Workforce: Opportunities

Existing Local Talent & Workforce Supply

- Local skilled workers, contractors, and project managers are available and could support projects if funding were secured
- Recent job postings for trail builders and guides received an overwhelming response, demonstrating strong latent interest in the sector
- The Sierra Nevada has one of the highest densities of trail builders in California and the United States, with trail contractor businesses ranging from hundreds of thousands to five million dollars in scale
- Many people moving to the region are specifically seeking outdoor and nature-related jobs, creating a growing local talent pipeline
- The region has a decent applicant pool when positions are posted, and the Bay Area recreation economy draws workers from outside the region
- 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

Workforce Pipeline Development

- A long-term workforce pipeline could be built if sustained federal and/or state investment is secured
- Workforce pipelines for trail building and fire break work already exist and could be strengthened with more focused investment
- Non-linear workforce pathways offer real potential — workers might spend six months on trail restoration, six months on wildfire mitigation, then launch their own business
- The California Conservation Corps trains workers from outside the Bay Area who then find local employment, functioning as an informal regional pipeline
- A volunteer trail coordinator training program is being developed that could create a clear pathway from volunteer service to paid positions
- A partnership with College of the Siskiyous for vocational training and certificates in trail construction and maintenance could help young people establish careers in the community
- The Santa Cruz trails ladder program — where laborers are trained and promoted to operator or planner roles — is a proven model worth replicating
- Machine-built trails require machine maintenance, creating demand for specialized skills that could anchor a durable, year-round local workforce
- Larger hotel chains provide workforce training that could be models for smaller businesses if structured incentives or requirements are put in place
- Requiring large organizations to hire locally could create more durable career pathways and keep wages circulating in the regional economy

Workforce: Opportunities - *continued*

Economic Stability & Community Benefit

- SBTS pays "house-buying wages" with full benefit packages so employees can participate in the local economy, not just work in it — a model demonstrating that recreation jobs can be quality careers
- The goal is job stabilization, not just job creation: existing businesses paying above minimum wage with healthcare benefits is the meaningful measure of regional workforce success
- The trail project generates a broad, sustained bell curve of economic activity rather than a construction boom-and-bust — local businesses can build tours, shuttles, fly fishing guide services, and cultural experiences around the route
- Many small businesses collectively produce sustained economic activity that stays within the community rather than extracting value outward

Cross-Sector Workforce Connections

- Overlapping seasonality of wildfire mitigation and recreation creates natural year-round employment — wraparound services and backbone support for seasonal employment, including pre-arranged off-season work, could stabilize this model
- Trail maintenance represents a significant workforce opportunity, particularly for kinesthetic learners, with potential for year-round rather than seasonal employment
- The restaurant industry offers a proven model for soft skills development through direct customer interaction and could serve as a template for workforce pipelines in the micro tourism sector

Community Recruitment & Retention

- Targeted recruitment has worked — a guide relocated from Alaska after researching Quincy; three others came from outside the region after attending events or reading about it
- A strong regional ethic of "home growing" — providing tools and pathways for people already in the region — is an asset that can be built upon
- Second homeowners are being recruited as board members and major donors, converting a source of community tension into a potential resource

Institutional Support

- The county plays an active role filling capacity gaps by identifying grants and writing on behalf of nonprofits that lack bandwidth
- River Ambassadors provide crucial on-the-ground capacity — visitor education, data collection, and safety compliance — serving as an effective extension of understaffed state park rangers
- Strong potential exists for partnerships with community colleges, local hire programs, and local contractors to formalize and expand workforce pathways

Workforce: Challenges

Funding Instability & Implementation Barriers

1. **Funding for local contractors and project managers is sporadic and inconsistent**, preventing workforce stability
2. Local capacity exists but **cannot be activated without sustained, dedicated investment**
3. The current workforce model **cannot be maintained at scale without ongoing funding commitments**
4. **Workforce development must accompany infrastructure development**, but funding structures rarely support both together
5. Building complex trail infrastructure without sustainable maintenance funding **risks creating liabilities the community cannot support**

Federal Process Barriers

6. Implementation must go through a federal bid process, raising **serious concerns about whether local contractors can meet federal bidding requirements**
7. **Dedicated Forest Service staff on local districts** — essential for project oversight — has become increasingly difficult to secure
8. The Forest Service hires seasonal workers but not for recreation maintenance, **leaving a critical gap in ongoing stewardship capacity**
9. Forest Service capacity issues and small city staff limitations **constrain the pool of partners available to support project work**

Housing as the Primary Constraint

10. **Housing is the primary workforce constraint** — not expensive as in ski resort communities, but critically limited in quantity
11. The Greenville fire destroyed approximately 10% of the county's housing stock, significantly worsening an already acute shortage
12. **Second home purchases further lock up available housing**, and surrounding national forest land limits the ability to expand communities outward
13. **A chicken-and-egg dynamic** persists building community requires people, but attracting people requires community infrastructure

Volunteer Sustainability

14. **Heavy reliance on volunteer organizations with MOUs is unsustainable**; the Forest Service does not compensate these groups, who must independently raise their own operating funds
15. The River Ambassadors program, initially funded by State Parks, now has no state funding; the supporting nonprofit is struggling to continue, and **Nevada County cannot fully fund a program on state property**

Workforce: Challenges - *continued*

Workforce Quality & Retention

16. **High turnover is a persistent problem**, with newly hired workers quickly departing for other opportunities
17. **Soft skills are the most significant workforce gap** identified across all steering committee members
18. **Internship quality has declined since COVID**, with programs devolving into low-wage jobs rather than genuine pathways to management and career development
19. **Generation Alpha workers present emerging challenges**, with reduced interpersonal skills attributed to digital-native behavior
20. **Young people are often unaware that trail work is a paid career**, limiting the applicant pipeline before it even begins

Structural & Institutional Gaps

21. **Workforce pipelines** in this sector resemble paths or trails rather than traditional career ladders, making them harder to fund and institutionalize within existing systems
22. **State job data collection** fails to capture this type of employment, leading to systematic underrepresentation in workforce planning and policy
23. **Significant capacity gaps exist in grant writing, management, and implementation** across partner organizations
24. **Tribal administrative capacity is a meaningful slowdown in collaboration timelines**, representing an equity gap that needs dedicated resourcing

Community Scale & Economic Fragility

25. **Rural communities lack the critical mass to support new businesses** without exceptional circumstances — existing businesses are struggling, not growing
26. **Too many second homeowners relative to full-time residents can destabilize community cohesion** even as they bring economic resources
27. **Large capital incursions are uncommon in the Sierra Nevada**, limiting the scale and consistency of workforce and income growth
28. The region sits at the intersection of large public land holdings and checkerboarded private ownership, **complicating workforce development and economic planning**