

## Tourism & Outdoor Recreation Sector — Project Interview Summary

# Inland So Cal Region – Discover Inland Empire

*Representative Interviewed:* **Freddy Bi**  
*Interviewed by:* **Calder Johnson**

### 1

## Assets

Think about the natural assets — public lands, parks, trails, or other features — and the community assets — community facilities, airports, train stations, unique areas, and/or cultural events — that draw visitors to the region, and how the project connects to them. Then consider what kinds of investments, whether in staff capacity, coordination, or regional information sharing, the project would most benefit from to move forward.

### Consider:

- *What natural assets attract people to the region, and how does the project connect to them?*
- *What community assets attract and bring people to the region, and how does the project connect to them?*
- *What investments would most help the project advance?*

### Discussion Points

#### *Opportunities:*

- **Natural Assets**
  - The Inland Empire offers a striking **range of natural environments** (mountain terrain, desert landscapes, and wine country) within a single region
- **Community Assets and Regional Access**
  - **Route 66** represents a significant cultural and heritage asset with substantial untapped tourism potential

#### *Challenges:*

- **Infrastructure investment** is needed to fully leverage existing assets, particularly along the Route 66 corridor

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## Policy & Regulations

Reflect on the policies or regulations the project has encountered, and whether they have opened doors or created roadblocks. Consider also where the policy landscape simply does not match conditions on the ground, and whether a governance structure — like a joint powers authority or special district — could help bridge that gap.

### Consider:

- *Which policies or regulations have helped or hindered the project?*

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- *Where does the policy landscape not match reality on the ground, and what structures might help?*

**Discussion Points**

*Opportunities:*

- Adopting GO-Biz CA Jobs First regional designations as a standard definition would resolve confusion caused by **differing regional boundary definitions** across agencies and programs

*Challenges:*

- No additional policy challenges were identified.

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**Funding**

Consider what funding opportunities have identified and pursued, and what challenges have arisen if none are available. Think about how well current funding aligns with the actual needs and timeline — including reimbursement structures, long-term maintenance, and the ability to braid multiple sources together — and whether a capacity gap exists between the project and the funding it requires.

**Consider:**

- *What funding opportunities have been found, and what gaps or challenges remain?*
- *How well does available funding match the project's real needs, and can multiple funding sources be leveraged?*

**Discussion Points**

*Opportunities:*

- A state partnership modeled on California's **specialty license plate** programs is being explored as a potential mechanism to fund tourism infrastructure: a model with significant potential to scale across the state if structured well

*Challenges:*

- Discover Inland Empire currently relies on **membership dues and matching funds** from cities and counties, a funding base that is insufficient for implementing larger projects

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**Data**

Think about what data resources exist in the region to support your project — things like visitation numbers, economic impact, or user behavior — and what is missing that should be measured. Consider who owns the data, what happens to it when the project ends, and whether data to demonstrate the project's value to the agencies and funders who need to act on it can be used.

**Consider:**

- *What data is available and what important data is still missing?*
- *Who owns the data, and can it be used to make the case to funders and decision-makers?*

**Discussion Points**

*Opportunities:*

- No specific opportunities were identified

*Challenges:*

- No specific challenges were identified

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**Climate Change**

Reflect on whether climate change is a factor in the project — through shifting seasons, temperature fluctuations, or changing visitor behaviors — and how the project is responding or adapting. Consider whether the project is connected to climate resilience or mitigation funding, and what it would take to do so.

**Consider:**

- *How is climate change affecting the project, and how are the project sponsors responding?*
- *Is the project connected to climate resilience or mitigation funding opportunities?*

**Discussion Points**

*Opportunities:*

- No specific opportunities were identified

*Challenges:*

- No specific challenges were identified

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## **Workforce**

Think about the workforce gaps standing in the way of the project moving forward, and whether the project's proponents are finding the skills, contractors, and project managers they need locally. Consider also whether the project creates opportunities to build longer-term workforce pipelines through partnerships with community colleges, workforce boards, or local hire programs.

### **Consider:**

- *What workforce gaps are slowing the project, and is the project finding the talent needed locally?*
- *Does the project create opportunities to build long-term workforce pipelines in the region?*

### **Discussion Points**

#### *Opportunities:*

- The existing **Travel Academy** program could be expanded to serve student and broader workforce audiences, providing a foundation to build from rather than starting from scratch

#### *Challenges:*

- Neither San Bernardino nor Riverside County offers **hospitality-focused training** through workforce development agencies, leaving a significant gap in the regional pipeline
- Temecula Valley wineries have been forced to close Tuesday and Wednesday (beyond the typical Monday closure) due to **insufficient staffing**, representing a direct and measurable economic impact from the workforce gap
- No clear pathways exist for local graduates to access **hospitality careers**, despite regional demand

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## **Collaboratives**

Reflect on the collaborative relationships your project depends on — across jurisdictions, land managers, or tribal partners — and where those relationships are accelerating progress or slowing things down. Consider whether there is a regional body or coordination structure your project needs but does not yet have access to.

### **Consider:**

- *What collaborative relationships does your project depend on, and where are they helping or hindering?*

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– *Is there a regional body or coordination structure you need but don't yet have?*

**Discussion Points**

*Opportunities:*

- **Engaging outside tourism-only circles** (such as the Southern California Procurement Alliance's work around LA28) surfaces fresh thinking and has provided inspiration for symposium and project design

*Challenges:*

- No specific challenges were identified

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**Branding & Marketing**

Think about whether your project or region has a clear identity, and how effectively you are telling your story to your community, to funders, and to decision-makers at the state and federal level. Consider whether your project's brand or identity could go beyond marketing to become a tool for financing, advocacy, or building political will.

**Consider:**

- *Does your project or region have a clear identity, and how well are you telling that story?*
- *Could your project's brand become a financing or advocacy tool, not just a marketing one?*

**Discussion Points**

*Opportunities:*

- No specific opportunities were identified

*Challenges:*

- Big Bear is **perceived as a seasonal destination**, suppressing year-round hotel and Airbnb occupancy despite a robust off-season offering of hiking, skydiving, ziplining, and cultural events
- A state-level task force has been recommended to coordinate regional messaging when **weather events** affect destinations; low snowfall affecting ski resorts is a recurring example where uncoordinated messaging compounds the economic damage