting training, or other services. RRRISE can also capture administrative income by charging standard overhead rates when serving as a fiscal sponsor or host for regional projects. Finally, once regional value is established, an equitable cost-sharing membership model could emerge to source contributions from local partners and participants.

Next Steps

This report provides the analytical groundwork for evaluating sustainable options for RRRISE's future structure. The Sustainability Working Group is currently evaluating each model against its trade-offs while gauging regional capacity, and planning to select a pathway for development during its upcoming deliberations.



Part 1

RRRISE Situational Assessment

Grounded in the problem statement for this project and in close partnership with the CCRP and the broader RRRISE community, we sought to better understand how the collaborative currently functions in order to envision what it may be capable of becoming. This section of our report presents the findings from the first phase of this work (see Figure 1), which focused on discovery through partner interviews, a document review, a survey, and early sensemaking with partners and participants. Our learnings established the analytical foundation for the second project phase, which centered on ideation and the development of strategic organizational forms for the future. Our role as consultants was to surface clear patterns, organize complex information, and offer interpretations to help RRRISE participants see the collaborative more fully and determine a structure of organization that best supports their long-term goals.

Figure 1. Project Design

Phase	Objectives	Deliverables	Process
Phase 1 **Discovery and engagement**	Interpret and map the current collaborative ecosystem: the interest-holders, the intended outcomes and existing practices of collaboration, the evidenced challenges, and the landscape's hard and soft resources.	**Situational Assessment Report** (includes systems map, collaboration and synergies map) **Key Findings and Implications** memo	Access and interpret available internal documents (strategic plans, past project reports, financials, organizational charts) relevant to RRRISE history, growth trajectory, and outcomes.
			Attend RRRISE Sustainability Working Group meetings. Report on project status. Record, document dialogue and input from the group.
			Develop semi-structured interview questions for RRRISE Working Group members and RRRISE staff.
			Conduct one-on-one semi-structured interviews with as many as 25 RRRISE Working Group members and at least three key staff. Additionally, conduct as many as five focus groups or collective dialogues to gather insights and experiential perspectives.
			Map flow of existing hard (material, financial) and soft (social forces, influence, incentives) resources. Interpret system.
			Establish and issue a baseline assessment of collaborative capacity (governance, funding, roles, communication, data-sharing) and sustainability needs (financial, organizational, environmental), to include ways and means through which to improve delivery and efficiency in outcomes.
Phase 2 **Ideation of collaborative structure and sustainability models**	Offer research-based, community-informed options for RRRISE organizational design and sustainability post-California Jobs First.	**Organizational Sustainability Report** (initial) (includes organizational design models, options for transition pathways)	Research and benchmark comparable collaborative structures, governance models, staffing, and funding strategies.
			Propose three effective + sustainable organizational models. Map accompanying transition pathways. Include case studies as applicable.
		CAM	Provide a criteria analysis matrix (CAM) through which to evaluate each organizational model.
		Organizational Sustainability Report (final)	Gather Working Group feedback and questions.
			Edit and issue final organizational design report and recommendations for outcomes improvement.

The Systems Lens

Systems thinking offers a valuable way to understand the potential of RRRISE because it draws attention to the underlying structures that shape how the collaborative operates. A system is made up of its elements, the ways those elements interact, and the purpose that guides their collective behavior. When these components are viewed together rather than separately, it becomes easier to see why a collaborative consistently produces the outcomes it does. A core principle of systems thinking is that any system is perfectly designed to generate its current results. If we want to understand what RRRISE might be capable of in the future, we need to look closely at the design that has guided it so far.

RRRISE was created in response to California Jobs First funding, and its current structure reflects that origin. The collaborative grew around the need to intake, organize, and distribute external dollars quickly and in accordance with state requirements. Roles, processes, communication routines, and expectations formed around this purpose, and the system became highly effective at moving outside funding to local organizations. The ability to capture and promptly allocate a privately funded $2.5M gift illustrates that the collaborative is keenly suited for sourcing and distributing resources across the region. A systems lens helps clarify that these strengths are not incidental. They arise from the way the collaborative is organized and the relationships and habits that have formed within it.

As RRRISE considers its future beyond the initial state funding cycle, a systems perspective helps reveal which parts of the existing structure will continue to serve the region well and which parts will need to evolve. It encourages partners to look beyond individual decisions and examine the deeper patterns that influence how information flows, how authority is assumed and understood, and how collective action takes shape. By understanding the current system as a product of its design, RRRISE is better positioned to imagine and build a design that supports its next phase of regional collaboration.

Place-Based Factors

The unique characteristics of a region or area heavily influence the systems that operate within it. This recognition allowed us to consider how the Redwood Region's qualities can serve as opportunities for innovation, rather than constraints. It also gave us an indication of ways in which the RRRISE system might behave differently if its elements or their interactions are changed. Unintended consequences of changes to complex systems are common, so our goal was to identify interest-holders' key priorities and name necessary trade-offs.

Report Structure

This report is organized to capture a full systems view of the RRRISE collaborative. We begin by examining the RRRISE system through its elements and interactions, drawing from partner interviews to illuminate roles, relationships, capacities, and patterns of coordination. We then assess the outcomes that emerge from these interactions, attending to how the system's current design influences its ability to support regional economic activity. Finally, we explore potential system purposes and designs informed by partners' survey responses, which offer signals about the structures and functions that will best support the collaborative's next phase. Together, these three layers provide an emergent picture of how the system operates today and what possibilities exist for its future.

RRRISE System Analysis: Elements and Interactions

To visualize RRRISE as a system – specifically, as an arrangement of system elements and their interactions – through the experiences of its constituents, we conducted 29 semi-structured interviews with RRRISE partners and participants. 25 interviews were recorded and transcribed via Zoom, while four were conducted in person. Findings were coded by theme using grounded theory. The questions are attached as Appendix B.

Ten themes emerged from the interview data (T = theme).

T1. RRRISE's relationship infrastructure is its core asset.

A majority of partners described RRRISE's relationship development as its greatest value. For many, RRRISE's relational infrastructure is more valuable than its focus or accomplishment of any specific project. Partners used phrases like "goodwill," "regional connective tissue," "safe space," "inclusion," and "relationships that wouldn't have formed otherwise" to describe their most meaningful experiences with RRRISE. Partners offered examples of:

- New cross-county relationships
- Trust-building across sectors
- Tribal/non-Tribal relationship development
- Accelerated networking.

Summary: RRRISE is currently experienced more as a platform for connection than a project delivery engine.

T2. RRRISE's convening processes are widely valued.

Partners across all sectors said that RRRISE's convening processes are its most essential ongoing function. Even RRRISE skeptics acknowledged convening as a necessary region-building function, and many said that without RRRISE, regular convening would disappear because no other entity has the bandwidth or mandate to provide it. The processes mentioned include:

- Quarterly meetings and regional summits
- Sector tables
- Shared communication channels (newsletter, website)
- The ongoing work to pull people together.

Summary: Convening is RRRISE's most universally supported function.

T3. RRRISE offers value to partners through regional visibility and a shared identity.

Multiple interviewees said that being recognized at a regional scale is itself a benefit. RRRISE provides:

- Regional visibility for smaller counties and smaller organizations
- A sense of belonging to a larger whole
- A unified regional identity with greater leverage in statewide policy formulation
- Access to intra- and inter-regional expertise, including idea sharing, data, and data analysis.

Summary: RRRISE raises participants' perceived value in and of the region.

T4. RRRISE's Tribal engagement is a notable, and fragile, success.

Partners described Tribal engagement in RRRISE as a product of active listening, successful in its scale, and respectful when done well. However, partners also discussed early outreach failures, capacity barriers in the form of time constraints, and the need for ongoing, culturally grounded, relationship-based engagement. Continued support of the Tribal Table was recognized as an essential component of the next iteration of RRRISE.

Summary: Partners view Tribal engagement as an imperative innovation that requires ongoing investment.

T5. RRRISE partners navigate several systemic friction points.

Interviews surfaced five points of friction within the RRRISE system.

A. Separation from or misalignment with local government structures
A number of partners expressed concern that RRRISE operates outside of formal governmental channels, which risks the duplication of work, heightens the possibility of competition, and weakens regional potential.

B. Capacity asymmetries between counties
Humboldt and Mendocino counties have more bandwidth for engagement and participation than do the counties of Lake and Del Norte. This difference in capacity can reinforce longstanding patterns of uneven resource capture.

C. Funding allocation tensions
The state's Catalyst funding distribution process introduced competition to the RRRISE system, yielding friction and debate over the prioritization of geographic equity versus need- or merit-based allocations.

D. Industry disengagement
Forestry, fisheries, tourism businesses, developers, financial institutions: many have not yet been meaningfully engaged in the RRRISE collaborative.

E. Heavy emphasis on process
Some interviewees said the collaborative was too heavy on meetings, process design, and documentation while too light on execution.

Summary: Structural frictions have the potential to reduce trust, slow progress, and create doubts about RRRISE's long-term viability.

T6. RRRISE requires execution capacity.

RRRISE's origin in a shifting and ambitious state funding initiative that also prioritized community-led, equity-focused distribution processes yielded ambiguity in the collaborative's structures for leadership and execution. Partners indicated concerns about changing or unclear governance and decision rules and at times, suboptimal project reporting or follow-through. They voiced a need for clarity about leadership authority and a dedicated team for outcomes execution and reporting.

Summary: Multiple partners believe RRRISE needs an assigned, empowered leadership entity to move from a convening body to an implementation and execution engine.

T7. RRRISE's current design produces valuable possibilities but requires material outcomes.

Jobs First funding catalyzed initiatives for meat processing, food hub expansion, cultural gatherings, and movement within the arts, culture, and tourism sector, among other projects. However, many interviewees said that RRRISE deliverables were not clearly visible and economic outcomes are not yet evidenced. Partners are asking for more information about the longer-term regional effects of the collaborative's work.

Summary: RRRISE is rich in relationships and ideas but less so, yet, in lasting economic outcomes.

T8. RRRISE sustainability will require structural and financial renewal.

Interviewees posited different sustainability models for RRRISE, but all agreed that the collaborative will not be able to continue as-is without new funding sources. Viable-seeming models included:

- Embedding RRRISE organizing responsibilities in an existing entity within the Redwood Region
- Pursuit of philanthropy + grants + earned income
- Formation of a hybrid JPA + nonprofit
- Maintenance of RRRISE as a fee-for-service "brain trust"
- Conversion of RRRISE into a membership organization with sliding-scale dues
- Creation of a capital fund to generate program income.

Summary: No interviewees saw a single funding model as most viable, although a variety of approaches were named as possible.

T9. Regional collaboration must move toward implementation.

There is strong agreement across interviews that:

- Convening and planning alone are not enough to sustain collaborative engagement
- Regional execution requires continued backbone staffing
- Measuring impact is essential
- RRRISE must identify a few priority initiatives and deliver them
- Participants want evidenced economic change over iterative cycles of planning.

Summary: The Redwood Region is ready to move past structuring and planning into economic activation.

T10. The RRRISE collaborative is recognized as valuable to sustain, but it must evolve.

Almost all interviewees wish for RRRISE to continue, but with changes:

- Defined leadership and clearer governance
- Structural simplification
- More transparent decision-making
- More industry engagement
- Greater project execution capacity.

Summary: RRRISE is now viewed as necessary regional infrastructure, but it must be organized differently for its next phase of operations.

RRRISE System Analysis: Outcomes

To understand how the current RRRISE system influences – or could influence – regional economic development outcomes, we drew insights from the partner interviews. The interview data offered a detailed view of how participants experience the collaborative in practice and what conditions support or limit its ability to generate meaningful economic impact. By tracing the connections between structure, resource flows, behavior, and outcomes, we could identify the patterns that shape progress. These insights help clarify what RRRISE is already positioned to accomplish and what changes might strengthen its influence on the region's economic future.

Regional Economic Development: Direct Outcomes of RRRISE

Direct outcomes are the results a system is intentionally designed to produce, such as the allocation of funding or the completion of specific projects. Our assessment found that RRRISE has produced four distinct direct outcomes. We show below how each outcome has translated into regional economic activity, or has the potential to do so in the future (direct outcome = DO).

DO1. Flow of resources: distribution of Jobs First funding

The RRRISE collaborative fulfilled its purpose of formation by processing and distributing $9M in state funds to community-conceived economic development projects using an equity-focused process reflective of the state's "bottom up" planning objectives.

Pathway: *Jobs First funding → RRRISE convening and collaborative processes → funding distribution → project activation*

Evidenced: [Capture and implementation of funding]

DO2. Bricolage: complementary resource matching

Several RRRISE partners described making connections between other partners and local businesses through RRRISE, facilitating economic exchange. This mode of economic development, often referred to as *bricolage*, drives development from within the region itself. This is the most accessible and immediate form of economic development for RRRISE to facilitate.

Pathway: *RRRISE collaborative processes → connections between entities → economic exchange*

Evidenced: [Match of supply and demand]

DO3. Data

RRRISE partners said that the CCRP's production of regional data has been a valuable aspect of the collaborative's convening. "The data and science...we've never had that before. I attended meetings when [CCRP] first released the data. It was inspiring" (RRRISE partner). RRRISE's cultivation and provision of data helped partners better understand opportunities for economic development.

Pathway: *RRRISE's data → understanding of opportunity → ideation of projects → [potential] enaction of economic activity*

Evidenced: [Ideation]

DO4. New Ideas
Interviewees named the Jobs First funding distribution process prescribed by the state of California as amorphous, messy, and confusing. However, they said that the CCRP's convening processes and structures effectively allowed new ideas to be generated for economic development in the region. Partners referenced the projects that came out of the Sector Advisory Councils as inspiring and possible only through collective thought. Said one interviewee, "They're working together, they're talking with one another, and they're creating solutions."

Pathway: *RRRISE convening → ideation of projects → [potential enaction of economic activity]*

Evidenced: [Ideation]

Regional Economic Development: Collateral Outcomes of RRRISE

Collateral outcomes emerge indirectly from a system's structure and interactions, often showing up in areas like trust, participation, or regional identity. Both direct and collateral outcomes are meaningful, but collateral outcomes can be especially influential because they shape the conditions under which future work becomes possible. Our assessment found five collateral outcomes of the RRRISE collaborative. Below we describe each and draw connections between the outcome and regional economic development (indirect outcome = IO).

IO1. Trust
Interpersonal trust – and its follow-on, interorganizational trust – were consistently named as valuable outcomes of RRRISE. RRRISE created cross-county and cross-sector relationships that did not previously exist, which stimulated economic activity. One partner said, "RRRISE affects our bottom line. We've [done more business] in outlying areas because people now know and trust us. That makes participation worthwhile."

Pathway: *Trust → engagement → sharing of supply and demand → economic activity through current business models*

Evidenced: [Stimulation of latent supply/demand]

IO2. Regional Visibility
Regional visibility is a novel result of RRRISE's successful engagement of formerly discrete actors, which includes Tribal representation. Partners described an increased visibility to the greater region's activities, challenges, and opportunities, which led to an expanding capacity for facilitating economic activity. One individual posed two distinct examples of connecting organizations to each other to enable an economic exchange, which "likely wouldn't have happened if I hadn't been able to see both through the RRRISE lens."

Pathway: *Regional visibility → connection → sharing of supply and demand → economic activity between existing actors, through current business models*

Evidenced: [Stimulation of latent supply/demand]

IO3. Belonging and Regional Identity

RRRISE partners described a shift toward recognizing the region as connected rather than fragmented, and feeling a sense of belonging, engagement, and regional identity as a result. One partner said that now, "I feel like I'm at home until I'm outside of the region. It used to be…you leave your city, or you leave your county, and you're like, I'm gone, I've left my home. But now, if I'm in [another county], I still feel at home. I think that is one of those intangible things about relationship building, where those borders and lines between counties don't seem to exist as much."

Several individuals noted that the northwest area of California is challenged in its political influence due to a dispersed population when compared to more condensed, urban areas like the Bay Area or Los Angeles. The belonging and resulting sense of regional identity facilitated by RRRISE, however, engage residents and offers the Redwood Region "the potential to be a stronger political force" (RRRISE partner). This is particularly true for smaller and less inhabited counties in the collaborative. Two partners referenced RRRISE as a "rising tide [that] lifts all boats."

Pathway: *Belonging → regional identity → engagement → political influence → state policies beneficial to the region*

Projected: [Gain through a shift in power]

IO4. Social Capital

RRRISE has facilitated an environment in which the shared goals and cooperative work of its collaborative partners generate social capital, which leads to accountability and commitment. One partner said, "RRRISE is personalized and localized. There is strong collective accountability; participants see each other at the grocery store."

Pathway: *Social capital → accountability and commitment → engagement → collaboration → potential economic activity*

Evidenced: [Regional participation and cohesion]

IO5. Recognition of Possibility

Among committed partners, a sense of possibility was pervasive. "The value [of RRRISE] is real" (RRRISE partner).

Pathway: *Possibility → participation → engagement → collaboration → reciprocity → potential economic exchange*

Evidenced: [Engagement]

RRRISE System Purpose

The identification of a system's purpose is imperative because purpose guides how the system's elements are arranged, how decisions are made, and where energy is directed. Without a clear purpose, even well-meaning efforts can become diffuse or reactive, shaped more by circumstance than by shared intention. A defined purpose gives partners a common reference point to enable coherence, clarify priorities, and strengthen the system's ability to produce the outcomes participants value most. As mentioned previously, RRRISE is currently well designed to process and distribute external funds to the Redwood Region. However, with less promise of receiving outside funding in the future, RRRISE partners must designate the collaborative's role in regional economic development going forward.

To probe participants' perspectives, we distributed a 7-question survey to 65 RRRISE partners. 34 individuals responded. Analyzed and grouped by theme, the survey responses suggest that partners' commitment to RRRISE depends on the collaborative functioning in the future as a disciplined, well-resourced organization that turns regional collaboration into coordinated action, measurable results, and sustained economic impact. Responses by question are shown below; answers to open ended questions have been grouped by theme. A brief analysis follows the results.

Survey Results

Q1. *What is the most important outcome for RRRISE to produce in our regional economic system?* (Open-ended, single entry; 31 responses)

- **Regional coordination and system alignment (15)**
  The collaborative should serve as a cross-sector regional system to align individuals, entities, resources, and strategies in taking action collectively rather than in silos. This includes functions such as:
  - Driving cross-sector collaboration
  - Providing regional infrastructure and systems-building processes
  - Serving as a clearinghouse of ideas or funds
  - Functioning as a tribal and multi-county partnership
  - Aligning shared priorities and reducing fragmentation
  - Facilitating regional networking and coordination
- **Job creation and workforce development (5)**
  Creation of quality, sustainable, family-supporting jobs and workforce pathways. This includes:
  - Job creation
  - Laying pathways for workforce training and employment
  - Generation of jobs tied to regional strategies
- **Capital attraction and investment (4)**
  Attracting, aligning, and deploying capital to support regional priorities. This includes:
  - Cultivating connections to funders and investors
  - Bringing external money into the regional economy
  - Seeking continued and expanded investment from both internal and external sources
  - Linking emerging projects to funding sources

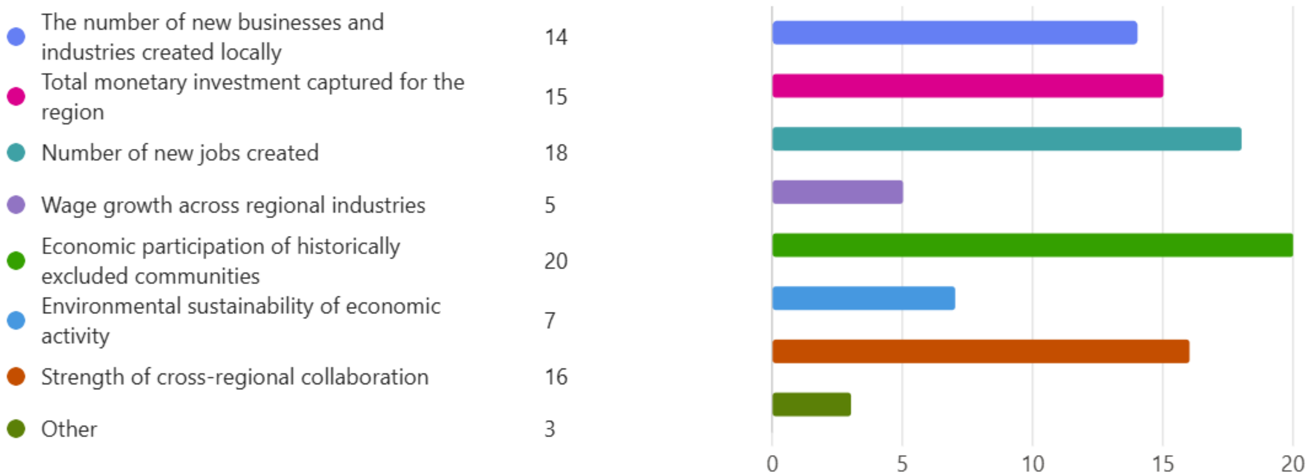
➢ **Business vitality (3)**
Supporting businesses as a path to long-term prosperity. This includes a focus on business stability and resilience.

➢ **Continuity of current RRRISE efforts (3)**
Ensuring that RRRISE's existing initiatives, investments, and projects persist beyond initial funding. This includes post–grant sustainability planning and driving the long-term continuation of funded

➢ **Project development and innovation pipeline (1)**
Generating and advancing innovative, community-driven, "shovel-ready" projects. This includes identifying and championing projects that reflect community needs and priorities.

Q2. *RRRISE should measure its success by…* (Multiple choice, up to three choices; 33 responses)

Figure 2. Endorsed Success Measures for RRRISE



Q3. *If you answered "other" in Q2, please indicate what measure of success you would endorse.* (Open-ended, single entry; 5 responses)

Answer 1: "It seems important for RRRISE to measure it's success based on what's important to local stakeholders/participants but also what's important to key funders/investors (i.e. the state). What metrics would the state use to determine our success and their ROI? I suspect these might skew towards number of new jobs created, outside monetary investment in priority sectors, etc. Those metrics might not be congruent with locally identified indicators of success (which might focus more on the strengthening of cross-regional collaboration or stabilizing of industry sectors or environments which enable economic development)."

Answer 2: "Small caveat for 'number of new jobs created' – this should be 'number of new thriving-wage jobs created.'"

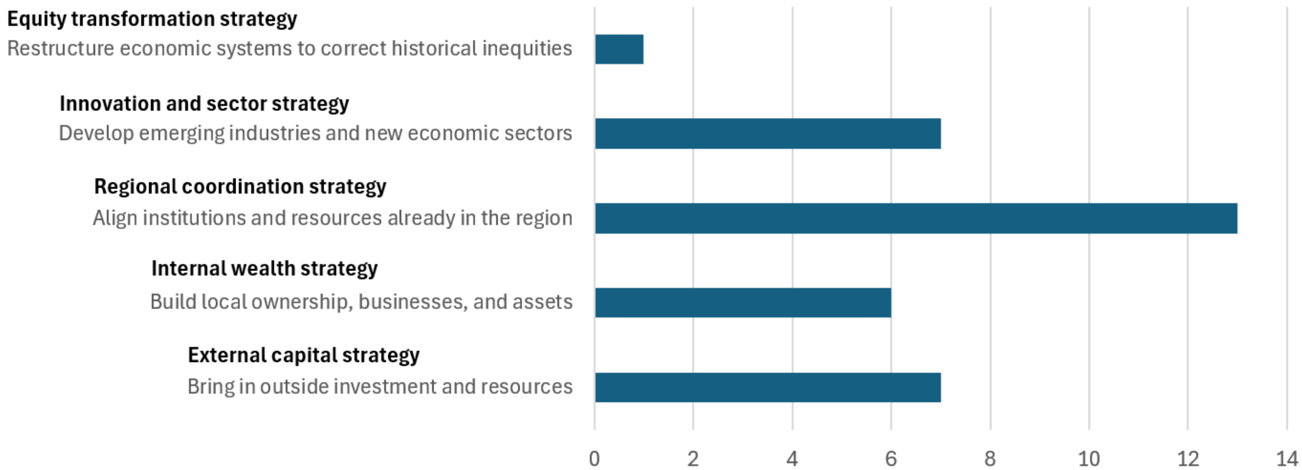
Answer 3: "Implementation and institutionalization of RRRISE/CA Jobs First regional strategies into regional/county/local agencies."

Answer 4: "Businesses recruited, retained, and/or expanded."

Answer 5: "Can you possibly show the specific capacity that was built in the organization."

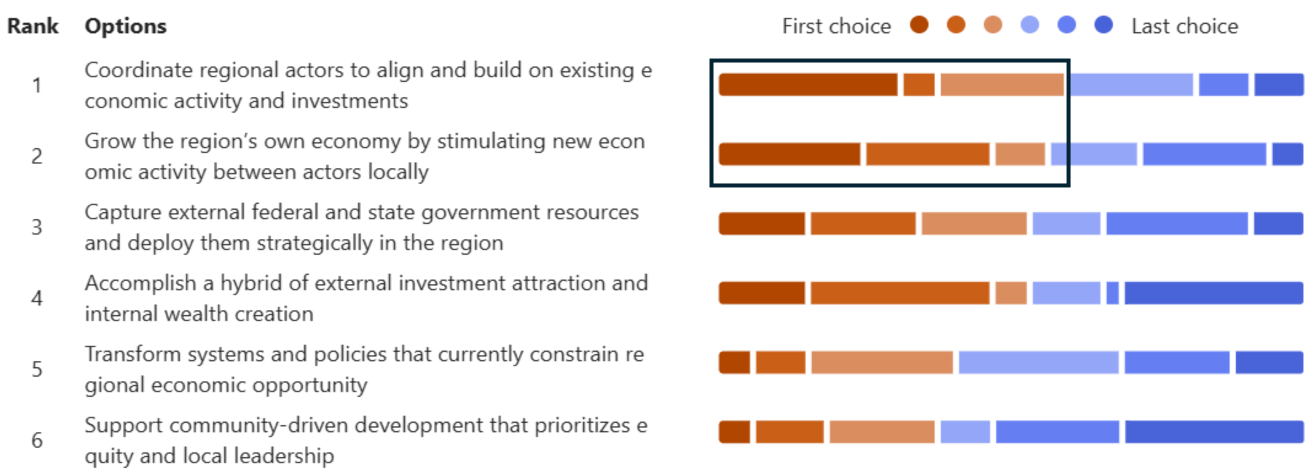
Q4. *Which economic development model should RRRISE prioritize?* (Single choice among 5 options; 34 responses)

Figure 3. Prioritized Economic Development Models



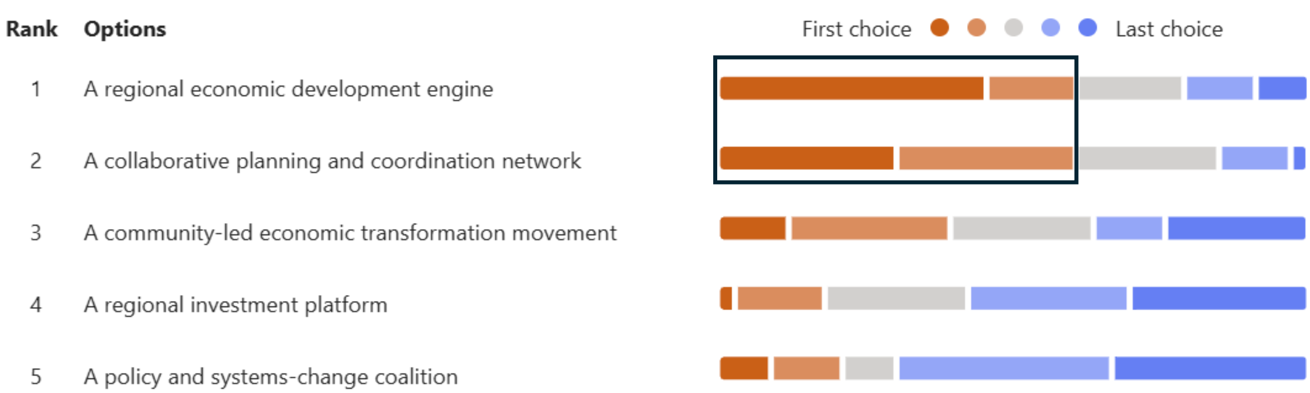
Q5. *In the future, the RRRISE collaborative should…* (Priority ranking of all choices; 32 responses)

Figure 4. Prioritized Economic Development Activities



Q6. *What should RRRISE ultimately become?* (Priority ranking of all choices; 33 responses)

Figure 5. Purpose Through Future System Form



Q7. *For me to participate into the future, RRRISE must…* (Open ended, single entry; 30 responses)

- **Demonstrate a clear strategy, structure, and direction (7)**
  RRRISE must have a clearly defined vision, goals, and a structured approach that translates into actionable work. This includes:
  - A clear vision and articulated strategy
  - Defined approach and goals
  - Tangible end goals and planning
  - Organizational structure and processes
  - Focus and purpose
- **Enable effective and inclusive collaboration (6)**
  RRRISE must be a well-functioning, inclusive, and genuinely collaborative regional network. This includes:
  - Cross-sector collaboration
  - Community and industry engagement
  - Inclusion of Tribal communities and diverse stakeholders
  - A welcoming and participatory environment
  - Regional networking and ecosystem support
- **Demonstrate impact and accountability (6)**
  Participants need to see measurable results, tangible outcomes, and ongoing evaluation. This includes:
  - Evaluation and measurable impact
  - Demonstrated results and accomplishments
  - Clear progress and accountability
  - Communication of success
- **Maintain sustainable funding and organizational capacity (5)**
  RRRISE must be financially sustainable and supported by a strong backbone or independent entity. This includes:
  - Funding for a backbone organization
  - Long-term financial sustainability
  - Independence and resourcing
  - Alignment of funding sources (state, external, internal)
- **Enable operational effectiveness and efficient participation (2)**
  Participation must be meaningful, efficient, and action-oriented, and not burdensome or performative. This includes:
  - Efficient meeting structures
  - Flexible participation options
  - Action-oriented working processes

- **Produce economic and workforce development outcomes (2)**
  RRRISE must maintain a continued focus on real economic outcomes, including jobs and workforce development. This includes:
  - Workforce development strategies
  - Living-wage job creation
  - Private-sector and business growth focus
- **Offer distinct value and regional relevance (1)**
  RRRISE must add unique value to the Redwood Region and avoid duplicating existing efforts. This includes:
  - Acting as a connector rather than duplicator
  - Staying relevant to regional needs
- **Provide clear direction for regional industries (1)**
  RRRISE must meaningfully engage regional industries in its strategies for regional economic development in the future.

Analysis

The survey results show a clear, emergent purpose for the RRRISE collaborative: to produce regional coordination and system alignment. Through the survey's variety of questions about purpose, current RRRISE partners defined their vision, shown below.

Primary Vision for RRRISE Purpose

Outcome	Regional coordination and system alignment
Economic development model	Regional coordination strategy
System activity	Coordinate regional actors to align and build on existing economic activity and investments; grow the region's own economy by stimulating new economic activity between actors locally
System nature	A regional economic development engine; a collaborative planning and coordination network
Success measure	Economic participation of historically excluded communities

The survey results also indicate a secondary system purpose for RRRISE: to produce capital attraction and investment in the Redwood Region.

Secondary Vision for RRRISE Purpose

Outcome	Capital attraction and investment
Economic development model	Innovation and sector strategy; external capital strategy
System activity	Accomplish a hybrid of external investment attraction and internal wealth creation
System nature	A community-led economic transformation movement
Success measure	Number of jobs created; strength of cross-regional collaboration

These primary and secondary purposes of RRRISE, as indicated by collaborative partners, will guide our system design in Phase 2 of this project.

System Tensions

All systems feature dynamic tension, which provides form, structure, and stability to the system's operations. However, points of tension that remain unacknowledged may also diminish the quality of participants' experiences and lead to the disillusionment or eventual disengagement of those involved. Our interviews and survey of RRRISE partners reveal a series of recurring tensions that have shaped participants' satisfaction with the collaborative's work. These tensions are ideally not perceived as contradictions in values, but as natural outcomes of building a regional system in which organizations, governments, Tribes, and industries hold differing roles, constraints, and cultural orientations. Each tension point reflects the meeting point two legitimate aims, both of which are important to regional economic development, but require accommodation to coexist productively. The following describes the nature of each prevailing tension, why it exists within the context of RRRISE, and how it may be mitigated, navigated, or even utilized to enhance the collaborative's outcomes.

Equity Versus Traditional Economic Development

The data. Many RRRISE partners felt that the collaborative's focus on equity strengthened inclusion, engagement, and accountability within the group. Others expressed concern that it occluded the interests of actors pursuing traditional economic development, including businesses, private industry, and economic development specialists within local governments.

Assessment. The pursuit of equity and the pursuit of economic development are neither antagonistic nor mutually exclusive, but potentially complementary. The tension between these factors in the RRRISE system is a result of organizing processes – namely, significant time and attention spent attending to equity and a resulting signal that the collaborative was placing a smaller priority on traditional economic development – rather than inherent opposition between the two constructs. The disparity in time allocated to each created an impression that one came at the expense of the other. Both objectives can be met simultaneously; bringing more groups and individuals to the table will yield expanded trade, collaboration, and idea generation. As RRRISE moves forward, linking inclusive engagement to concrete economic outcomes and balancing processes will help to soften this tension point.

Inclusivity Versus Efficiency

The data. A number of partners said they have appreciated the inclusive, participatory processes of RRRISE. However, many also said that organizational processes became too complicated, too large, or too slow as a result.

Assessment. The history and complex demographics of the Redwood Region are factors in this tension point. As a product of the United States' formation through colonization and the hegemonic resettlement of Indigenous Peoples, plus the longstanding extraction of hard and soft resources from the area, the Redwood Region is populated by factions of people who hold differing levels of economic power, social privilege, and cultural synergy. The broad ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic diversity among the region's populace means that more effort will be required to gather, align, and coordinate groups than might be necessary in other areas. A process that prioritizes inclusivity will nearly always require more time and attention from its administrators than a process that does not, and the scale of this requirement is proportional to the level of cultural difference between actors.

One RRRISE partner, a Tribal member, provided a good example of this situation. Receiving an emailed invitation to participate in the collaborative was witnessed as disrespectful to Tribal customs, which favor in-person acquaintanceship and some personal familiarity prior to participation. In this cultural mismatch, Tribal partners interpreted that their inclusion by administrators was performative, despite email distribution of invitations being seen as status quo in American society at large. Accessibility was further complicated by the fact that wifi coverage can be inconsistent across more remote locations, including some rancherias.

Efficiencies gained through the use of email, virtual meetings, and other online communication – which can be imperative to participation in a region with large physical distances between actors – may thus represent a trade-off to engagement and inclusion. Administrative efficiencies are paradoxical: they can enable increased participation by some while limiting it for others. This tension can be managed but not eliminated; a sustainable regional system requires a clear distinction between processes that must be inclusive and those that must be efficient. For example, inclusive structures could be best suited for visioning, norm setting, and long horizon planning. Efficient structures could be most useful for implementation, resource allocation, and time sensitive decisions. RRRISE's next phase could benefit from the creation and maintenance of dual structures that honor both aims but do not force them into the same procedural space.

Regionalism Versus Locality

The data. RRRISE participants holding positions in local governments described negotiating tension between their immediate job responsibilities and the collaborative's longer term, regionalized objectives.

Assessment. Regional coordination relies on collective interest, but local governments operate under mandates that prioritize their own jurisdictions. This tension arises not from disagreement about the value of regionalism, but from statutory and political realities. Staff are accountable to local boards and budgets, and these obligations shape their behavior even when they personally support regional approaches. The tension becomes visible whenever regional collaboration requires decisions that could disadvantage a single county or when benefits accumulate unevenly across the region.

This tension is inherent but navigable. Successful regional systems often rely on structures that create shared incentives, such as pooled regional resources, aligned metrics, or jointly governed authorities. Without mechanisms that translate regional benefit into locally meaningful value, the system will continue to revert to local advocacy during moments of resource pressure. Clarifying RRRISE's purpose and developing structures that allow counties to participate without sacrificing their local responsibilities can turn this tension into a useful one.

Competition Versus Collaboration

The data. A number of RRRISE partners described feeling a strong sense of group collaboration until competition for the state's Catalyst funding began: "That was when the gloves came off" (RRRISE partner). This contrast with their expectations for the collaborative led to disillusionment with its work.

Assessment. Competition is a core tenet of capitalism and thus foundational to the United States' economy. Competing for opportunities drives innovation among producers and powers the free market, incentivizing continual improvement of products, services, and ideas. Many processes of fund distribution, including public and philanthropic initiatives, accordingly feature competition among potential recipients. While competitive processes may indeed allow “the best” proposals to emerge in the short term, they produce winners and losers, and thus enforce the individualism and protectionism that are adverse to collaboration in the long term. Collaboration functions best when shared purpose is strong, expectations for resource distribution are clear, and all parties stand to benefit. When any of these conditions weaken, the system shifts toward competitive behavior.

Going forward, this tension can be mitigated by reinforcing collaboration at the structural level. Clear decision rules, shared funding strategies, and transparent criteria can help reduce the likelihood of collaborative systems to regress to individualistic, competitive positioning. Collaboration becomes easier to sustain when partners trust that the system can distribute benefit over time, even if each county does not receive equal advantage in every process.

Equality Versus Equity

The Data. Some RRRISE partners described confusion or disagreement with the voting block’s shift of Catalyst funds away from merit-based or needs-based projects and toward those that would satisfy geographical equality.

Assessment. This tension reflects two legitimate interpretations of fairness: fairness as equal treatment and fairness as proportional investment. In the absence of a clearly defined purpose or agreed upon economic development strategy, both interpretations remain plausible, which leads to tension. Without a shared framework for understanding what counts as regional benefit, partners may use different mental models for evaluating decisions.

This tension becomes resolvable only when the regional collaborative defines a common purpose and a clear investment methodology. If RRRISE selects a small number of regional priorities and aligns funding to those aims, need-based or impact-based allocation becomes easier to justify. If RRRISE’s primary purpose is relationship building and inclusion, equitable distribution may be more appropriate. The collaborative must choose the system’s purpose first; the allocation model will follow.

Process Orientation Versus Outcome Orientation

The Data. Some RRRISE partners felt that the collaborative was too heavy on process and procedures and too light on tangible outcomes.

Assessment. The tension between process and outcomes arises from differing theories of change. Some partners view process as the essential work of building a functional region. Others view process as a means to an end, and measure value through projects completed or measurable economic gains. Neither view is incorrect, but each operates on a different timeline. Process-oriented work produces slow, often foundational shifts. Outcome-oriented work produces more visible, short-term progress. The tension becomes problematic when the system lacks a shared understanding of which outcomes matter and how process contributes to them.

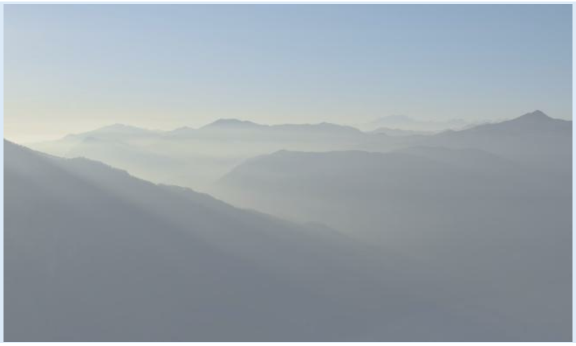
Resolving this tension requires tying process to explicit outcomes and outcomes to explicit processes. If RRRISE clarifies the economic results it seeks, the collaborative can better assess which process investments are necessary and which are burdensome. When process is framed and understood as a strategy rather than an unspoken obligation, it becomes easier to balance with the need for tangible economic advancement.

Tribal Inclusion Versus Tribal Capacity

The Data. Some RRRISE partners characterized Tribal engagement in the collaborative as a halting process, due in part to tension between the goal of Tribal inclusion and the reality of Tribal capacities. With more than 30 federally recognized and unrecognized Tribes in the Redwood Region and the unique governance demanded by each, the capacity for Tribal leaders to participate in RRRISE was limited.

Assessment. This tension does not stem from disagreement about the importance of Tribal participation. Instead, it reflects the gap between the time, cultural grounding, and relationship building that meaningful participation requires and the administrative timelines and procedures typical of state funded initiatives. Tribal partners often operate within varying governance rhythms and with different expectations for trust building than the systems that RRRISE acquired from state structures. Inclusion without adequate support can become symbolic rather than substantive.

Going forward, the tension between Tribal inclusion and Tribal capacity can be reduced by designing engagement structures that recognize Tribal sovereignty and capacity as core system features rather than barriers. Flexible timelines, culturally grounded outreach, dedicated facilitation, and resourcing for participation can shift inclusion from a partially fulfilled or aspirational goal to a longer standing operational reality. Ensuring Tribal engagement is an integral component of regional economic development and not an ancillary objective will help resolve this tension in future iterations of the collaborative.



Situational Assessment Key Findings

The following eight points are the key findings from the RRRISE Situational Assessment (key finding = KF).

Q. For sustained impact in regional economic development, what must RRRISE continue to preserve?

KF1. RRRISE's strongest asset is its regional relationship infrastructure.
Partners consistently described the relational connectivity created by RRRISE as the collaborative's most valuable feature. Trust, familiarity, and cross-county awareness increased significantly over the past three years, creating new possibilities for information sharing, coordination, and mutual support. This infrastructure is both rare and foundational. It is also fragile without an organizing structure to maintain it.

KF2. Convening is RRRISE's most widely valued function.
Partners affirmed that regular convening is essential for regional cohesion. RRRISE is the only regional entity with both the perceived legitimacy and the convening power to gather such a broad range of stakeholders. Without a regional convener, participants believe RRRISE will fracture back into county silos.

KF3. Tribal engagement is a significant achievement that will require continued investment.
The Tribal Table and associated engagement practices brought Tribes into regional economic development conversations at an unprecedented scale. This is one of RRRISE's most celebrated accomplishments. Meaningful Tribal participation requires time, relationship building, and culturally grounded methods that must be intentionally supported going forward.

Q: What currently prevents RRRISE from reaching its full potential for regional economic impact?

KF4. Structural barriers currently limit RRRISE's ability to produce visible large scale economic outcomes. Partners identified several points of friction that constrain the collaborative: lack of connection or alignment with local government structures, peripheral industry disengagement, and potentially unstated governance rules or expectations. Unresolved, these factors could make it difficult for RRRISE to translate planning and convening into measurable, lasting economic progress.

KF5. The system's current design emphasizes process over execution.
RRRISE has excelled in its inclusive, participatory processes – fulfilling the state's mandate for a "bottom up" planning process – but has not yet converted those processes into sustained implementation. Some partners advocated for greater clarity in decision-making authority and the remedy of gaps in collective follow-through.

Q: What is RRRISE producing now?

KF6. RRRISE has generated direct and collateral economic development outcomes.
Direct outcomes of RRRISE include project ideation, Catalyst funding distribution, and opportunities for bricolage (resource matching) among partners. Collateral outcomes – byproducts of the collaborative's processes – include increased trust, regional visibility, a stronger sense of belonging, and expanded social capital. These results prime the conditions for future regional economic development but will require other mechanisms and structural support to translate into long-term results.

A complicating factor in evaluating RRRISE's existing outcomes and productivity is the delay that occurs in any complex system, such as a regional economy, between an intervention and its results. Tracking the longer-term effects of RRRISE's Catalyst-funded projects will be important to a full understanding of the system's outcomes. Moreover, assuming a long-range perspective of the region's economy is imperative for determining RRRISE's priorities going forward.

Q: What is RRRISE's future purpose?

KF7. RRRISE must redefine its purpose for its post-state funded phase.

The collaborative's initial purpose was shaped by the need to receive, process, and distribute external funds. With no additional funding expected, this default purpose is far less viable. Partners have expressed desire to evolve RRRISE into a disciplined, action-oriented entity that turns regional coordination into measurable outcomes. RRRISE partners name regional coordination and system alignment as the primary purpose of the collaborative going forward, with capital attraction and investment an additional priority.

Q: What funding structure will support that purpose?

KF8. No single financial sustainability model is likely to support RRRISE alone.

Interviewees and survey respondents named several possible sustainability approaches but did not converge on a single preferred structure. Most partners agreed that a diverse revenue mix will be necessary. Success will depend on aligning structure, purpose, governance, and funding strategy.

Situational Assessment Implications

The following points are key implications for RRRISE's future organizational design (key implication = KI).

KI1. Capture clarity of purpose

- **RRRISE's origin shaped its current form but does not prescribe its future.** RRRISE was created in response to an immediate impetus: to secure and distribute California Jobs First funds. In pursuit of that goal, the collaborative generated powerful assets, including strong relationships, cross-county networking, and the beginnings of a shared regional vision. RRRISE's next phase requires acknowledging that the system was built for a short-term purpose and will change so these emergent strengths can successfully support long-term regional economic development.
- **RRRISE must utilize its defined system purpose to guide structural design.** Purpose determines structure and function. RRRISE partners' priority of regional coordination and alignment suggests specific features in future organizational structures.

KI2. Design for purposeful structure and governance

- **RRRISE's next iteration will require a backbone that is modest but consistent.** Partners emphasized the need for a designated backbone to provide coordination, administrative capacity, and continuity. The backbone does not need to be large or complex but must be clearly authorized, appropriately staffed, and equipped to support both convening and implementation.
- **RRRISE will want to consider differentiated participation structures.** Inclusivity and efficiency can coexist if RRRISE uses different structures for different tasks. Broad and participatory spaces can support visioning and learning, while smaller, accountable bodies can manage operations, resource deployment, and implementation. Establishing these parallel structures could help manage one prevailing tension within the RRRISE system and reduce participant process fatigue.
- **Industry engagement must be intentionally woven into the next organizational design.** Private sector partners will be critical for lasting regional economic development. Their absence from RRRISE's early phases limited the collaborative's economic signal. The next phase must create clearer roles and entry points for business, finance, and industry interest holders.
- **Tribal engagement must remain a core feature.** Ensuring Tribal participation requires dedicated structures, culturally appropriate engagement practices, and adequate resourcing. RRRISE has the opportunity to cement a regional model for Tribal inclusion that can influence other parts of the state.

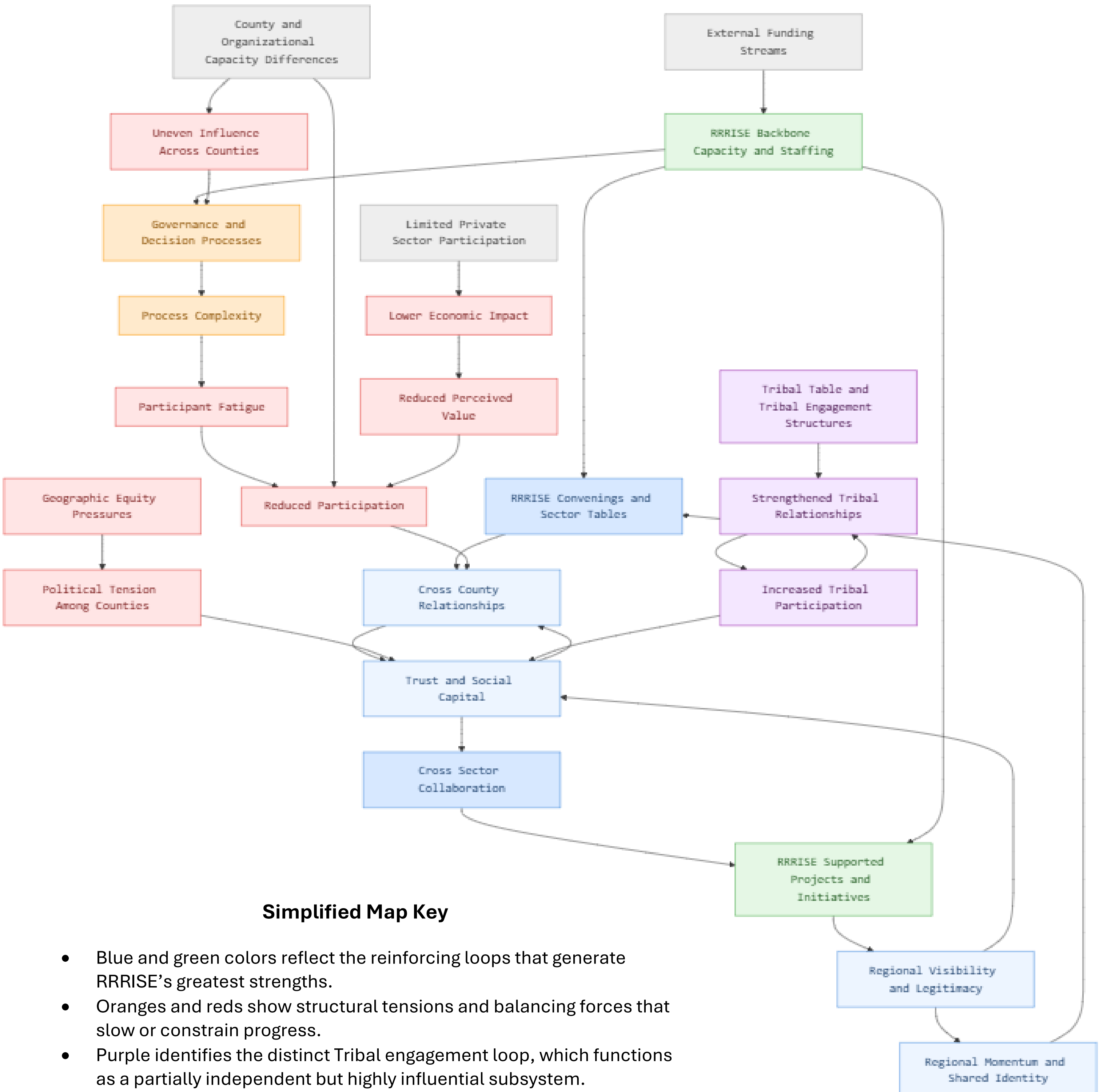
KI3. Build financial sustainability

- **Sustainability planning must accommodate multiple funding streams.** Because no single funding pathway is likely to sustain RRRISE, a variety of sources must be considered, including philanthropy, earned revenue, contract support, government partnerships, and membership contributions.

RRRISE System Map

A systems lens allows us to visualize the RRRISE collaborative graphically. In addition to the static map below, a more exploratory, interactive systems map has been provided with this report.

Figure 6. RRRISE System Map



Simplified Map Key

- Blue and green colors reflect the reinforcing loops that generate RRRISE's greatest strengths.
- Oranges and reds show structural tensions and balancing forces that slow or constrain progress.
- Purple identifies the distinct Tribal engagement loop, which functions as a partially independent but highly influential subsystem.
- Gray reflects contextual forces that shape but are not controlled by the collaborative.

Part 2

Organizational Modeling for the Next Iteration of RRRISE

As RRRISE evolves into an organization defined not by state mandates but by its own long-term aspirations, its partners hold an opportunity to create a bespoke structure reflective of the Redwood Region's unique resources and identity. They also face the larger realities of funding availability, legal constraints and demands, and the momentum of metropolitan polarization: the continued investment, infrastructure, and specialized resources that draw industry into major metropolitan areas, widening the economic gap with micropolitan and rural regions.

To draw learnings from the preceding work of others, Part 2 of this report examines RRRISE's intended purpose and structural needs alongside 26+ existing regional development organizations within the United States. By comparing RRRISE partners' priorities with the governance, funding structures, and functional designs employed by other high-performing regional collaboratives, particularly those in rural settings, the analysis identifies three structural archetypes and the most feasible pathways for RRRISE's evolution. Next steps are suggested at the end of the report.

The analysis is grounded in three research questions:

> RQ1. Which organizational forms and supporting functions are best suited to a system designed for long-term regional coordination and economic alignment?
> RQ2. Which models demonstrate the greatest durability for multi-county collaboration?
> RQ3. Which designs preserve the core RRRISE qualities that partners value most?

By examining how other regions have institutionalized similar assets while navigating comparable tensions, the report provides RRRISE partners a set of options based on real-world examples with consideration to the Redwood Region's unique characteristics. Our findings are not intended to limit RRRISE partners' creativity in designing the next iteration of the collaborative. Rather, the content should spur decision-making about the trade-offs inevitable to organizational structuring. The collaborative will also need to examine the willingness of existing RRRISE partners and other organizations to step into leadership roles.

Terminology and Scope

Defining the terminology used in this report ensures that partners share a common understanding of what is being considered and designed. "Organizational sustainability" means:

- Demonstration of a plausible pathway for operating sustainability through income that covers essential organizational functions, distinct from project capital
- The ability to sustain a backbone function –coordination and accountability infrastructure – beyond a single grant cycle
- Clarity of decision responsibilities and operating arena, precluding ambiguity or mission drift
- Potential alignment with the Redwood Region's rural context and the region's Tribal sovereignty and cultural considerations.

What is and is not included in this report:

- Included: comparison-based patterns, a sense-making methodology, and several model options
- Not included, by design: legal recommendations or investment advice.

Method

To identify the organizational examples that best inform RRRISE's future structure, we employed a systematized search methodology. We defined the criteria that would guide our scan to ensure that each organization was evaluated through the same lens. This allowed us to compare models evenly, understand why they function as they do, and determine which elements would translate to the Redwood Region's context and its existing community-grown system. To be clear, our search was comprehensive but not exhaustive; our objective was to establish a sample size robust enough to clearly indicate patterns but still manageable within the scope of this project. Further, the resulting information is not to limit RRRISE partners' creativity in organizational design, but to learn from the previous work of other actors with similar regional goals. A complete list of the established organizational structures is included as Appendix C.

We organized our review around four major criteria.

A. Organizational structure and governance. We examined how each organization is structured and how decisions are made. This included its governance archetype, the mechanisms it uses to set priorities, how cross-jurisdiction trade-offs are handled, and its legal form when available. Of note: trust, social capital, and regional identity are powerful system forces that are nearly always implicit and unstated publicly. Our search allowed us to interview several individuals serving in the sample organizations to better understand how trust and relationships are built into their systems and structures. The interviews also provided insight into the organizations' behind-the-scenes methods of ensuring equity is served through their processes and decision-making protocols.

B. Backbone functions. We identified the functions each organization performs to hold a regional system together. This included strategy, convening, communication, coordination, knowledge management, shared outcome reporting, and the ways organizations support financing or investment readiness.

C. Funding mechanics. We assessed how each model sustains its work. This involved analyzing revenue streams such as public appropriations, philanthropy, membership dues, sponsorships, or earned income. We also considered how money moves through the system – whether the organization only aligns and coordinates, or acts as a fiscal sponsor, regrants funds, or manages pooled investments.

D. Participation incentives and feasibility. We looked at why partners continue to participate over time and what conditions support long-term engagement. This included incentives such as access to funding, technical assistance, data, policy influence, or business recruitment pipelines. We also considered rural applicability, Tribal and cultural considerations, and the conditions required for any model to transfer successfully to the Redwood Region. Appropriately, this scan does not assume or define RRRISE's Tribal partnership expectations. RRRISE's final organizational structuring will require co-design with Tribal partners to distribute decision rights, clarify participation norms, and ensure stewardship of relationships and knowledge.

Together, these four criteria allowed us to identify 26 organizations whose structures, behaviors, and funding approaches offer meaningful options for RRRISE's next chapter. A list of the organizations studied is included as Appendix D.

Findings

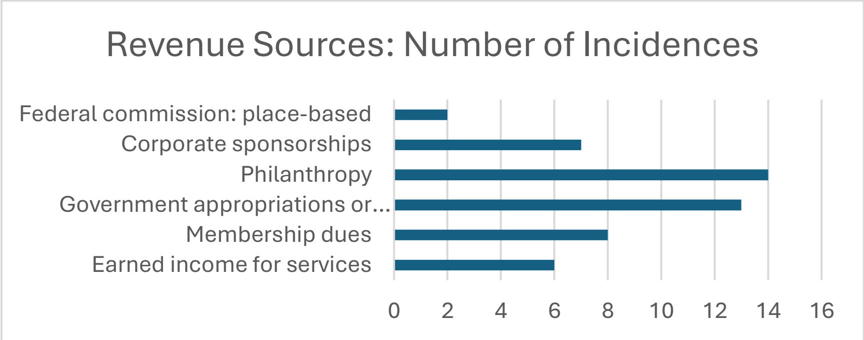
Across the 26 organizations, six structural patterns emerged (pattern = P).

P1. Decision making. All successful regional collaboratives distribute and assign decision-making responsibilities to specifically designated bodies comprised of cross-regional, cross-sector representatives. In some networks, these are leadership councils that set strategy and priorities. In other cases, the decision-making entities are boards of directors, steering committees, or voting assemblies. Regardless of form, the communication channels and responsibilities between the decision-making bodies and the collaborative at large are formalized and clearly articulated. The individuals serving on such bodies are authorized by the area or sector they represent to make decisions on its behalf, while also driving a comprehensive strategy for the region at large. In this way, individual interests are considered and negotiated fairly as regionalism is facilitated for larger collective benefit.

P2. Backbone structures. All regional collaboratives have at least some management backbone structure. Most durable backbone arrangements fall into one of three practical shapes. Many are hosted backbones, where an existing organization adopts and carries the administrative and fiscal responsibilities of regional alignment, allowing the collaborative to function without creating a new entity. Others operate as independent nonprofits dedicated entirely to staffing and maintaining the regional coordination function. A third group relies on intergovernmental or state-enabled structures, where formal multi-jurisdictional agreements or state program designs set roles, authorities, and sometimes funding pathways. These three structures appeared repeatedly, indicating that successful regional collaboratives favor such models to balance legitimacy, administrative capacity, and clarity of responsibility.

P3. Funding. A combination of sustaining funding sources is most common. 21 of the 26 organizations we studied draw revenue from a strategic stack of sources; only five rely on a single means of income for funding. Philanthropy was most evident as a funding source, followed by government appropriations or contracts, membership dues, corporate sponsorships, and earned income for services provided (see Figure 7). Two collaboratives were commissioned and funded at least in part by the federal government.

Figure 7. Revenue Sources Across Sampled Organizations



P4. Capital. A fourth pattern relates to how organizations handle capital. The organizations in our comparison set fall cleanly into two categories. Half operate strictly as coordination and readiness platforms, providing strategy alignment, communications, technical assistance, or project readiness support without deploying dollars directly. Others serve as capital-deploying intermediaries that re-grant funds, manage pooled capital, or administer pass-through dollars. In nearly every case, capital-deploying roles depend on either a public mandate with appropriated funds or an intermediary institution, such as a CDFI or fiscal sponsor, that has the systems, compliance capacity, and risk tolerance needed to move money responsibly.

P5. Engagement. A fifth pattern centers on engagement. Across models, sustained participation was tied to tangible value for members. Organizations that have retained partners over time offer one or more concrete benefits: access to funding, technical assistance, data products, analysis, policy influence, or the convening and network effects that help partners solve shared problems more effectively. Engagement does not persist on goodwill alone; across sample organizations it persists because partners receive something they cannot easily obtain elsewhere.

P6. Rural suitability. Finally, rural applicability proved to be less about governance mechanics and more about two practical factors: the availability of a stable funding base and the presence of administrative capacity to operate the backbone. Rural regions with limited resources rely more heavily on hosted models or state-enabled structures, while those with stronger philanthropic or institutional support had more flexibility in choosing form. This pattern suggests that, at least initially, RRRISE's options will be shaped as much by available capacity and funding as by preferred governance design. As the collaborative grows and evolves, so too will its options and opportunities.

Regarding rural suitability: the place-based characteristics of the regions that our 26 sample collaboratives serve are most successfully factored into each organization's priorities and processes with the explicit acknowledgement of trade-offs. When all partners recognize the challenges presented by, for example, large geographical distances between actors in a region, they can create bespoke approaches to navigation and shift the burden of accommodation among parties over time. For the Redwood Region, this looks like its current convening approach of holding some meetings virtually, some gatherings in person at varied locations, and offering a comprehensive structure of communication. In successful collaboratives, trade-offs are formally recognized, acknowledged, and accommodated by the network at large.

Meaning for RRRISE

Several organizational models well matched for RRRISE's next iteration emerged from our research. Of note: nearly all the large-scale, successful regional collaboratives we observed started as smaller organizations that gain – often over years – credibility and engagement as results are demonstrated. RRRISE partners should focus on key priorities that can bring those who have been absent, such as local government, corporations, and major industry leaders, to the table. As collective benefits can be demonstrated, RRRISE can begin to integrate revenue streams such as membership dues or earned income from services.

Consequently, we recommend that RRRISE plans for an organizational model that progressively evolves over time, rather than a larger fixed structure adopted at the start. A majority of regional collaboratives begin with a modest, hosted arrangement that stabilizes coordination, relationships, and trust to allow growth into more formal institutions with greater capacity. As RRRISE moves past its state-funded origins, an intermediate, or "bridging" phase will give the region space to clarify strategy, strengthen Tribal partnerships, attract new partners, and demonstrate value before taking on the responsibilities – and funding requirements – of a larger backbone organization. This gradual approach allows RRRISE to grow into a durable and powerful regional entity without overextending its current capacity.

During both its near-term, intermediate stages of development and RRRISE's longer-term structure, several considerations apply.

Capital movement. The second iteration of RRRISE must be structurally flexible enough to serve dual purposes. With the California gubernatorial race underway and a less-than-optimistic financial forecast for the state in 2026, the potential for further regional economic development funding from the Jobs First initiative is undetermined. RRRISE partners should therefore expect to generate funding for the RRRISE backbone and capital projects on their own but create an organizational structure that can also receive and distribute state funds if the opportunity arises.

A friction point encountered by participating partners in RRRISE's inaugural structure was the introduction of competition into a collaborative system, specifically during the distribution of state Catalyst funds. The competitive process, marked by shifting and at times unclear direction from the state, left some partners feeling disillusioned after investing time in ideating projects and preparing applications. This weakened their commitment and, in at least one case, caused them to leave the collaborative. The potential for funding served as an early attractor for RRRISE, so the reality that certain sectors, counties, and projects benefitted more than others reduced enthusiasm within the group at large. This shift highlights how competitive processes – particularly those without stable criteria or completely transparent governing rules – can reduce partners' motivation to participate.

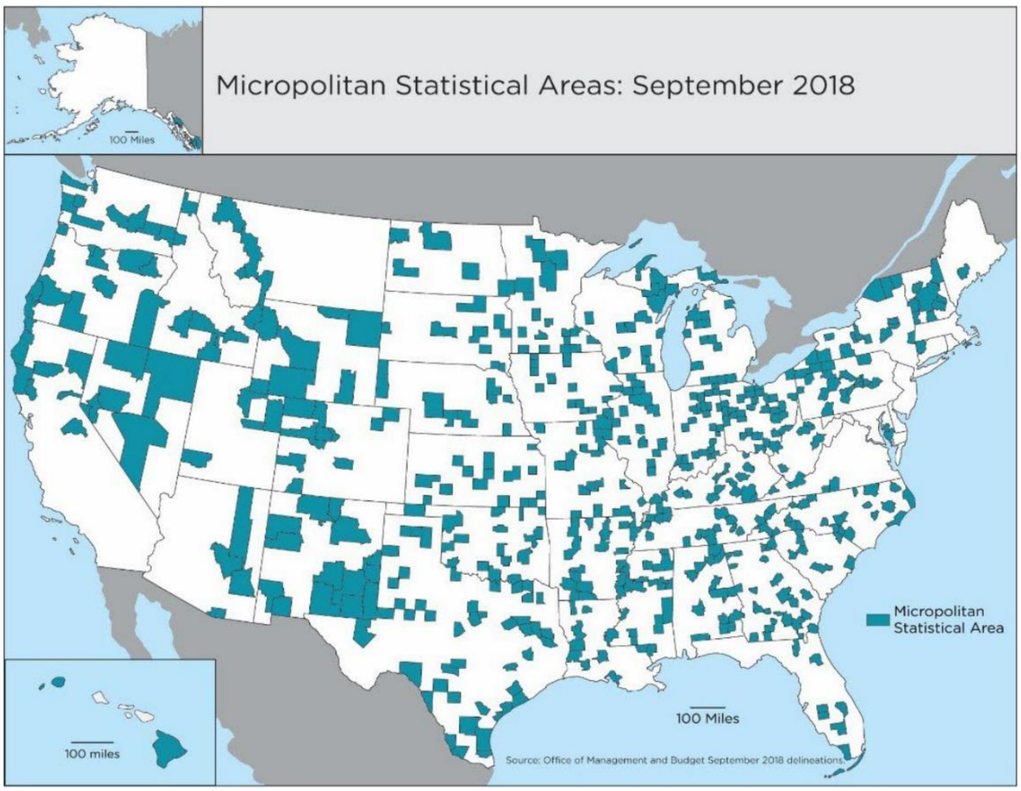
As RRRISE transitions to its next iteration, partners must acknowledge that if it moves capital into or through the region, it will likely reintroduce at least some competitive friction points. The collaborative will need counterbalancing forces and participation incentives that provide baseline value to partners simply for being a part of the network. RRRISE could implement the following participation incentives:

- **Industry-specific convenings.** One of the most valued features of RRRISE has been its Sector Advisory Councils. The intra-regional connections made within the four industry sectors offer great promise for the future, and sector partners have also found valuable connections across other regions and with the state. The Sector Advisory Councils should be expanded to additional partners by undertaking agendas relevant, to the extent possible, to major industry actors. The goal for the councils is to reach a critical mass by which those who do not participate fear "missing out" because everyone else is present. Volume-building represents a pathway to supporting RRRISE through membership dues, potentially structured with a sliding scale.
- **Exclusive access to regional data and insights.** RRRISE can provide members with specialized, region-specific data, economic trend reports, and market research that inform local planning, grant writing, and operational strategies.
- **Facilitated strategic networking.** The collaborative can institutionalize its role as a regional matchmaker by hosting structured "bricolage" sessions, intentionally connecting local supply with regional demand. RRRISE could help partners establish direct business exchanges, cross-county partnerships, and peer-to-peer mentoring that support their individual organizations' bottom lines.
- **Elevated regional visibility and credibility.** Membership can be utilized as a badge of legitimacy. RRRISE can feature participants in a regional newsletter, directory, and website, helping smaller or less-resourced organizations gain crucial exposure to outside philanthropies, state policymakers, and broader economic networks they could not easily access on their own.
- **Grant overhead and shared writing resources.** RRRISE could offer shared technical assistance, such as grant-writing support or administrative services, ensuring that even if a partner is not a recipient of a source of capital, they gain organizational capacity just by participating.

Micropolitan setting. The Redwood Region's status as a micropolitan area* suggests that RRRISE cannot rely solely on traditional corporate attraction strategies to drive economic growth. Rather, the collaborative's strategy must include "economic gardening:" building on existing assets and stimulating local economic activity from within. This activity can attract new investors and can also engage actors who have not been historically involved. The approach affords RRRISE an opportunity to chart a new path, as economic regionalism is a recent phenomenon and its effectiveness in areas without metropolitan anchors remains largely untested. Per our research, many economic development collaboratives throughout the country center their work in urban areas and invite surrounding rural areas to join in. (See Centralina and REACH as examples.)

The frameworks we pose next are designed to accommodate the resources and constraints of regions designated by the Office of Management and Budget (below) as micropolitan areas.

Figure 8. Micropolitan Statistical Areas



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*A micropolitan area is a labor market and statistical zone defined by the United States Office of Management and Budget (OMB). To be classified as micropolitan, an area must meet the following criteria:

- Core population: the area must have at least one urban cluster with a population of at least 10,000 but less than 50,000 residents.
- Geographically bound: It consists of one or more entire counties that house the central urban core.
- Economic integration: the area includes adjacent outlying counties that show a degree of social and economic integration with the central core.

In a systemic sense, a micropolitan area functions similarly to a metropolitan area but operates on a smaller scale with lower density, fewer corporate footprints, and more dispersed populations.

Framework: Hub-and-Spoke

A hub-and-spoke organizational design divides operations between a centralized core – the hub – and a network of local nodes, or the spokes. The model's structural rationale is that the centralization of certain tasks can facilitate cohesion and capture economies of scale, while tasks that benefit from local connections, relationships, activities, and trust are better broadly distributed. The hub-and-spoke model carries notable benefits and can be applied to numerous contexts, as shown below.

Application	Hub Holds	Spokes Hold	Examples
Services	Specialized skills, tools, and training	Local service delivery	YMCA
Operational logistics	Routing infrastructure and sorting	Origin and destination points	USPS; airlines
Governance and decision making	Strategy and policy	Tactics and execution	Federated government
Geography: brand	Brand identity and operational playbook	Local ownership and operation	Restaurant franchises
Knowledge and innovation	Core research and synthesis	Field testing and implementation	Clinical research networks

The advantages of a hub-and-spoke model for regional economic development include:

- **Elevation of regionalism.** Spoke-informed, hub-centralized decision making across a region allows for representation of local interests while empowering a larger, collective vision.
- **Power sharing.** The hub can be organized to distribute equal power in decision making.
- **Cost efficiency.** Spoke responsibilities can be assigned to existing entities with synergistic missions, infrastructure, staffing, or interests.
- **Decision efficiency.** Centralizing certain tasks, activities, and decision making reduces redundancies and the effort of coordination.
- **Unified front and brand.** The hub provides a single interface for external actors.
- **Autonomy.** The spokes preserve their unique assets such as expertise, knowledge, and skills.
- **Scalability.** New or expanded spokes can easily be added to the system as needed.

The drawbacks of a hub-and-spoke model include:

- **Communication complexity.** Significant communication is required for effective organizational functioning, as bidirectional channels must be established between the hub and spokes and among the spokes themselves.
- **Delays.** The complexity of communication pathways can delay signals and slow progress overall.
- **Fragmentation.** Without clearly defined responsibilities and communication channels, spokes can become disengaged from the hub and its regional focus.

The hub-and-spoke model is best implemented in contexts with a high commitment to collaboration among individuals and entities, strong social capital, and a widely shared vision for the system's outcomes. Key to its success are transparency in roles, clarity of decision rights, and adequacy in its wiring for communication. Based on RRRISE's strong relational assets, a hub-and-spoke framework is a feasible model for its interim structure and possibly, for its long-term design. Following are two potential RRRISE organizational progressions using the hub-and-spoke framework.

Hub-and-Spoke Progression: Model 1

Coalition of the Willing → 501(c)(3) backbone (see Figure 8)

Phase 1. Centralized decision-making hub of willing partners + distributed backbone responsibilities hosted in existing organizations (see model, Appendix E)
Example. Central Appalachian Network, serving rural communities across six states
Funding. Termed philanthropy (two to three years of committed support)

- **Organizational advantages:** Very low cost; allows individuals and organizations to step into and try on longer standing roles; high community ownership; short-term philanthropic commitment is more palatable to grantors than open-ended giving.
- **Organizational disadvantages:** Communication can be complex; system is vulnerable to entropy if partners do not maintain commitment; hub may struggle to gain legitimacy.

Phase 2. [Hub: 501(c)(3) backbone with Board of Directors + Spokes: partnered Tribes, organizations] (see model, Appendix F)
Example. Red Wing Ignite, serving eleven rural counties in southeastern Minnesota
Funding. A mix of the following sources:

$ **Philanthropy.** Because the development of a region's economy has a significant long-term impact on community wellness and well-being, community-oriented private donors, foundations, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) entities can be compelled to give.
  - *Key interim activities:* donor cultivation and stewardship, outcomes assessment, philanthropic case building.

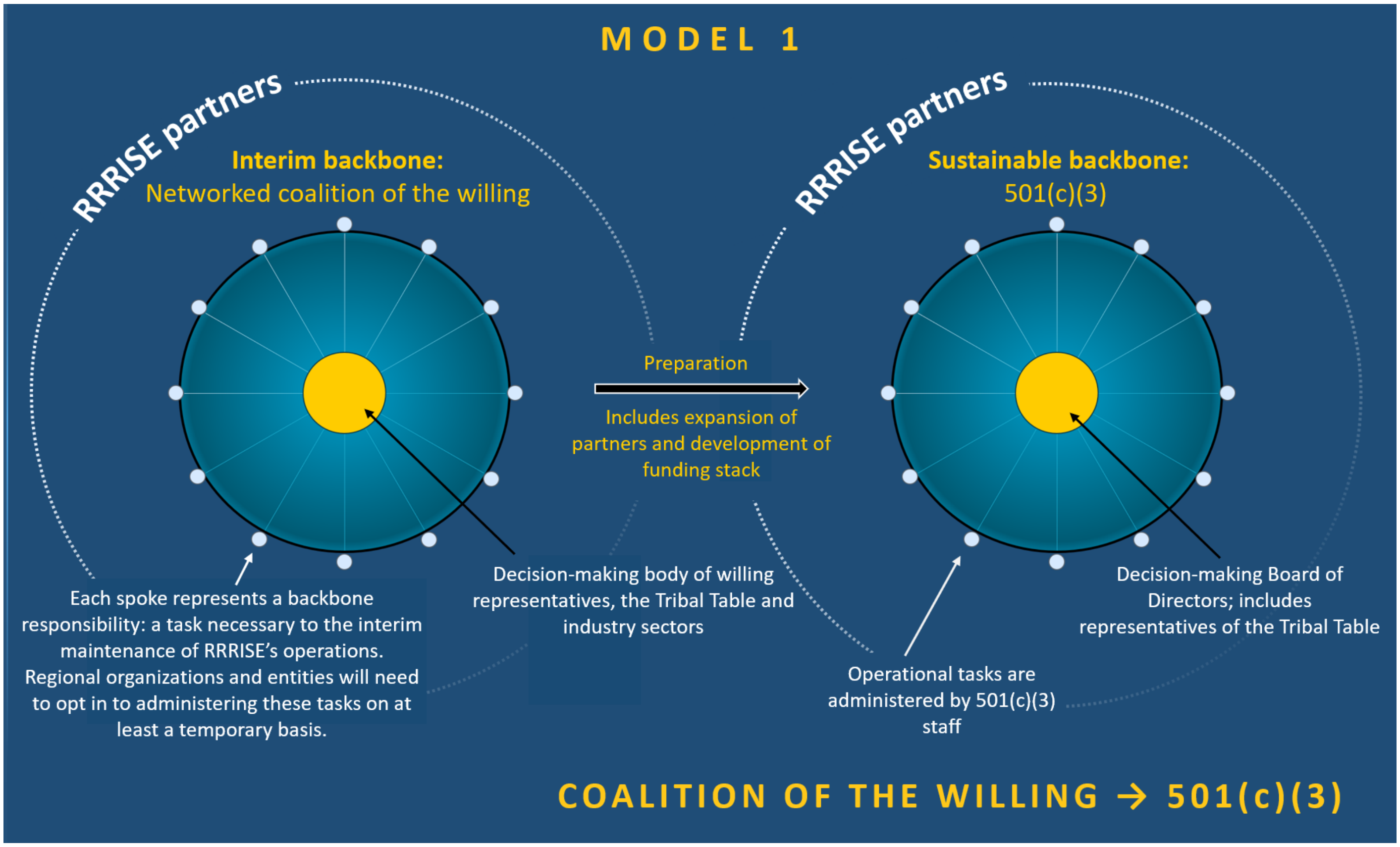
$ **Earned income through shared service provision.** RRRISE's evolving backbone organization could provide strategy or administrative services to RRRISE partners, reducing redundancies and capturing economy of scale. Examples include grant writing support, shared administrative functions, or technical support.
  - *Key interim activities:* demand assessment, cost determination.

$ **Governmental allocations.** Some form of state funds may become available for backbone support in the future, although the potential is undetermined. The four county governments in the Redwood Region may also find reason to support RRRISE if it sufficiently supports accomplishment of their goals. The structures of Model 1 allow for governmental funding for backbone activities to enter the system at any time.
  - *Key interim activities:* establishment of dialogue, opportunity scanning.

$ **Scaled membership dues** (annual dues commensurate to organizational size or type). Membership dues can be introduced when RRRISE offers enough unique or exclusive value that partners are willing to pay to participate. This can happen in two ways: first, RRRISE can embed offerings that partners cannot find anywhere else, or second, when participation reaches a volume sufficient to induce a fear of missing out in those who are not members. Currently, the most promising area for RRRISE to develop toward membership dues is the Sector Advisory Councils, due to their evidenced value to partners and potential to attract well-resourced industry players.
  - *Key interim activities:* value strategy and creation; partner recruitment.

- **Organizational advantages:** 501(c)(3) structure provides critical flexibility in receipt of funding, especially from philanthropy; clarity of purpose and accountability; single interface for external parties; strong branding and identity.
- **Organizational disadvantages:** Higher administrative load; requires revenue consistency; may absolve collaborative partners from leadership responsibilities.

Figure 9. Coalition of the Willing to 501(c)(3)



Hub-and-Spoke Progression: Model 1 Factors

Rationale. Progression Model 1 leverages RRRISE's existing assets – its relationships, social capital, and strong partner commitment – to navigate immediate funding constraints while growing the operations and sustainability of the backbone.

Structure. Phase 1: RRRISE is a networked coalition of the willing to allow partners time to develop its leadership, partner base, and financial resources. Phase 2 graduates RRRISE to a 501(c)(3) hub with a wide variety of partner organizations as spokes.

Governance. Phase 1: voluntary decision-making council of parters. Phase 2: Board of Directors or otherwise community-authorized group.

Dependencies. Successful execution of Model 1 depends on the strategic cultivation of revenue streams during Phase 1 to source a permanent operating platform in Phase 2 (see Figure 9). A value proposition that engages previously missing private-sector, finance, and government interest holders will be imperative.

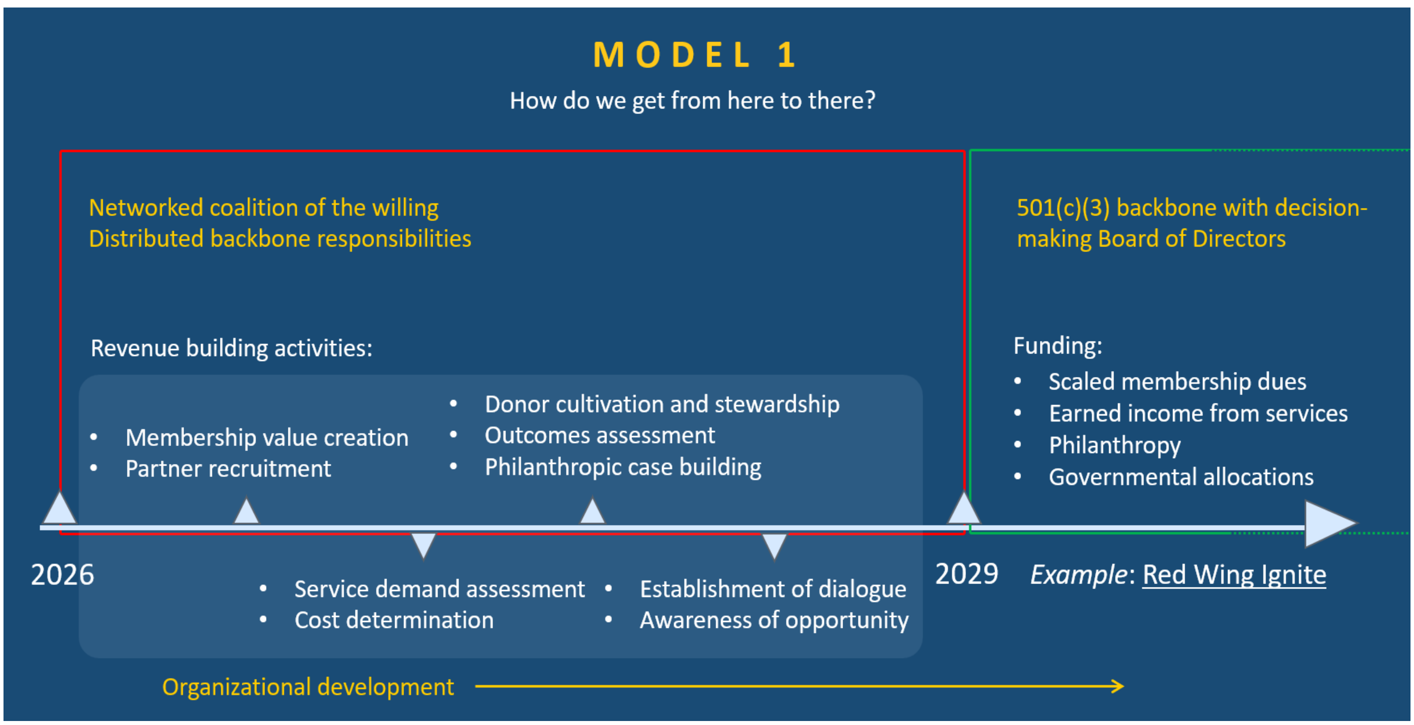
Sustainability. Phase 2's 501(c)(3) will be sourced through a blended funding stack of private philanthropy, earned income through service provision, governmental allocations, and/or scaled annual membership dues. The nonprofit structure provides substantial flexibility in funding receipt and allows county or state allocations to enter the system when available.

Considerations. Several structural drawbacks to Model 1 must be managed. A backbone 501(c)(3) requires consistency in revenue to survive. From a systems-behavior perspective, the introduction of a professionalized nonprofit entity also risks absolving collaborative partners of individual leadership responsibilities.

Tribal participation. Model 1 offers a variety of ways in which RRRISE's existing Tribal Table can assume involvement and leadership while holding decision-making power equitable to any other parter or entity at large.

Fit for RRRISE. Model 1 can leverage RRRISE's strengths to afford partners time to address its challenges in revenue. The flexibility of a 501(c)(3) entity makes this a potentially strong fit for RRRISE.

Figure 10. Transition Pathway, Model 1



Hub-and-Spoke Progression: Model 2

Hosted backbone → Hosted backbone *or* 501(c)(3) (see Figure 10)

Phase 1. Hosted backbone in existing organization + engaged partners and sector/industry clusters
Example: [Growing Rural Oregon (GRO)](), a program of the [Ford Family Foundation]()
Funding. Hosting organization considers RRRISE interim operations as its program or a community service.

- **Organizational advantages:** Quick, uncomplicated transition of RRRISE administration; immediate legitimacy; established infrastructure and expertise.
- **Organizational disadvantages:** Interim organization may be disproportionately shaped by nature, interests, or limitations of host; shift in ownership

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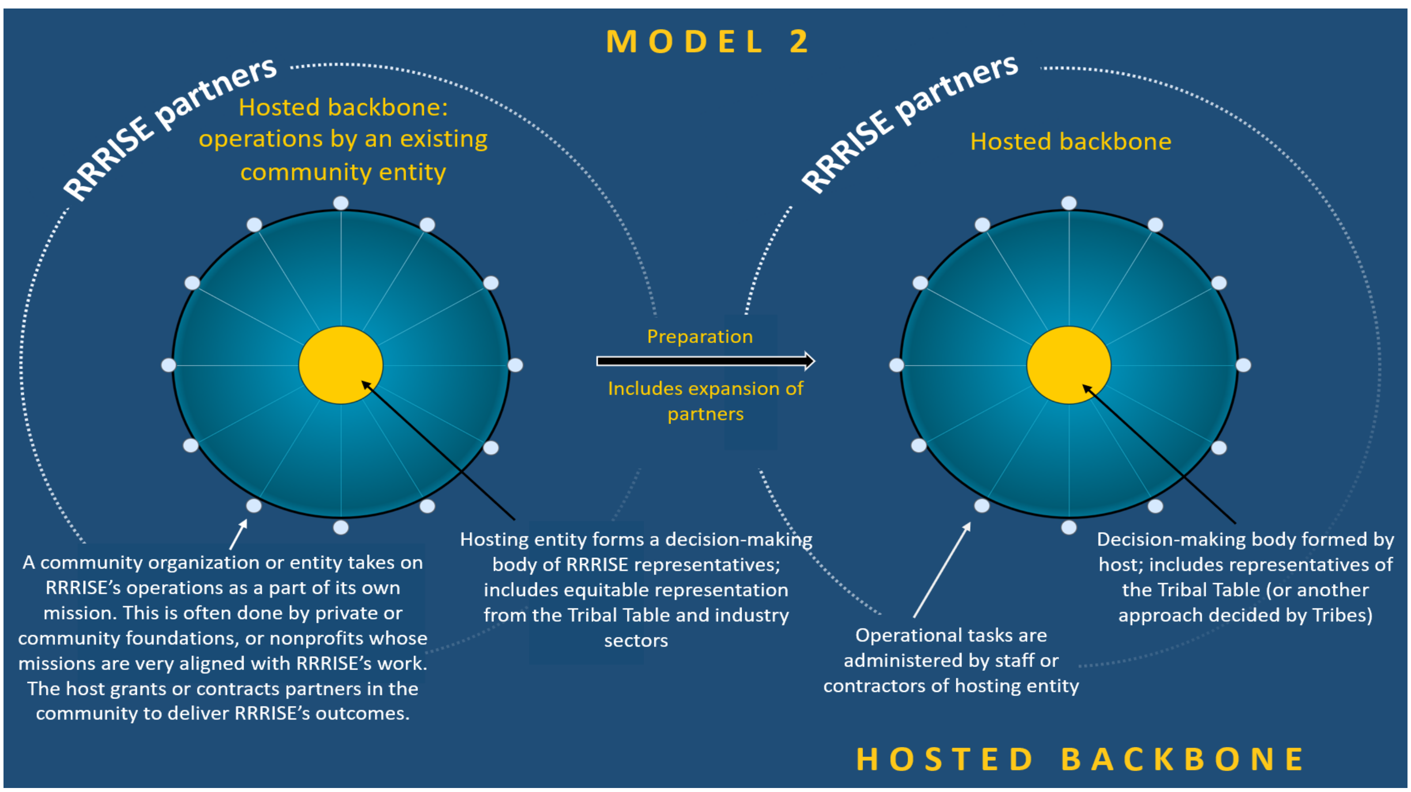
Phase 2a. [Hub: decision-making leadership council in hosted backbone at existing organization + Spokes: partnered entities] **Or**
Phase 2b. [Hub: 501(c)(3) backbone with decision-making Board of Directors + Spokes: partnered Tribes, entities, and organizations]
Funding. Hosting organization considers RRRISE interim operations as one of its programs or a community service as an interim structure while revenue is being cultivated for a 501(c)(3).

- **Organizational advantages:** Streamlined and supported RRRISE administration; lasting legitimacy; established infrastructure and expertise (option 2a).
- **Organizational disadvantages:** As a hosted program, RRRISE may be disproportionately shaped by nature, interests, or limitations of host; arrangement risks loss or abdication of ownership by community.

Figure 11. Hosted Backbone to Hosted Backbone or 501(c)(3)



Hub-and-Spoke Progression: Model 2 Factors

Rationale. A hosted model can stabilize RRRISE's functions as the collaborative evolves into its next structural phase. National research on place-based partnerships shows that hosted backbone structures are common and effective early in a collaborative's lifecycle, especially when administrative infrastructure and the capacity for revenue generation are still developing.

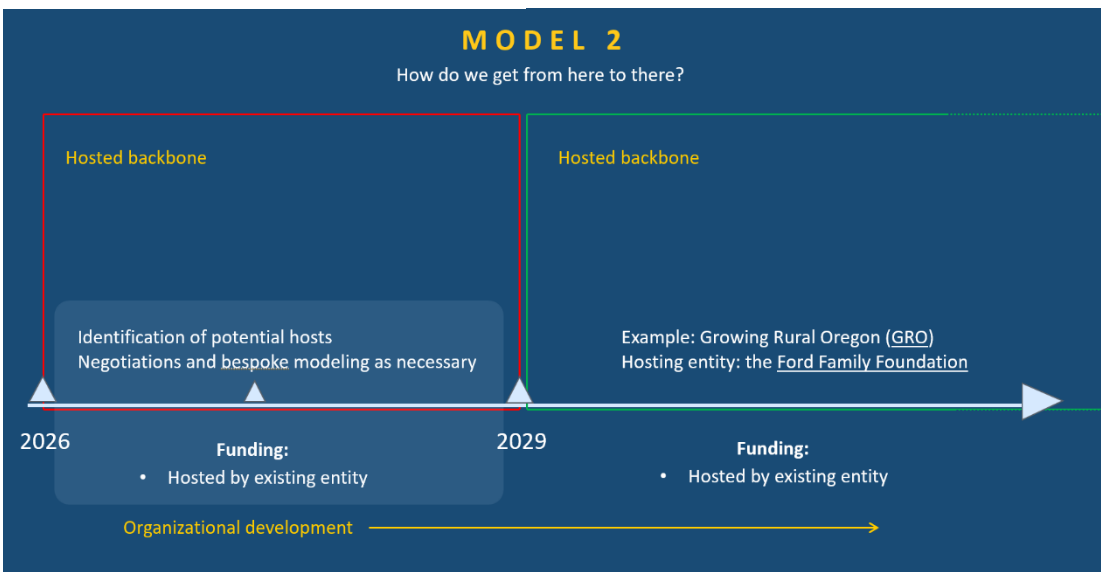
Structure. This model has RRRISE management housed within an administrative host, responsible for a range of coordination functions to maintain operations. This approach can provide immediate stability to RRRISE during its transition in funding.

Governance. Imperative to the success of this model is the hosting organization's commitment to forming a decision-making leadership council. Written guidance specifies which decisions belong to the backbone – such as meeting coordination, agenda setting, documentation standards, communication patterns, and process routing – and which decisions remain within the collaborative via the leadership council, including regional priorities, strategy, and organizational commitments.

Dependencies. The model relies on identifying a host that can provide or subcontract the range of backbone functions.

Sustainability. Operating sustainability is dependent on continued commitment from the hosting organization.

Figure 12. Transition Pathway, Model 2



Considerations. This model carries several considerations. If the host lacks a mandate or resources, RRRISE risks repeating its current challenges, including the absence of individuals and organizations key to regional economic development. Transparency in decision processes is essential to maintain RRRISE's neutrality, especially in a region with diverse interests and capacities.

Tribal participation. Equity in Tribal leadership must be structurally built into this model, with explicit designation by the hosting organization.

Fit for RRRISE. Model 2 is well-suited for rural regions when the convening responsibilities for the backbone entity are closely matched to the mission and objectives of an existing organization or agency. However, the region at large must be committed to supporting the decided roles and responsibilities.

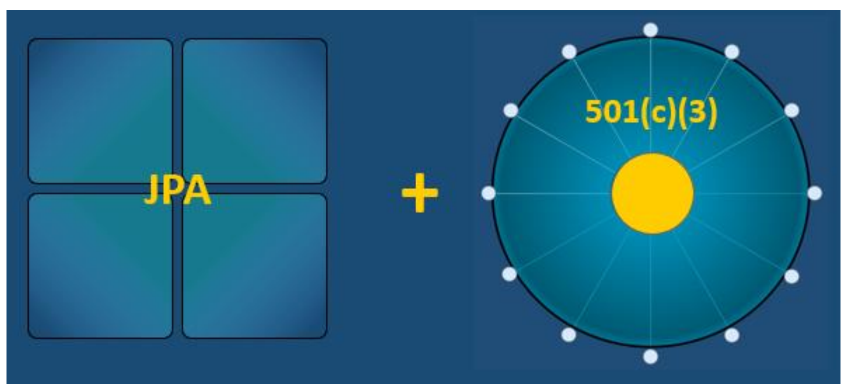
Model 3: Hybrid Joint Powers Authority (JPA) + Nonprofit

A Joint Powers Authority (JPA) is a legal entity formed when two or more public agencies, including county governments, cities, or special districts, agree to collectively exercise powers they may have in common. Under California's Joint Exercise of Powers Act, a JPA enables independent public entities to pool their financial resources, administrative staffing, or other interests to solve regional issues without creating a new layer of government. The JPA framework is often used by neighboring public agencies to fund and manage complex regional initiatives, such as water systems, emergency response networks, or multi-county economic development programs that would be expensive or challenging for a single local government to handle on its own.

Our assessment of RRRISE during the first phase of this project revealed a gap in opportunity for the collaborative: RRRISE has functioned outside of local governmental channels for most of its existence. A long-term separation of the collaborative's work from that of local cities and counties risks duplicating efforts, creating redundancies, and amplifying scarcity in resources. Therefore, our third organizational model for RRRISE partners to consider is that of a hybrid JPA + nonprofit organization. Because a JPA is established by and among public agencies, Model 3 could integrate RRRISE with some existing local government efforts. This integration could narrow the gap between RRRISE and the Redwood Region's governments, capturing potential economies of scale and strengthening the collaborative's public legitimacy. Tribes would have right of participation by nature of their sovereignty.

Model 3 would operate as a combination of a JPA and a 501(c)(3) or 501(c)(6) backbone (see Figure 12). This would be preceded by a preparation period of dialogue and negotiation with local governments and Tribes, so the Phase 1 infrastructure of Model 1 would likely be necessary to tide the collaborative's operations over until a new structure is agreed upon.

Figure 13. JPA + 501(c)(3)



Hybrid JPA/501(c)(3 or 6): Model 3. [JPA + 501(c)(3) backbone]

Example. Amador Tuolumne Community Action Agency (ATCAA) + Amador Tuolumne Community Resources, Inc. (ATCR)
Funding. A mix of governmental funds and the sources that apply to nonprofit organizations.

- **Organizational advantages:** Flexibility in funding sources; leverage of governmental resources; clear and disciplined governance model.
- **Organizational disadvantages:** Governmental resources are bound by strict stipulations; balance between local interests and regional concerns; capacity of local governments may differ substantially.

Model 3 Factors

Rationale. The hybridization of Model 3 captures the benefits of both a public agency and a private charity, giving the collaborative the legal power to handle public funds and the capacity to receive charitable donations. The 501(c)(3) or (6) also retains autonomy in its branding and independence in distributing public benefits.

Structure. Model 3 creates two connected organizations: a public JPA and a 501(c)(3) or (6) nonprofit. The JPA handles government relations and public money, while the nonprofit runs daily programs and manages community projects.

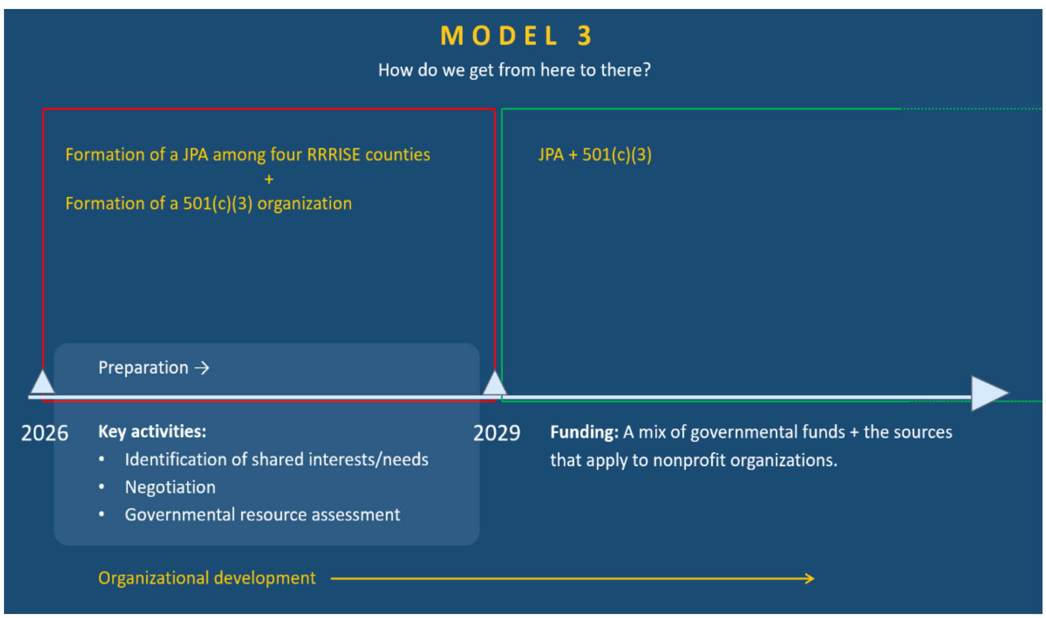
Governance. Governance in Model 3 is split between two separate boards. A public board of elected officials oversees the JPA to ensure government alignment, while a separate board guides the nonprofit to focus on project execution.

Dependencies. Model 3 requires clear legal agreements that define the roles and money duties of each entity. It also depends on keeping both local government leaders and business partners actively involved in the collaborative.

Sustainability. Model 3 creates a diverse funding mix from both public and private sources. The JPA secures county allocations and state grants, while the nonprofit can collect private donations, foundation grants, and service fees.

Considerations. Model 3's main drawback is high administrative complexity; staff must manage two sets of legal rules and bank accounts. The structure also risks friction if public agency timelines clash with the faster pace of the nonprofit. Finally, the appetite or willingness of county governments to engage in a JPA arrangement is as of yet untested.

Figure 14. Transition Pathway, Model 3



Tribal participation. Model 3 allows sovereign Tribal Nations to participate in two different ways. Tribal leaders can work with the JPA on an official government-to-government basis, and/or they can join the nonprofit's board to shape local economic projects.

Fit for RRRISE. Model 3 connects RRRISE directly to local county governments, creating an empowered backbone the region can use to move from planning to action.

Funding Opportunities

The majority of regional collaboratives draw from diverse funding sources. Based on RRRISE's context and national examples, the following sources are evidenced as most viable. Additional opportunities may become more available as the network grows and matures.

Government contracts and intergovernmental agreements. Across the country, government-embedded or government-supported backbones tend to have the most stable funding bases. Identifying shared objectives between RRRISE and the four governments of Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, and Mendocino counties could lead to alignment and potentially, contracts and partnerships. Bringing government representatives into RRRISE's planning sessions will be important for exploring this possibility, with a goal to uncover mutual goals and consider deeper value that RRRISE could bring to county-specific efforts.

Philanthropy. Philanthropy represents a key potential source of startup or early-stage funding, as precedent exists across the nation. Philanthropy is particularly well suited for funding measurement infrastructure, data platforms, Tribal engagement support, and strategic planning. As an example, a number of national funders supporting place-based and rural collaboration, including: the Ballmer Group (currently supporting backbone sustainability nationally); the Kresge Foundation (economic mobility, regional systems); the James Irvine Foundation (California-focused economic mobility); the Ford Foundation (rural equity); and the California Endowment (regional health/equity collaboratives). Only one community foundation in the Redwood Region – the Humboldt Area Foundation/Wild Rivers Community Foundation (HAF+WRCF) – currently offers the potential of financial support for RRRISE. Funding cultivation and case making are discussed on the next page.

Federal and state technical assistance contracts. Rural regions have in the past received funding for coordination and technical assistance through federal and state channels. Despite the federal government's current contraction of services, potential future sources might include the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Partners Network (supports on-the-ground rural navigators and coordination structures); EDA strategy and coordination grants; and EDA Build Back Better Regional Challenge follow-ons. Funds from the state of California, in addition to Jobs First resources, have included initiatives toward state broadband, housing, or wildfire programs requiring regional coordination. RRRISE partners will want to consider how the collaborative can play a role in statewide efforts going forward.

Earned revenue. Modest backbone revenue could come from grant writing or project packaging services, technical assistance training, data reports or regional dashboards, or convening and event sponsorships. Earned income should remain secondary to core funding to avoid overburdening the backbone with pay-for-service activities. As RRRISE grows and the value to its partners continues to emerge, organizers will want to consider which of its capabilities might be productized and marketed to generate earned income.

Administrative/overhead recovery. If RRRISE hosts projects or serves as a fiscal sponsor for select initiatives, a reasonable administrative rate can support backbone operations, which is standard practice for successful intermediaries.

Regional cost-share model. Once RRRISE's value toward economic development is consistently demonstrated, a structured membership or shared-cost model may emerge. This said, rural and Tribal contexts require caution in this strategy, as contributions must be flexible and equitable over flat dues.

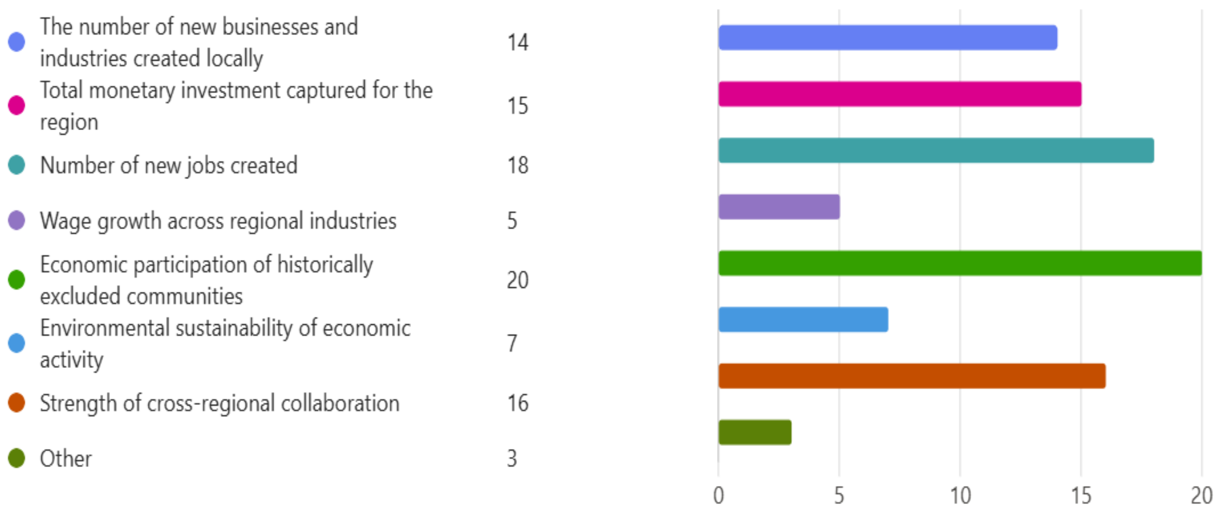
Funding: Case Building

Economic development is a gradual, often nonlinear process that spans years or even decades. The extended timeline between today's actions and far-future results are at odds with the needs of philanthropic funders and other interest-holders, who must have evidence of the collaborative's effectiveness if they are to invest in its backbone funding now. Industry representatives need to see value in funding or contributing membership dues toward the collaborative, and partners need assurance of organizational legitimacy if they are to prioritize their own time for participation. Consequently, outcomes measurement will be a crucial function for the next iteration of RRRISE.

One approach to navigating the gap between near-term demands for evidence and long-term actual outcomes is sound logic modeling. Collecting and analyzing data at each stage of the collaborative's program logic (see Appendix G for RRRISE's logic model) will provide the measures of effectiveness necessary to attract philanthropic investors and can signal legitimacy and value for the governmental bodies and industry actors who have yet to engage. As accurate data is also essential for ongoing learning, improvement, and course correction, the collection of key metrics and indices will allow RRRISE partners to assemble a roadmap instructive to other regions with similar aspirations.

Measuring RRRISE's outcomes will require active engagement from everyone in the collaborative. Partners will need to provide accurate, timely data to an assigned entity. As prescribed by partners during Phase 1 of this project (see Figure 14), the framework will initially prioritize five long-term impact measures: the levels of economic participation by historically excluded communities; the number of new jobs created as a result of collaborative's activities; the strength of cross-regional coordination; the total monetary investment captured for the region; and the number of new businesses and industries generated locally.

Figure 15. Partners' Recommended RRRISE Outcome Measures



However, these indicators represent a longer-term horizon point for organizational reporting and must be augmented to include measures at the collaborative's stages of program outputs, short-term outcomes, and intermediary outcomes. Some sample output and near-term outcome measures are shown in the following table.

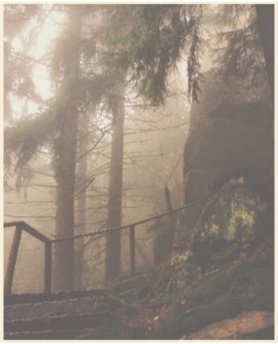
Sample Measurements to be Collected by RRRISE		
Outputs [immediate]	**Outcomes [near-term]**	**Outcomes [mid-term]**
Governance: The ratification of a formal governance agreement, tracked by the percentage of core partners and Tribal entities who have signed and committed to the charter. **Convening:** The number of partner meetings that issue actionable documentation, tabulated with attendance rates by county and sector representation. **Communication:** Open and click-through rates for "just-in-time" communications; the number of downloads for regional data products from the collaborative's portal. **Project pipeline development:** The number of community-generated projects vetted and added to a "capital-ready" portfolio. **Data production:** The number of region-wide data products published annually.	**Reduced fragmentation:** The volume of multi-party grant applications created. **Enhanced trust and visibility:** Aggregate scores from an annual partner survey measuring participants' trust in the transparency of RRRISE's resource allocation. **Increased network access:** The number of connections facilitated by RRRISE between smaller/local organizations and larger state, federal, or philanthropic networks. **Capital readiness:** The percentage of project sponsors in the pipeline who report high confidence in navigating complex funding mechanisms.	**Capital attraction:** The dollar amount of internal, external, state, and philanthropic investment secured by projects within the RRRISE pipeline. **Economic stimulation:** The number of intra-regional contracts, vendor agreements, or formalized partnerships formed directly through RRRISE connections. **Project execution:** The number of regional initiatives that transition from the collaborative planning phase into active, funded implementation. **Institutionalized equitable practices:** The percentage of funded projects that explicitly integrate benefit to Tribal nations and other historically excluded communities. **Policy and regional visibility**: The number of times RRRISE regional strategies or data are cited in state policy discussions, or the number of state-level working groups that include RRRISE representation.

The organization or organizations designated to manage this data reporting process must possess a specific set of technical and relational capacities. It must wield persuasive power, relying on a culture of commitment to encourage consistent partner reporting. Ensuring community trust will require robust data privacy protections implemented with secure software and communication channels. The entity must also demonstrate sufficient analytic capacity to derive meaningful insights, as data is often valuable for the gaps it may reveal. Finally, the assigned organization needs information publishing capabilities to translate findings into narratives that engage stakeholders and validate the cooperative efforts of the Redwood Region.

Next Steps

This report is intended to allow RRRISE partners to envision sustainable options for the collaborative's future. By comparing partner priorities with lessons from peer organizations and presenting three structural options that balance purpose, durability, and regional context, the analysis offers RRRISE partners the opportunity to gauge the feasibility of multiple approaches (see table of most notable trade-offs, Appendix H). The models presented here are meant to clarify possibilities, illuminate priorities, and help partners consider how RRRISE can preserve its strongest assets while building the capacity required for long-term impact.

As the final step in this evaluative process, members of the RRRISE Sustainability Working Group are currently completing an online Criteria Analysis Matrix, which will allow the group to quantify the value of each organizational model and recommend one developmental pathway to the RRRISE Voting Block on July 21, 2026.



Appendix A

RRRISE Problem Statement

The Redwood Region RISE (Resilient, Inclusive, Sustainable Economy) collaborative is a network of individuals and organizations who came together in 2023 to respond to state-level funding opportunities through California's post-pandemic economic development efforts. The Redwood Region*, one of 13 economic regions designated by the state, was eligible for a total of $14 million in grant funding ($5 million to support discovery and regional planning + $9 million for Catalyst development projects). Two organizations stepped up to provide leadership for the collaborative, with one serving as the fiscal agent (North Edge, a CDFI) and the other as the regional convener (the CCRP of Cal Poly Humboldt). Through a community-informed process, the CCRP engaged stakeholders in gathering extensive input for the development of a 10-year Regional Roadmap during the project's first phase.

In the second phase, member organizations organically formed smaller groups to compete for Catalyst funding, proposing projects intended to advance the roadmap. A screening circle composed of collaborative members reviewed and narrowed the pool of proposals, which were then advanced to a voting body convened by the regional lead to determine final funding recommendations. Ultimately, $9 million was captured and allocated, with funds set to expire by September 2026. With no more funding expected from the state, collaborative members now want to consider sustainable organizational structures that will further what's been gained.

The problem: State funds drew people together, organized the system, and sparked collaboration. How can the community keep collaboration happening when the funds are no longer there – and to what end?

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*The Redwood Region is comprised of the California counties of Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, and Mendocino.

Appendix B

Redwood Region RISE Partner Interview Script

1. **Greetings, introductions, and warm up**
2. **Profile**
    - 2.1. How does your organization contribute to regional job creation and workforce development?
    - 2.2. What is your (organizational) work's geographical reach?
    - 2.3. Scope (local, county, regional, other)?
    - 2.4. With which other organizations do you currently partner?
    - 2.5. Probe for informal partnerships and exchanges
    - 2.6. Do you participate in any collaboratives other than RRRISE?
        - Do these groups potentially allow for efforts toward regional economic development alignment and/or coordination?
        - In what way?
3. **RRRISE value and outcomes**
    - 3.1. What aspects of the RRRISE initiative have been most valuable to you?
    - 3.2. What would the region lose if the RRRISE initiative discontinued its work tomorrow?
    - 3.3. Which RRRISE functions feel essential for maintaining regional economic growth?
    - 3.4. Where do you currently see gaps in RRRISE's efforts to drive regional economic growth?
        - Which would be most impactful to fill?
    - 3.5. Have you seen any innovative, unique, or unexpected results from the RRRISE initiative?
4. **Financial sustainability**
    - 4.1. Which potential revenue sources feel most viable for sustaining RRRISE in the next phase?
        - Why?
        - What obstacles exist?
    - 4.2. What would make your organization's continued participation in RRRISE valuable and worthwhile?
    - 4.3. What might your organization be able to contribute to maintain RRRISE's work into the future?
5. **Close**

Appendix C

Established Collaborative Structures

Model	Meaning	Best for	Risks
Hosted backbone embedded in existing organization	RRRISE-like work is housed inside a pre-existing organization that provides administrative infrastructure (HR, finance, contracting, compliance). Often shows up as a fiscal sponsor arrangement or as a program housed at a university, nonprofit, or public agency.	Fast start; lower overhead; maintaining convening and communications quickly.	Independence/neutrality can be questioned; priorities may be constrained by host rules, brand, or risk tolerance.
Independent nonprofit backbone	A standalone nonprofit, often 501(c)(3), with its own board, staff, and operating budget serves as the coordinating "backbone" and can also run implementation services or administer grants/contracts.	Clear accountability; execution capacity; durable identity and brand; easier to hire and manage staff dedicated to outcomes.	Requires a reliable operating revenue model; governance must be designed to avoid capture by the best-resourced counties/sectors.
Dues-based membership association	A member-funded entity, often 501(c)(6), where participation is incentivized through paid membership tiers and benefits (events, data, policy influence, business attraction services).	Strong "member value proposition" and predictable revenue in regions with a substantial private-sector base.	Rural regions may not have enough dues capacity; can skew toward large employers unless explicit equity and representation guardrails are built in.
JPA or intergovernmental authority	A formal governmental collaboration structure (e.g., joint powers-type arrangement) where local governments collectively guide, fund, and authorize the work; may be able to receive public funds more directly and align across jurisdictions.	Legitimacy with counties; formal decision rules; aligning local incentives; potential to manage/allocate public dollars.	Can be slower; political dynamics can dominate; may limit participation and voice of nonprofits, Tribes, or industry unless intentionally designed.
Hybrid JPA plus nonprofit	A paired structure where a governmental entity handles public legitimacy and certain funding pathways, while a nonprofit (or foundation arm) handles program delivery, fundraising, and community partnerships.	Blended funding stacks; separating "public authority" from "community implementation."	Governance complexity; requires crystal-clear roles, decision rights, and conflict resolution.
Network coalition of the willing	A lighter-weight network where members opt into specific initiatives; coordination is often accomplished through MOUs, shared workplans, and facilitation rather than formal authority.	Early-stage alignment; piloting; reducing process load by focusing on a few shared initiatives.	Can struggle to sustain execution without backbone staffing and a stable operating budget; decision rights can remain ambiguous if not explicitly defined.

Appendix D

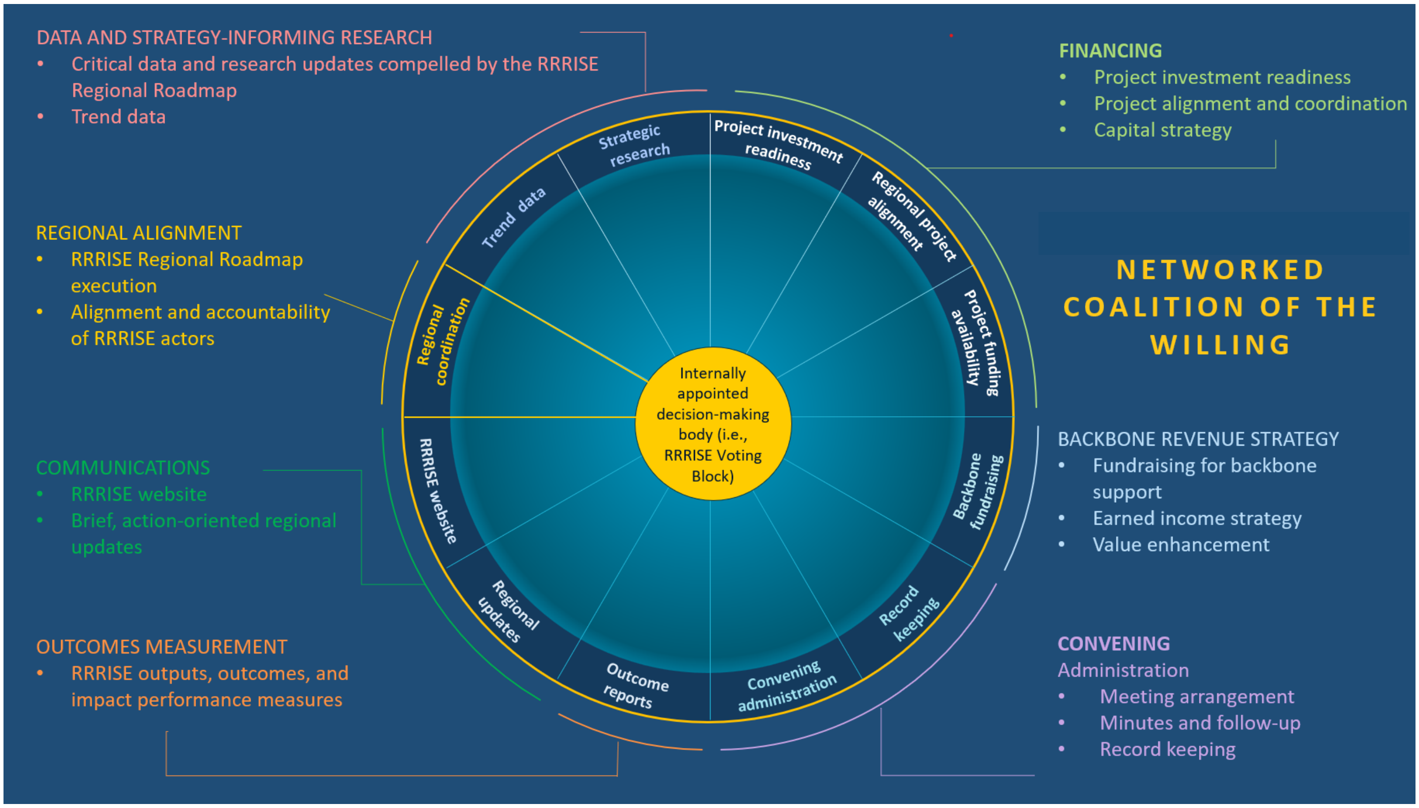
Sampled Organizations

California Association for Local Economic Development (CALED)
https://caled.org/about-caled/
California Community Economic Development Association (CCEDA)
https://cceda.com/
California Forward (CA FWD)
https://cafwd.org/
CompassPoint Nonprofit Services
https://www.compasspoint.org/
National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC)
https://nyec.org/
Nia Tero (Organizational Strengthening)
https://www.niatero.org/programs/organizational-strengthening
Valley Vision https://www.valleyvision.org/
Fahe https://fahe.org/what-is-fahe/
Inland Economic Growth & Opportunity (IEGO)
https://iegocollab.com/
REACH (Central Coast Regional Economic Action Coalition)
https://reachcentralcoast.org/
Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC)
https://www.rcrcnet.org/about/economic-development/
Sierra Business Council
https://www.sierrabusiness.org/
Centralina Economic Development District (CEDD)
https://centralinaedd.org/
Charlotte Regional Business Alliance (CLT Alliance)
https://charlotteregion.com/
Detroit Regional Partnership (DRP)
https://www.detroitregionalpartnership.com/
EdTrust-West https://west.edtrust.org/who-we-are/
GO Virginia (Virginia Growth and Opportunity Fund)
https://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/gova
Greater Houston Partnership
https://houston.org/
Greater Phoenix Economic Council (GPEC)
https://www.gpec.org/
Kansas City Area Development Council (KCADC)
https://onekc.org/
North Coast Resource Partnership (NCRP)
https://northcoastresourcepartnership.org/

Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC)
https://www.nbrc.gov/
Northern California College Promise Coalition (NCCPC)
https://norcalpromisecoalition.org/
Rise East Oakland (RiseEast)
https://www.riseeast.org/
Siskiyou Economic Development Council (SEDC)
https://www.siskiyoucounty.org/

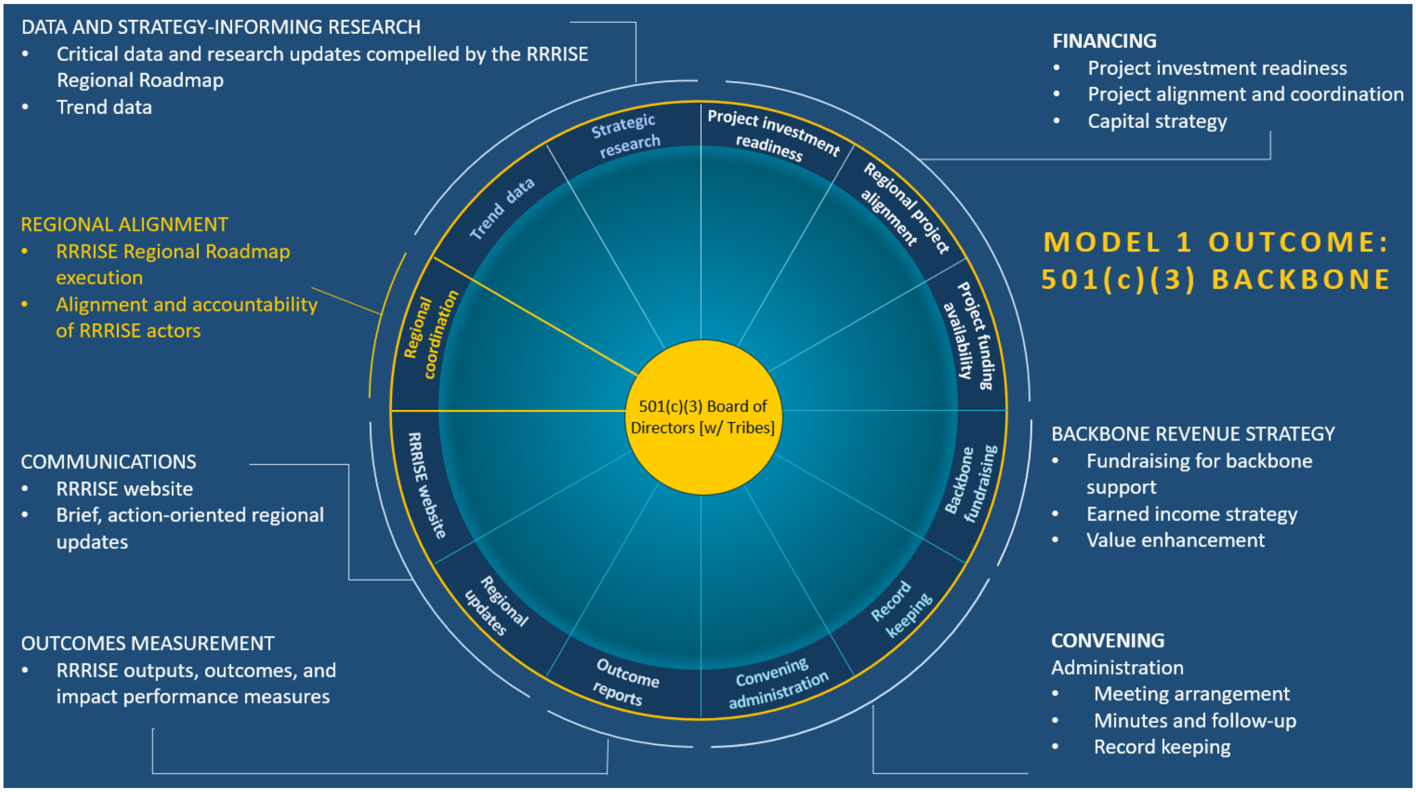
Appendix E

Networked Coalition of the Willing



Appendix F

501(c)(3) Nonprofit



Appendix G

RRRISE Logic Model

1 INPUTS

Relational infrastructure. Existing cross-county trust, social capital, and unified regional identity generated during Phase 1.

Backbone capacity. A stable, clearly authorized administrative structure providing coordination, necessary communications, and accountability.

Diversified funding. A blended operating revenue model to sustain the backbone's regional coordination, independent of specific project capital.

Tribal engagement. Existing relationships and a shared commitment to co-designing culturally grounded governance and participation processes with Tribes as sovereign entities.

Equity emphasis. Commitment to the meaningful engagement of historically excluded communities.

Sector collaboration. Resource-, strategy-, and project-sharing within the region's four high-leverage sectors and those of other regions.

Shared knowledge. Regional data, collaborative learning, community wisdom, and strategy insights produced within the collaborative.

2 ACTIVITIES

Regional coordination and convening. Facilitating targeted cross-sector and cross-county tables; sustaining communication channels; maintaining the region's relational infrastructure.

System alignment and governance. Operating explicit, transparent decision-making structures that separate inclusive visioning spaces from efficient, implementation-focused working groups.

Tribal partnership integration. Maintaining dedicated processes and relationship-building practices that ensure meaningful, non-extractive Tribal participation and shared governance.

Project readiness, implementation, and capital strategy. Coordinating an innovation pipeline by matching regional projects to internal and external funding opportunities and attracting investors.

Bricolage facilitation. Actively connecting regional organizations and businesses to stimulate intra-regional and inter-regional economic exchange, collaboration, and resource sharing.

Performance monitoring. Key RRRISE performance data is regularly collected, analyzed, and published.

3 OUPUTS

A formal governance agreement. Establishes clear roles, decision rights, and accountability mechanisms for the collaborative backbone and partners.

Regular, well-documented meetings. Convenings of the collaborative's bodies have clear purpose and meaning toward regional coordination and alignment.

Relevant regional communications. Partners and participants receive streamlined "just-in-time" communications only as relevant. Other communications are held for access by partners as needed.

A curated project pipeline. Capital-ready community-driven projects aligned with larger regional strategy are documented and made available to prospective investors.

Data. Up-to-date county-specific and region-wide data products are available for use by partners.

Documented evidence. RRRISE's effectiveness and learnings are readily available to partners, investors, and other interested parties.

4 OUTCOMES [NEAR-TERM: CHANGES IN ALIGNMENT AND BEHAVIOR]

Reduced fragmentation. Locallized strategies and funding pursuits align with a unified regional economic vision, reducing inter-county competition.

Improved visibility. All partners gain heightened visibility to other regional projects and priorities.

Increased access. Smaller counties, local organizations, and Tribal governments gain improved access to broader regional and state networks.

Enhanced systemic trust. Partners experience clear, agreed-upon governance and transparent resource allocation, deepening commitment to the regional collaborative.

Capital readiness. Project sponsors gain the structural advisory support needed to pursue complex state, federal, and philanthropic funding with confidence.

5 OUTCOMES [MID-TERM: CHANGES IN ACTION AND CAPACITY]

Local economic stimulation. New economic activity is generated from within the region through the successful connection of local supply with local demand, and by connections between shared interests.

Capital attraction. Internal and external investments are successfully drawn into or through the Redwood Region to support shared priorities.

Project execution. A number of visible, high-priority regional initiatives move from collaborative planning into active implementation.

Institutionalized equitable practices. Economic planning consistently integrates the participation and priorities of rural and Tribal communities as well as other historically excluded groups.

Regional visibility. An increasingly comprehensive understanding of the Redwood Region's economic opportunities and challenges, combined with a more unified regional voice, allow for state policy influence.

6 IMPACT [LONG-TERM]

Workforce and job creation. The Redwood Region hosts sustainable, family-supporting jobs and workforce training pathways that serve both emerging and established industries.

Business vitality. Businesses across the Redwood Region are strengthened and expanded.

Equitable economic participation. The economic advancement of historically excluded and under-resourced communities is measurably increased.

Enhanced regional power. RRRISE enables a cohesive political and economic influence that successfully advocates for state and federal policies beneficial to the Redwood Region.

Appendix H

Comparison of Trade-Offs, Recommended Models

Model	Rewards/Advantages	Risks/Disadvantages
Networked Coalition of the Willing	• Very low operating cost • Allows partners to try on roles • High community ownership • May secure philanthropic support; time-bound giving commitments are easier to secure	• Complex communication pathways • Vulnerable to waning partner commitment • Can struggle to sustain project execution • May not easily gain public legitimacy
Independent 501(c)(3) Organization	• High flexibility for receiving diverse funding; especially attractive to philanthropy • Clear organizational purpose and accountability • Strong branding, unique identity, and single interface for external actors • Dedicated execution capacity	• Can carry high administrative load • Requires consistent and predictable revenue streams to survive • Risks allowing collaborative partners to pull back from their own leadership duties
Hosted Backbone	• Quick, uncomplicated administrative transition • Low upfront overhead cost • Capitalizes on the host's existing infrastructure, expertise, and legitimacy	• RRRISE's independent identity, neutrality can be questioned • Priorities may be limited by host's rules, brand, or risk tolerance • RRRISE risks abdicating community ownership to the host
JPA + 501(c)(3) Hybrid Model	• Combines the authority to manage public funds with the agility of a public charity • Integrates RRRISE with county structures and expands public legitimacy • Safeguards Tribal sovereignty via government-to-government participation • Strong, disciplined governance framework	• Very high administrative complexity • Requires management of two distinct sets of legal rules, funding streams, and operations • Risks friction if rigid public timelines clash with a faster pace of the nonprofit • County willingness to engage is currently untested