

# Branding & Marketing: Opportunities

## ***Emerging Brand Identity***

- A clear identity is emerging — Recreation Economy + Stewardship + Resilience — with strong potential as a financing and advocacy tool, not just a marketing message
- The "Lost Sierra" name, adopted 20 years ago, demonstrates that transforming an unknown region into a recognized outdoor recreation destination is achievable through sustained, consistent effort
- The multi-benefit framing of the plan — recreation as conservation, public health, economic development, and education simultaneously — represents a powerful narrative for funders and policymakers
- The project is straightforward to explain to community members, funders, and government decision-makers, reducing the barrier to effective storytelling
- **Cultural districts** provide effective micro-level branding; Barrio Logan's Chicano and Latino identity is a strong model for how distinct neighborhood brands can elevate specific arts and culture communities while contributing to a broader regional narrative

## ***Asset-Rich Regional Narrative***

- The region's asset density — redwoods, art, coast, rivers, wine, cannabis — enables visitors to have multiple distinct experiences in a single day; full brand vitality comes from layering these assets, not any single one
- The natural environment and small-town culture are effective tools for attracting Bay Area investment, philanthropy, and talent
- Brand messaging tied to natural assets can unlock private sector and philanthropic funding well beyond traditional tourism marketing

## ***Existing Brand Infrastructure & Reach***

- SBTS has a global membership of over 40,000 people who signed up independently, and strong media relationships that consistently generate quality storytelling and visitor interest
- SBTS functions as the de facto visitor bureau and chamber of commerce for the region, with its brand already serving as a financing and advocacy tool
- RTA has an established brand identity recognized and amplified by regional parks and foundation partners through newsletters and media coverage
- The organization's nonprofit status is actively used as a tool for financing, advocacy, and marketing — a model others can adopt

## Branding & Marketing: Opportunities - continued

### ***Earned Media & Visit California***

- A San Francisco Chronicle outdoor writer is coming to cover the Connected Communities project, representing a significant earned media opportunity
- Visit California has been more active in the region over the past year and represents a relationship worth intentionally deepening
- Engagement with Visit California is growing, including recent direct meetings
- The project brand has demonstrated that reputation-building through consistent quality work and storytelling over two decades can drive both visitation and investment

### ***Wayfinding & Shared Narrative Tools***

- A wayfinding signage project is underway, with a digital outpost consolidating all existing maps under one QR-code-accessible platform
- A second annual recreation fair is in progress to build a shared regional narrative around stewardship ("Play hard, play lightly")
- Cultural districts, chamber marketing, and events organically generate visitor awareness and can be built upon with minimal additional investment

### ***Advocacy & Coordination Structures***

- Existing DMOs have indicated they would support a county-level advocacy organization — modeled on CalTravel — as long as it does not function as a marketing organization competing with their city or district work
- A county-level advocacy body could provide a unified voice for regional tourism interests without threatening existing DMO contracts
- Project success could serve as a valuable tool for future financing, advocacy, and building political support
- Investment in branding and marketing could unlock financing and advocacy opportunities far beyond traditional marketing returns
- A goal of reaching over 50% public awareness among park users is defined and achievable with additional investment

# Branding & Marketing: Challenges

## ***Absence of a Unified Brand Strategy***

1. The project and region **currently lack a clear brand identity**, despite the region's existing reputation and assets
2. The region **lacks a comprehensive brand strategy** and has not invested in active marketing outreach
3. **Messaging remains fragmented across agencies and partners**, with no unified narrative connecting them
4. The region's abundance of assets is also its branding challenge — **multiple narratives compete rather than reinforce each other**, and a single coherent elevator pitch does not yet exist
5. 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
6. Micro-level competition between cities for tourism attention and dollars **drives fragmented individual branding investments rather than a unified regional narrative**

## ***Passive & Under-Resourced Marketing***

7. The project's story is **not being actively communicated to key audiences**
8. **No investment in branding or marketing** has been made, despite its potential value as a financing and advocacy tool
9. **The existing website is passive**; the region is not attending fairs, running advertising, or proactively telling its story
10. **Local chambers of commerce lack digital capacity** with no significant regional marketing infrastructure outside of SBTS
11. Recreation is marketed for tourism but not fully leveraged as a policy and funding strategy
12. **Increased public presence requires funding that does not currently exist**, creating a catch-22 where visibility investment competes with operational needs

## ***Capacity & Priority Constraints***

13. As a rural county, **capacity for aggressive branding and marketing is limited**, and this work consistently falls to the bottom of the priority list
14. **Most park users are currently unaware of organization's work** despite strong project delivery and partner recognition
15. **Building a destination reputation takes time** — Downieville did not become an international destination overnight — and patience and sustained investment are required

## Branding & Marketing: Challenges - *continued*

### *Visit California & Geographic Identity Gaps*

16. Some local officials are **unaware that Visit California exists as an organization**, limiting the region's ability to leverage that relationship
17. Relationship-building with Visit California needs to be **more intentional and sustained**
18. The region falls between two Visit California areas (Shasta Cascade and Gold Country), making it **difficult to surface as a destination** the way clearly defined regions like the Eastern Sierra do

### *DMO Fragmentation & Territorial Dynamics*

19. Orange County has nine city-level DMOs but no county DMO, **leaving a significant gap in regional coordination and advocacy capacity**
20. **Existing DMOs strongly opposed the formation of a county DMO** during steering committee discussions, fearing it would threaten their city and business district contracts
21. DMOs showed limited interest in the collaborative overall, **viewing it as a potential interference with existing work rather than a complement to it**
22. The tourism industry's **territorial nature is a structural barrier** to the regional collaboration this project requires

### *Earned Media Gaps*

23. Newspapers are declining in relevance as a media channel, and **no clear replacement strategy for earned media has emerged**
24. **The region's strong story is not reaching key audiences** — funders, policymakers, or the public — at the scale needed to drive investment and support