

CALIFORNIA JOBS FIRST REGIONAL REGIONAL RECREATION & TOURISM WORKING GROUP

Summary of Results from April 2025

MLTPA x SFM

SIERRA WORKS

RECREATION & TOURISM PROJECTS IN THE SIERRAS



Overview of the April 10th & 17th Working Group



The need for renewed local focus and investment coupled with intra-regional collaboration.

The purpose of the Quarter 1 working group was threefold: (1) to begin establishing the footprint of a regional industry collaborative spanning the 7-county region that shall be charged with stress test ideas and refine existing strategies; (2) to examine the seaworthiness of the “unhoused” tactics (those tactics outlined but not currently funded under Catalyst); and (3) to locate those strategies for further refinement to reflect opportunities for immediate actionability given the existing federal climate and disproportionate stress placed on the rural communities contained within the Sierra Region.

April 10th: The April 10th meeting sought to orient attendees to the California Jobs First initiative, the Catalyst applications, and the technical assistance and value of collaboration and information sharing offered by participating in the Working Group, as well as prepare attendees for providing feedback via surveys and focused discussion questions on April 17th, as well as into the future. Following the April 10th meeting, a brief survey was distributed to the entire mailing list of ~800 people. Nearly 40 people completed the survey.

Methodology for April 10th Survey:

The April 10th survey was crafted around the resourcing across the strategy to enhance strategic effectiveness, maximize access to resources, and seek opportunities to refine the plan to more accurately reflect efforts taking place on the ground, and the most accurately reflect the needs and priorities of the region. As such, the Quarter 1 Working Group principles were derived from the need to fully assess the strategies remaining in “Bucket C”, or those projects which currently held no known efforts nor articulated funding associated with them.

Discussion of Results from April 10th Working Group Survey

The April 10th survey revealed the following:

The survey feedback reflected a near split on the relevance of working with the film industry and local film commissioners/visitor bureaus, and several respondents noted that it seems difficult to implement this tactic within the scope of Job creation/Rec & Tourism /in the context of this Regional Strategic and would require coordinated state incentivizing. **The high rate of neutrality suggests that this strategy might need additional framing or actionable steps to show its potential value to the region.**



Regarding cultivating partnerships, the Majority of respondents rated cultivating 'Partnerships with Recreation Organizations' as relevant and identified that—broadly speaking—partnerships in general are a beneficial and in fact necessary thing for the Rec & tourism sectors and general job creation, and a significant amount of feedback called for this tactic to be less specific to CORP and more broadly attached to general partnerships for the furtherance of the regional Rec & Tourism plan. **The high relevance of this tactic suggests that partnerships are a clear priority to this working group.**

There's a near even split, with a roughly 60% majority highlighting the relevance of 'Private Investment in Public Lands,' but also concerns about the complexities of federal permitting. While most support the idea, the higher appearance of the not neutral ranking would suggest some caution or concern, particularly around regulation, environmental impacts, or local control. **Several folks even highlighted the potential of a Tourism Marketing District as more beneficial for the same types of outcomes.**

A Large majority were in support of reinforcing regional connection through visitor infrastructure and regionally consistent wayfinding programs. The strong support and relatively low opposition would suggest that this is a supported tactic, particularly insofar as it functions as a powerful tool for reducing barriers to entry to recreation assets, and improves accessibility and safety. There were comments that perhaps this **tactic is more realizable as a digital wayfinding program rather than as total physical infrastructure, and could function as an important way to facilitate coordination across jurisdictions.**

A majority, at 63, support on-the-ground fire hardening, with several folks saying there are already significant efforts taking place. The support suggests that generally fire hardening is very widely supported, although many are unsure of its direct tie to Rec & Tourism, which would suggest that **this tactic might need more clarification or specificity attached to it to become a meaningful tactic.**

An overwhelming majority was in favor of developing infrastructure to support and facilitate regional events, but remarked that this broad strategy needs to be more actionable and specific. Several of you noted that this deserved to be spoken about in conversation/a breakout group. **The strong support would suggest that this is perceived as a practical strategy to boost year-round tourism and provide more stable and year-round employment for traditionally seasonal workers.**



The top themes of note that merit integration into the future Strategic Plan include: more inclusive economic development practices (particularly tribal and veteran-led efforts), the revitalization of downtown areas, and a need to balance tourism with overarching environmental and community resilience. Many respondents are deeply keyed into enhancing local business development, the importance of tourism to our region as the backbone of our rural and gateway economies, and that both tourism and recreation are infused into our regional identity.

Several folks noted whether facilitating more tourism was even desirable while many others noted that a clearer strategy for supporting the baseline needs of our rural region, such as year-round employment, stable workforce housing, and local business incubation needed more focus.

April 17: The April 10th Survey directly shaped the questions and items of discussion for April 17th's gathering of practitioners. The April 17th working group gathering of practitioners again revealed a great deal about areas that deserved further exploration or actionable tactics attached to them, as well as gathered a dynamic and in real time needs assessment across the Sierra Region, specific to Recreation and Tourism.

Discussion Questions on April 17th:

1. How would you facilitate better collaboration between tourism businesses and the film industry/film commissioners?
2. What funding, capacity, and resources do you need to enhance cultural/arts-related investments to augment our tourist offerings?
3. Should we consider formally pooling our resources to create a fund to realize the projects we envision in the region? (Yes/No)
4. What new or improved regional wayfinding programs or interpretative opportunities including digital resources do you suggest?
5. What new or improved regional event infrastructure do you need to positively impact recreation and tourism?
6. Should wildfire hardening efforts consider and/or benefit recreational resources? (YES/NO) If YES, What are the most important recreation resources to consider?
7. How do we bring more people into this working group and what resource sharing would you benefit from the most?
8. The April 10th Survey indicated that there is interest in having developed recreational facilities while at the same time having more natural/undeveloped areas available. How do we promote a diverse array of recreational facilities

while promoting and facilitating wilderness experience? Should developed recreational facilities be in close proximity to developed communities? (YES/NO) Should opportunities for more wilderness experiences be located farther away from developed communities?

9. What 2-3 words would you use to define sustainable recreation and tourism?
10. How do you feel about the future of Sustainable Recreation and Tourism?

Discussion of April 17th Results:

How would you facilitate better collaboration between tourism businesses and the film industry/film commissioners?

1. The group suggested acting collectively to cultivate a more film-friendly environment by **centralizing resources and inventorying regional offerings/film partnerships**. There was a strong inclination to broaden the scope to "media collaboration" to encompass various methods beyond just film.

What funding, capacity, and resources do you need to enhance cultural/arts-related investments to augment our tourist offerings?

2. The discussion centered on the need for unrestricted funding for staffing and organizational capacity building, dedicated project management funding, diversifying funding streams beyond federal cuts, stable non-grant dependent employee funding, corporate sponsorships, and local voter ballot measures. **The discussion highlighted that this area needs further exploration to develop community-based tactics.**

Should we consider formally pooling our resources to create a fund to realize the projects we envision in the region? (Yes/No)

3. Equity concerns around implementation of a collaborative funding pool, the risk of imbalance, and concerns over the decision-making body were prominent, referencing past difficulties with similar efforts. The Working Group proposed an adjustment to Strategic Plan language. Alternative approaches, such as fostering competitive project development and exploring existing resources (like within the UC system), should be considered. **The Working Group concluded that the next steps include researching existing models like TBIDs and TMDs that demonstrate successful resource pooling elsewhere and present these case studies to the WG to identify areas of agreement/disagreement.**

What new or improved regional wayfinding programs or interpretative opportunities including digital resources do you suggest?

4. The Working Group noted the importance of dedicated efforts to wayfinding and signage, and that lack of connectivity and reception limits the use of such tools to the physical realm. Future wayfinding should prioritize inclusivity by incorporating tribal perspectives, leverage local content and digital tools where feasible, and reinforce the regional brand. The Working Group concluded that the next steps include researching successful examples and offering them to the group for consideration.

What new or improved regional event infrastructure do you need to positively impact recreation and tourism?

5. Working Group agreed that investing in **diverse event infrastructure remains critical**, including indoor/outdoor venues, supporting tribal tourism, and cultivating events that celebrate local culture, support local businesses, and have the necessary supporting infrastructure (e.g., loading on the west side, air travel on the east side) is needed. **Action step: explore ways for a standardized receptacle of “needs” across the Region to better prepare shovel-ready projects in the future.**

Should wildfire hardening efforts consider and/or benefit recreational resources? (YES/NO) If YES, What are the most important recreation resources to consider?

6. Addressing fire hazards associated with dispersed camping through vegetation management and education, adapting to federal policy and permitting, and developing visitor navigation plans during disasters were discussed. **Fire hardening is critical and should align with each community’s reliance on recreation/tourism and can be integrated into recreation planning and the dual use of event infrastructure spaces for shelter, working group must define “fire hardening”.**

How do we bring more people into this working group and what resource sharing would you benefit from the most?

7. Clearly communicating the expected outcomes of the working group, identifying missing stakeholders (especially business owners), conducting targeted outreach, the possibility of sharing existing recreation master plans, and clearly identifying the benefits and deliverables via newsletters/social media were raised. To increase involvement, the working group needs to outline benefits and goals and conduct outreach to underrepresented groups like



business owners and tribal representatives. **This group must work to identify where this document will be housed after September 2026, as well as outline a stream of decisions that be adopted by local decision makers, as well as collaborate across the state with other Recreation & Tourism sectors in addition to cross-pollination among the Sierra Region’s sectors.**

How do we promote a diverse array of recreational facilities while promoting and facilitating wilderness experience? Should developed recreational facilities be in close proximity to developed communities? (YES/NO) Should opportunities for more wilderness experiences be located farther away from developed communities?

8. There was agreement that developed recreation facilities should be near developed communities, along with the promotion of Towns to Trails initiatives. Creating a regional inventory of recreation assets/facilities was deemed beneficial. **A regional inventory of existing facilities would help identify gaps and needs.**

2-3 Word Definition of Sustainable Recreation and Tourism

9. Definition: Sustainable recreation and tourism are defined by concepts of stewardship, respect, education, low impact, regenerative, diverse, and supported by necessary infrastructure.

How do you feel about the future of Sustainable Recreation and Tourism?

10. The future is viewed with a **mix of optimism and concern**, acknowledging both opportunities and potential negative impacts requiring careful planning and management.

Summary of the Working Group’s Quarter 1 Contributions and Recommendations

Deliverable 1 of the Quarter 1 Working Group, establish the footprint of the regional collaborative:

- a. The initial Quarter 1 working group, whose invitations spanned to a targeted audience of nearly 800 identified subject matter and area experts and decision makers, was composed of a total of ~50 participants across the 7-county region.

Deliverable 2 of the Quarter 1 Working Group, examine the seaworthiness of the “unhoused” tactics:

- a. Of those “unhoused” tactics, we put all of them forward to the Working Group for consideration in reference to the existing Strategic Plan and its goals for fortifying the region and enhancing Recreation & Tourism’s ability to provide family-sustaining, year-round employment across the region. . The working group identified several key themes and priorities for consideration in the existing Regional Strategic Plan.
- b. Primarily, the working group identified that there is a recognized need for more inclusive economic development practices, particularly for tribal and veteran-led efforts, along with a renewed sense of importance and focus on revitalizing downtown areas, and balancing tourism with environmental and community resilience. The group emphasized enhancing local business development, acknowledging tourism’s importance to the region’s economy, and recognizing the deep connection between tourism, recreation, and the region’s identity. Specific feedback on current tactics highlighted that partnerships with recreation organizations are seen as highly relevant and necessary, while there were mixed views on the relevance of prioritizing working with the film industry as a tactic that can feasibly advance the overall arc of the Strategic Plan. Private investment in public lands garnered support but also raised concerns about regulations, environmental impacts, difficulties associated with local control, and a renewed sense of wariness about feasibility given the current climate in coordinating with Federal partners and land managers. The group strongly supported reinforcing regional connections through improving visitor infrastructure and wayfinding programs and favored developing infrastructure to support regional events, while noting the need for more actionable steps around how best to do this. Fire hardening was generally supported, but its direct connection to Recreation & Tourism required clarification.
- c. The group defined “sustainable recreation and tourism” with terms like stewardship, respect, education, low impact, regenerative, and diverse, and expressed a mix of optimism and concern about its future, recognizing both opportunities and potential negative impacts.

Deliverable 3 of the Quarter 1 Working Group, locate strategies for relevance and possible refinement:

- a. The working group was asked to rank the strategies in terms of relevance and importance for impact to the region. The working group identified the most important strategies for immediate implementation as (from most important to least important) as:



- i. (a) locating sustainable funding (Strategy 1, Action Step 4);
- ii. (b) enhancing regional collaboration (Strategy 1, Action Step 1);
- iii. (c) enhancing visitor experiences through improved infrastructure (Strategy 3, Action Step 3);
- iv. (d) diversifying regional attractions through events and attractions (Strategy 3, Action Step 1);
- v. (e) strategic visitor management (Strategy 3, Action Step 4);
- vi. (f) addressing climate change impacts (Strategy 4); and
- vii. (g) promoting sustainable visitation (Strategy 2, Action Step 1).

Moving forward, the function of the working group will shift to a new fourfold emphasis: (1) to begin stress-testing the ideas in the Regional Strategic Plan for further “seaworthiness”; (2) to establish a quarterly cadence of reporting out on the work and projects pursued via Catalyst funding; (3) to serve as a container for best practices, policy outputs and recommendations across the 7-county region in the Recreation & Tourism sector; and (4) to function as a body that has elicited input for its statewide collaborative efforts