

HUMBOLDT RISING

COMMUNITY OUTREACH REPORT

PREPARED FOR:

County of Humboldt Economic Development Division
to inform the 2023-2027 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy

OUTREACH CONDUCTED:

May - October 2022

PREPARED BY:



ILLUMINATED
MARKETING

We humbly acknowledge that we live and work on the traditional territory and homelands of the Wiyot, Yurok, Hupa, Karuk and Tolowa, who continue to live and thrive today. As storytellers, creative stewards, and community influencers, Illuminated Marketing seeks to uplift the ongoing stories of the indigenous nations impacted by our work.

INTRODUCTION

Celebrating what makes us different. Collaborating around what we have in common. Cultivating a plan to help everyone prosper. Together, we are Humboldt Rising.

In Humboldt, we are different. Humboldt is home to both the bohemian and straight-laced. Some of us are newly arrived and some of us have been calling Humboldt home for generations. We are multiracial, multicultural, multiethnic, and from all walks of life. We represent liberal and conservative worldviews. Yes, we have our differences. Our differences make us vibrant.

But we have a lot in common too. In Humboldt, we are resilient. We are community-minded. We are nature lovers. We're all a little bit quirky, and we know how to be scrappy. We may all be a little bit stubborn, but we all love Humboldt fiercely. Our commonalities make us strong.

Humboldt County is at a unique crossroads. From offshore wind and Nordic Aquafarms to Cal Poly Humboldt and a trans-fiber cable, we have several unprecedented opportunities at our doorstep. The pandemic's lasting impacts and other ongoing community challenges will continue to change the landscape of our economy. In light of this, we need to ask our community—what are our priorities? What are our biggest barriers to thriving? How can we make our region more resilient?

This report summarizes the answers to those questions based on the community outreach efforts for Humboldt County's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, or CEDS. The key takeaways and themes from the conversations, survey results and community roadshow participants are a great starting point for our community to understand better where our community's priorities are and how we want to move forward. While this may not reflect the diversity of all perspectives and experiences in our County, this community outreach report is built to be a tool that:

- Offers insights to key decision-makers across our county
- Sparks conversations about how economic development impacts us all
- Informs our economic development strategies moving forward

We intentionally began this process by listening. To create an effective and inclusive economic development strategy, we need to know what community members are experiencing, their priorities, and their insights on the strengths and weaknesses of our county. If and when we come together, we are confident that we will see Humboldt Rising.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH APPROACH

We started our community outreach efforts in May 2022 with a variety of activities designed to get a candid snapshot of where our community is right now. Our goals in our outreach efforts included:

- Seeking out underrepresented voices and perspectives by going out into the community.
- Understanding the community’s biggest concerns and priorities by asking a variety of open-ended questions.
- Broadening the public’s perspective of what economic development means through informal conversations.
- Using story-gathering, interactive question boards, and facilitated discussion to capture themes for our community vision.

We were most successful in getting candid and nuanced responses from a wide range of community members in tabling at community events—meeting people where they were, in other words.

We had lower turnouts and a lack of diversity represented in our community roadshow events. While multiple factors contributed to this, one theme emerged as important feedback to consider moving forward. Several people shared frustration over a lack of results from past efforts. “We did this five years ago and shared all of our ideas, and then nothing changed. Why go through the effort again?”

OUTREACH	DETAILS	OUTCOME
Online Survey	A seven-question survey open to the public, asking for feedback on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 86 Survey Participants • 1,993 website views
Community Events	Set up a booth with interactive questions and informal conversations around Humboldt County’s quality of life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 Events • Over 350+ conversations
Storytelling Interviews	Individual interviews, getting personal perspectives intersecting with Humboldt County economic drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 One on One interviews • 22 video interviews
Community Roadshows	In-person events throughout the County with World Cafe conversations discussing 14 economic drivers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 Roadshows* • 125 total participants

*Events were hosted in Southern Humboldt, Eel River Valley, Greater Eureka Area, Arcata-McKinleyville Area, and Trinidad. The Hoopa/Willow Creek Roadshow was postponed to early November due to wildfires and is not represented in this report.

SUMMARY OF DATA

What should we prioritize as a community?

In our in-person community events and roadshows, we asked people what they thought were the highest priorities we should focus on as a county. Participants could choose their top three priorities, based on the categories listed below. We had a total of 289 people participate.

1 | COMMUNITY SUPPORT (261 votes)

Education, Housing, Childcare, Healthcare, workforce programs, etc.

2 | CLIMATE RESILIENCY (148 votes)

Green Practices, Programs, and Industries; Mitigating the impacts of climate change, Fire, Drought, and Sea Level Rise

3 | EQUITABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (139 votes)

Addressing inequities and ensuring every member of our community is able to share in and benefit from economic growth

4 | LEADING INDUSTRIES (124 votes)

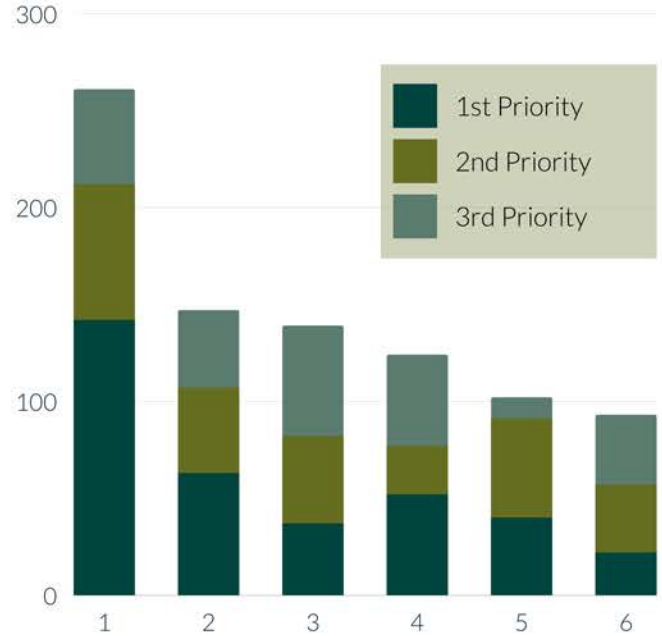
Arts/Culture, Tourism, Agriculture, Forest Products, Food and Beverage, etc.

5 | PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE (102 votes)

Transportation, Broadband, Public Utilities

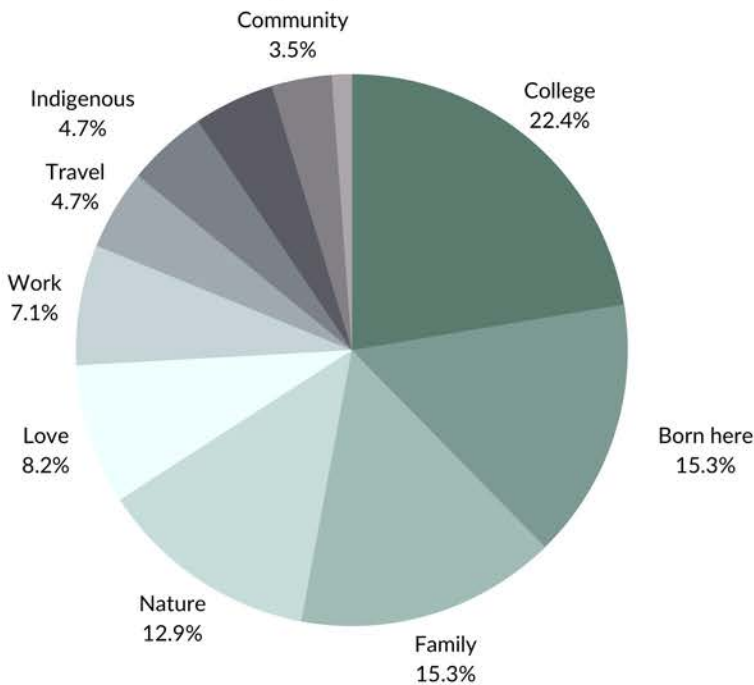
6 | EMERGING INDUSTRIES (93 votes)

Offshorewind, Solar, Aquaculture, Tech, etc.

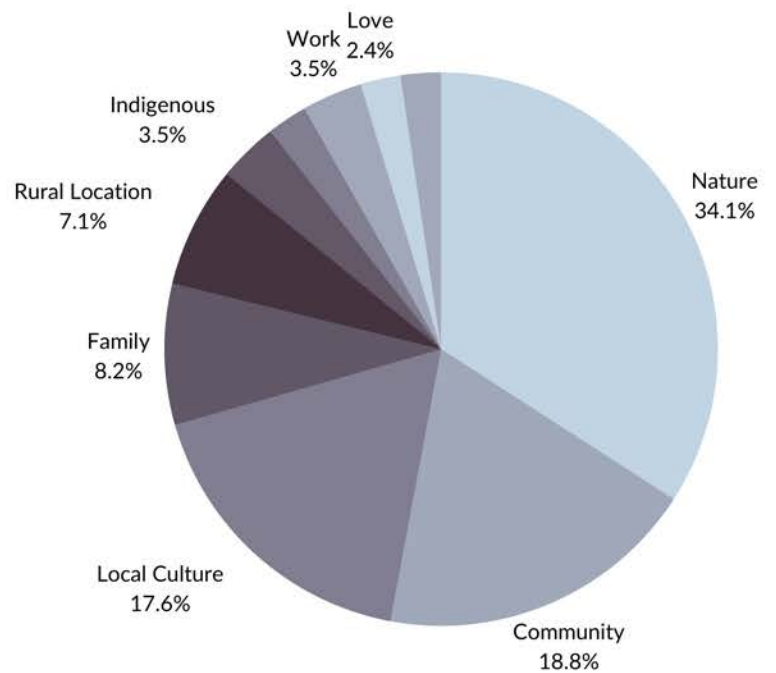


We also asked people to describe what brought them in Humboldt, as well as what keeps them here. This interactive question often sparked a conversation getting to the heart of what draws us to this place, and the challenges of living here. We captured 85 responses to these questions.

What brought you to Humboldt?



What keeps you in Humboldt?



COMMUNITY SUPPORT

By the Numbers

30%

Of participants said Community Support should be one of our top priorities (261)

124

Separate mentions of Housing or Healthcare in online surveys

14/14

Economic Driver Tables mentioned a community services challenge in their discussion

“Healthy families must be our biggest priority. If we don’t take care of our most vulnerable people we will always have suffering. By taking care of them it gives everyone more opportunity.”

Community Support was the highest priority identified from community outreach efforts and encompasses the systems, industries, and network of support needed for all individuals in our community. Access to affordable housing emerged as our most urgent need for economic development and quality of life. Inadequate healthcare support was another often-mentioned challenge for our county, with the workforce and streamlined services such as child care, elderly care, and wellness service providers. Education is another community support component, including early childhood, K-12, trade schools, and higher education.

Key Takeaways

- Addressing the gaps in community support needs of our current population was a theme across the comments. With factors such as climate refugees, increasing workforce opportunities, and rising student population, access to housing and healthcare will continue to be a key challenge.
- Affordable housing, healthcare, a liveable wage, and a sense of belonging and safety are harder to access and hold onto for black and brown bodies. The pandemic amplified this inequity. One participant recommended initiatives such as “asset mapping, research, and awareness/education to better understand the needs of oppressed people in our communities.”
- Mental health was identified as an underlying challenge across many economic drivers. During community events such as Bigfoot Daze and Friday Night Markets, many people discussed the community support category as a significant challenge to living in Humboldt County. “We have to address (housing and healthcare) first before we can focus on other opportunities.”

HOUSING

- Housing was the topic most frequently mentioned across all community outreach efforts. Several contributing factors to inadequate housing stock for our current population were identified, such as:
 - Available housing is being bought up by vacation rental property investors.
 - Many aging homes need renovations, but accessing/affording the skilled labor to make improvements is difficult.
 - There is a pervasive “NIMBY” (Not in my backyard) mindset around housing solutions.
 - Several comments mentioned the red tape and difficulties around permitting and regulation for the development.
 - Rapidly rising property values are making home ownership out of reach for many.
- Many community members identified concerns about the compounding challenges around our housing that are on our doorstep. “We can expect an increase in population with Cal Poly, climate refugees, and an increasing workforce around new industries like Nordic, the windfarm, and broadband/tech. Where will they live?”
- Participants mentioned existing initiatives that are helping, such as the Eureka Earth Center, Arcata Gateway plan, and incentivizing ADU units are helping us take steps towards reimagining what housing could look like, given our constraints. One survey responder recommended, “closely collaborating with the CERC Housing Group to identify issues and actions that can be taken on a regional level.”
- Participants mentioned the need to create housing to suit different categories of people and a variety of housing needs, including homeless individuals, affordable housing options for students/renters, first-time homebuyers, our aging population, urban housing, and rural housing.

HEALTHCARE

- Inadequate healthcare was a typical comment across all community outreach efforts. Some people drive out of the area to see a doctor or specialist, while others put off routine care, which leads to compounding issues. Community feedback highlighted the need for more healthcare services at every level, including mental health, medical care, specialists, dental, and skilled nursing/assisted living.
- The healthcare industry is one of our biggest employers, but we struggle to attract, retain, and support our healthcare workforce. Lack of adequate housing, lower wages and benefits packages, and quality of life support creates a “revolving door” effect. Those we do attract often don’t stay. Short staffing creates lower quality of care and a rise in burnout among these essential workers.
- Several individuals mentioned looking for creative, proactive ways to leverage our existing healthcare assets, specifically:
 - Increasing access to telehealth medicine.
 - Recognizing and leveraging our natural strengths in holistic health/well-being with access to nature, local healthy food, and strong arts and culture.
 - Attracting “mobile” or part-time specialists.
 - Improving current medical organizations’ communication, public outreach, and patient care through better communication and updated technology for patient support.
 - Building a “no wrong door” approach to get people the care they need, no matter where they go to start that process.
- The pandemic highlighted existing challenges in our healthcare system. Many people talked about prioritizing support to help our community be resilient, particularly around these topics
 - “High rates of ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) in our county, which is tied to many community challenges.” The pandemic exposed many children to more adverse experiences. We need to be proactive about creating trauma-informed care for youth.
 - The pandemic disproportionately affected people of color, people experiencing poverty and homelessness, and the elderly. How can we create a network of support to help those who need it most access health and well-being?
- We must practice response plans for other pandemics and communication channels for public health updates.

EDUCATION

- Community members pointed to the quality and leadership of our existing education organizations. Our local tribes have a lot of expertise that our education systems can/should partner with. Organizations focusing on early childhood do incredible work and create industry-leading initiatives to support and strengthen our childcare industry. The Humboldt County Office of Education’s Decade of Difference was an innovative success.
- There were a lot of comments about excitement and optimism regarding Humboldt’s California Polytechnic designation and the “game-changing opportunities” to help support industry, innovation, and community support. However, people mentioned a sense of disconnection between efforts and knowledge within the university and the needs of the community. As one participant put it “When it comes to the issues our community is facing, Cal Poly Humboldt is not separate from the communities around it.”
- From early childhood to higher education, people commented on the need for innovative educational experiences for learners, including:
 - Access to broadband to engage in 21st-century learning.
 - Hands-on learning experiences that connect students with the community and Extracurricular activities.
 - Support skilled labor and the trades through technical school experiences.
- COVID highlighted existing needs and created new challenges for students at every level. Specific comments included our need for the following:
 - Better access to technology for our students, especially low-income.
 - Academic and social-emotional support (trauma-informed care).
 - More teacher support and the need for better wages, benefits, mental health, pay, and classroom resources.

“The biggest stumbling block I see is insufficient health care from primary care through hospital support of specialists. That means we have some very fine specialists that do not have sufficient well-staffed and adequately paid nurses at hospitals and aftercare facilities. We desperately need more primary care providers, independent, clinics, and mobile.”

CLIMATE RESILIENCE

By the Numbers

17%

Of participants said Climate Resilience should be one of our top priorities (148)

39

Separate mentions of Climate Resilience in online surveys

9/14

Economic Driver Tables mentioned climate resilience in their discussion

“The multifaceted issue of Climate Change will be one of the biggest topics our county will see in the next 5 years. We will need to continue to rise to the challenges brought on by the physical and financial implications of climate change. I am not sure the means of how to do this but we need to continue to make our economy an economy that values and supports sustainable sources of food, housing, energy, jobs, and other vital aspects of a thriving community.”

Focusing on climate resilience was the second highest priority of those participating in our community outreach efforts. As an economic driver, this encompasses proactive plans to conserve natural resources, protect our local ecosystems, and prepare for natural disasters. Humboldt County has several new economic opportunities and emerging industries that we need to consider. We are seeing an increase in economic development within renewable energy solutions, and investing in these opportunities will strengthen our economy.

Key Takeaways

- Humboldt County has a lot of strengths when it comes to climate resilience. Our natural resources and ideal location sets us up for success—our ocean, trees, access to open green spaces, a lower population, clean air, and healthy local watersheds. We have local tribal leadership that models innovative regenerative practices and Cal Poly Humboldt is a resource for implementing best practices and research. We are poised to be leaders in climate resilience if we can create a cohesive and holistic community-wide approach.
- A majority of participants expressed an urgency to prioritize systemic and individual changes to mitigate climate impact, and a desire to create a unified and impactful approach. Others expressed frustration over government overreach and increased regulations around environmental policy.
- Participants requested a county-wide plan to address local climate impact challenges such as water conservation, wildfires, and rising sea levels. “If Humboldt County gets cut off from a natural disaster, we need to be ready to be self-sufficient with food and other resources.” Several comments also mentioned the need for Emergency Response and Resilience practice and training.
- Several comments expressed a need to improve and incentivize green transportation, including more bike-friendly communities with bicycle/pedestrian-friendly infrastructure and electric charging stations for cars and buses.
- There is excitement around the offshore wind project, as “a beacon for the future”, but several comments wondered if/how Humboldt County can make the most of this opportunity. We need to ensure we have the infrastructure on land and in the bay to accommodate this, and be strategic about how we facilitate and leverage this opportunity and “ensure that those new elements of our economy actually benefit the people who need the benefit.”

EQUITABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

By the Numbers

16%

Of participants said Equitable Economic Development should be one of our top 3 priorities (102)

9/14

Economic Driver Tables mentioned equity challenges in their discussion

9/14

Economic Driver Tables mentioned workforce challenges in their discussion

“Start by listening. Start with recognizing indigenous sovereignty. Take the initiative to educate yourself, develop a growth mindset, and be willing to be uncomfortable, before reaching out to have a dialogue with disadvantaged people. Too often, people in power come in with an agenda—they say “this is what we’re doing, want to have a meeting about it in two weeks.” That’s not how you share power, that’s not how you collaborate.”

Humboldt County attracts people with a strong entrepreneurial spirit, and we proudly claim grit, scrappiness, and creativity as our shared identity. With local changes such as the CalPoly Humboldt designation and the Trans-Pacific Fiber Cable, our county has exciting new opportunities to strengthen our economy. This category includes our business infrastructure, the systems, and organizations that support economic well-being. Economic development must be addressed through the lens of equity—we can’t separate economic development from addressing systemic inequities for BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and other disadvantaged and historically underserved communities. Attracting, training, and supporting a diverse workforce is also integral to sustainable economic growth.

BUSINESS INFRASTRUCTURE

- We have several success stories of these businesses going on to have international success, although we don’t always do a good job of highlighting this narrative.
- Several participants mentioned the quality of organizations and systems of support that currently exist for our business community. Specific business-facing organizations (Northern California SBDC, Chambers of Commerce, Humboldt Area Foundation, Cal Poly Humboldt, Ink People, Humboldt Made) and lending institutions (AEDC, RREDC, Credit Unions, local banks) were mentioned.
- Despite the challenges of the pandemic to local business owners, we are experiencing some silver linings. Lots of grant and funding opportunities were available through COVID Relief funds. Comments highlighted our community’s high value of supporting local businesses and the heightened public awareness around shopping locally.
- Participants identified several challenges that prevent entrepreneurs from growing and thriving. Specific issues mentioned include:
 - Hiring qualified candidates and retaining a motivated workforce.
 - Gaps in business infrastructure include a food hub, cold storage, diverse exporting options, 5G WiFi and broadband access, and outdated buildings.
 - Overregulation, red tape, and the limits on business and development across many industries foster the perception that Humboldt is not business development friendly.
 - Siloed and overworked leaders—causing a lack of cohesive marketing or vision and fragmentation of efforts.
 - In many areas, especially Southern Humboldt and more rural areas of the county, the collapsing cannabis industry has had a negative ripple effect on businesses, and many are struggling to keep their doors open.

EQUITABLE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

EQUITY

- Some participants mentioned community progress and the increased conversations and awareness around diversity, equity, and inclusion. Throughout the comments, there was a consensus that our community still has a long way to go to ensure that Humboldt County is a supportive place for all bodies to access resources for thriving. Unacknowledged privilege remains largely unchecked and these blindspots actively cause harm.
- A noticeable lack of diverse individuals were present at the community roadshows. Despite outreach efforts, most roadshows did not accurately reflect the diversity of our community. Many participants observed and shared concerns about this, stressing the need to build and repair trust. The Latinx community, tribal members, LGBTQIA+, people of color, and differently-abled individuals were specific groups mentioned.
- One online survey respondent noted the need for more resources and support from local bodies, as DEI “efforts currently rely too much on the oppressed to act.” We need more acknowledgment and accountability from leadership to make meaningful changes and address equity challenges.

WORKFORCE

- Almost every industry indicated a struggle to attract and retain a workforce. It’s challenging to attract specialists and higher-level employees because of our lack of amenities. Those who do come don’t always stay. Hiring and keeping a motivated workforce in the hospitality and service industries is challenging. Many who want to stay in our area for access to nature and community mentioned these challenging “tradeoffs” such as:
 - Lack of support such as housing, healthcare, and childcare.
 - Lower wages (the “Humboldt discount”) and mediocre benefits packages.
 - Perceived and real lack of career-level opportunities.
- People mentioned the challenge of a changing and transitioning workforce. Specifically, with the decline of small cannabis operations, “many are scrambling to find a new occupation,” and with an aging/retiring workforce, many businesses need help with succession planning.
- Post-pandemic, our workforce has different needs, expectations, and boundaries. Participants mentioned challenges such as:
 - An increase in mental health challenges, burnout, and feeling stretched thin.
 - Employers struggling to get employees back to work or retain employees (challenges with “The Great Resignation” happening throughout the country).
- Many comments emphasized the need to strengthen the workforce pipeline with education and training. We should be “marketing and highlighting the existing workforce programs and efforts already in place,” but participants suggested increasing support for incoming workforce needs, including:
 - Leading industries such as construction, agriculture, healthcare, and tourism.
 - Training for emerging industries such as aquaculture, wind farms, and remote workers.
 - Programming for employers to improve employee engagement, DEI training, morale, and mentorship programs in the workplace.
 - Programs or clinics to improve relevant employee skills—technology, marketing, hospitality/customer service.

“The cannabis industry’s painful restructuring will continue to be a hot topic. The new commodity prices simply won’t support the previous workforce. Artisanal business models will emerge, but without employment at prior levels. All efforts should be to transition the majority of workers into other employment.”

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

By the Numbers

12%

Of participants said physical infrastructure should be one of our top 3 priorities (102)

1/3

Of in-person participants (14) said they weren't satisfied with their current broadband service.

48

Separate mentions of physical infrastructure in the online survey

“There is a very strong ‘Not in my backyard’ attitude here, especially in vocal (perhaps minor, but very organized) groups adamantly opposed to change here. We see it each time someone tries to bring in a large business (with the potential tax base growth and new jobs), or when efforts are made to build infrastructure into Humboldt... there is a very loud opposition to growth here. As long as that voice continues to rule the narrative, things aren't going to change.”

This category includes the physical structures required for an economy to function and survive, such as a transportation network, broadband access, and public utilities such as energy, water, sewer, and waste management. Particularly with the trends of an increasing population and new incoming opportunities, comments stressed the importance of addressing our physical infrastructure gaps and taking a proactive approach to improving existing infrastructure, specifically through the lens of resilience for future natural disasters.

TRANSPORTATION

- When it comes to infrastructure, we have “tremendous public involvement to identify issues and fix them.” Even so, several comments expressed the need to build capacity through grant writing, technical assistance, and more permanent sources of funding.
- Some participants emphasized the need to ensure additional infrastructure initiatives consider the environmental impact. In contrast, others felt that permitting and environmental regulations, particularly with so many different jurisdictions, make “lots of hoops to jump through. Regulators should work regionally and streamline processes.”
- We must be proactive about improving infrastructure because “any large disaster will emphasize that we are a geographic island.”
- Participants in rural areas, particularly those in unincorporated communities, shared frustration with overdue road maintenance, particularly in Southern Humboldt and Scenic Drive near Trinidad.
- Several people commented on improving multimodal transportation—making walkable urban areas and viable biking corridors, as well as increasing public transportation. “If we look at transportation and the economy, making it so you don't have to have a car is a major win. The average person spends 10k/year on owning and maintaining a private vehicle. This is an easy, obvious way to boost the local economy. Support the infrastructure for bikes, walking, transit.”

BROADBAND

- Thanks to leadership that doesn't give up, we now have far more resilient broadband than we did previously. We have several current initiatives that will continue to improve this.
- Participants identified opportunities to increase access, including:
 - Basic Cell services throughout the county
 - Free wi-fi and Google Fiber for downtown/urban settings
 - Community services districts and more rural areas
 - For low-income households, homeless population, and students
- Several comments requested making the public more aware of the process and timeline and being more proactive about promoting the progress. Locally, we want to clearly understand what is happening and how it will directly impact us. Externally, we want to be proactive about attracting tech companies and innovative entrepreneurs to come!

LEADING INDUSTRIES

By the Numbers

14%

Of participants said Leading Industries should be one of our top 3 priorities (124)

35

Separate mentions of Leading Industries in online surveys

Local businesses and activities, especially those that support and honor the unique environment here, are the heart of our community.

Humboldt has an enviable regional development pipeline. It seems that economic growth is locked in and basically needs program management to facilitate and leverage. The challenge remains whether this will be boom-and-bust, boom-and-decline (gentrification), or sustainable longterm growth. I grew up in Santa Cruz county and can attest to the unwanted consequences of 40 years of under-managed growth.

Humboldt County has many established industries that directly impact our economic development. As identified in the 2009-2019 Targets of Opportunity Industry Cluster Study, industries such as tourism, specialty food and beverage, niche manufacturing, and forest products are experiencing growth in wages and employment. Humboldt County is set up for success with the blue economy, encompassing our ocean import-export, fishing, and water-centered tourism. We want to ensure we are supporting and optimizing the economic opportunities for these industries.

(Note: the Targets of Opportunity Study also identifies diversified health care, building and systems construction, investment support services, and management and innovation services as industry growth clusters, but are accounted for in other categories.)

Key Takeaways

- We are proud of our world-renowned reputation in several of our leading industries. Our natural environment makes this an internationally sought destination for tourists. We boast the highest artists per capita, and “many artists are able to actually live off their efforts.” Humboldt County has an established infrastructure and legacy expertise within the forestry industry. We are recognized nationally for excellence in our locally produced food and beverage industry, including beer, cider, seafood, oysters, and dairy. Alongside those accomplishments, participants identified that our local perception can skew towards the negative and that we don’t do a good job of sharing the stories of our success.
- Each leading industry identified challenges in hiring and retaining a workforce to scale and grow. One participant mentioned that many of our higher education programs “aren’t set up to help graduates to enter our local workforce, so many leave. While taking on an intern is a lot of work, we need to build bridges between our higher education and the real-world experiences in our local economy.”
- Across various leading industries, there was a theme of needing to “de-silo efforts” and to work collaboratively to increase our impact and success.
 - Tourism needs a more cohesive marketing effort. One of our biggest barriers to growth is our “fractured/individualistic approach to reaching tourists outside of the area.”
 - Within the Forest Products industry, one participant mentioned that “different parts of the industry are very siloed” and that the industry would benefit from increased regional and national partnerships.
 - For both niche manufacturing and specialty food and beverages, participants identified opportunities to combine efforts, collaborate to increase purchasing power, and share training and best practices that foster an incubator environment.
- There was a shared desire to move towards sustainable practices across all leading industries. Several comments referred to a need for sustainable thinking and away from an “extractive mindset” in our tourism-facing businesses. A few comments encouraged “expanding our view of what forest products are and the sustainable solutions this industry could offer” to mitigate the impacts of wildfire damage. Participants discussing niche manufacturing recommended researching ways to incentivize carbon neutrality. Within the agriculture industry, participants discussed ways to reduce waste.

LEADING INDUSTRIES

TOURISM, ARTS & CULTURE

As one participant described tourism, “growth isn’t the challenge; it’s managing that growth in sustainable ways.” Participants mentioned a couple of strategies to strengthen and diversify our tourism industry, including:

- Continuing to increase our current tourism efforts, and leveraging shoulder and off seasons.
- Taking advantage of our cannabis reputation and creating a marketing campaign to make our region a boutique experience “like France or Napa has done within the wine industry.”
- Attracting more cruise ships, and expanding our strategy around blue-economy tourism.
- Showcasing our rich arts culture. Artisan fairs and events, murals, and the marble hunt were specifically mentioned.
- Expanding our trail system and other tourism recreational assets will also benefit residents' quality of life (trails, disc golf, biking, outdoor activities). Similarly, several comments called out a need to improve and beautify key areas in the community to attract tourists, especially where there is crime, abandoned storefronts, and other indicators of blight.

FOREST PRODUCTS

Within the Forest Products industry, participants mentioned that “locally-owned forestry businesses are well-managed, and a mix of ownership types makes the land and the industry more resilient.” Comments about this industry cluster centered around reimagining this “legacy industry” to be more innovative and sustainable.

- There is some negative public perception around logging and misunderstanding of the industry’s goal for caring for it. More public outreach and positive storytelling around sustainable practices and care would help.
- Partnering with Cal Poly and investing in R&D efforts, especially around carbon sequestration tracking and developing more creative uses for biomass waste. How can we lead our country in efforts that “lead to thinning forests, increasing forest health, creating an environment for innovative forest products”?
- Utilizing traditional native American practices for forest management, as “education about those practices leads to more interest and engagement.”

BLUE ECONOMY

As a coastal community, “we have always shared a great history from and for the blue economy.” We are poised to lead in developing sustainable ways to use our ocean resources for economic growth and ocean ecosystem health.

- Humboldt County is set up for success with the blue economy due to our deepwater port, healthy watersheds, marinas, beaches, and waterfront areas. Both Cal Poly Humboldt and the College of the Redwoods support aquaculture through the lens of sustainability. Many of our blue economy businesses, such as oyster farms and fisheries, get positive media attention for their sustainable approach.
- Ocean-based crops such as kelp and seaweed offer another economic opportunity within the blue economy and could offer jobs to support “the graying fleet, people close to retirement.”
- Participants mentioned the opportunity for growth within the tourism sector of the blue economy. Certain businesses like Kayak Trinidad or Humboldt Bay Oyster Tours help tourists feature ocean/bay-centric excursions, such as:
 - More sustainable ocean tourism efforts centered on wildlife (whale watching, guided fishing, bird watching) and education (an aquarium, marine biology tours, and tribal-centered ecotourism).
 - Several comments suggested improving our outreach to attract more cruise ships and ensuring that the experiences we offer cruise ship tourists are excellent.
 - Some comments identified a struggling or slowing down economy within more traditional businesses, such as commercial fishing, while there is a lot of future potential around innovative blue economy industries like Nordic Aquafarm and off-shore wind. There is tension between resistance to change from the “old guard” in the fishing industry and a lack of clear communication from different businesses, jurisdictions, and agencies around the newer industry developments.

LEADING INDUSTRIES

AGRICULTURE/SPECIALTY FOOD & BEVERAGE

“Humboldt County's economy stands out in that it can support multiple farms and a diversity of farms, especially for its size. Also, there is a lot of passion for linking different industries together to create a network of support.”

- Many local farmers and businesses in this industry exemplify sustainable and regenerative practices. Participants highlighted our phenomenal local farmers and the network of local markets and CSAs.
- More infrastructure is needed for this industry, such as more commercial kitchens, cold storage, and co-packing facilities. This food hub will not only support growth and the ability to scale but will also provide food security during emergencies.
- Several participants suggested diversity of locally-owned restaurants and access to healthy, culturally diverse food. Participants mentioned food trucks, more restaurants, and local food markets. One comment pointed out that certain areas are “food deserts” and need more grocery stores in isolated communities.

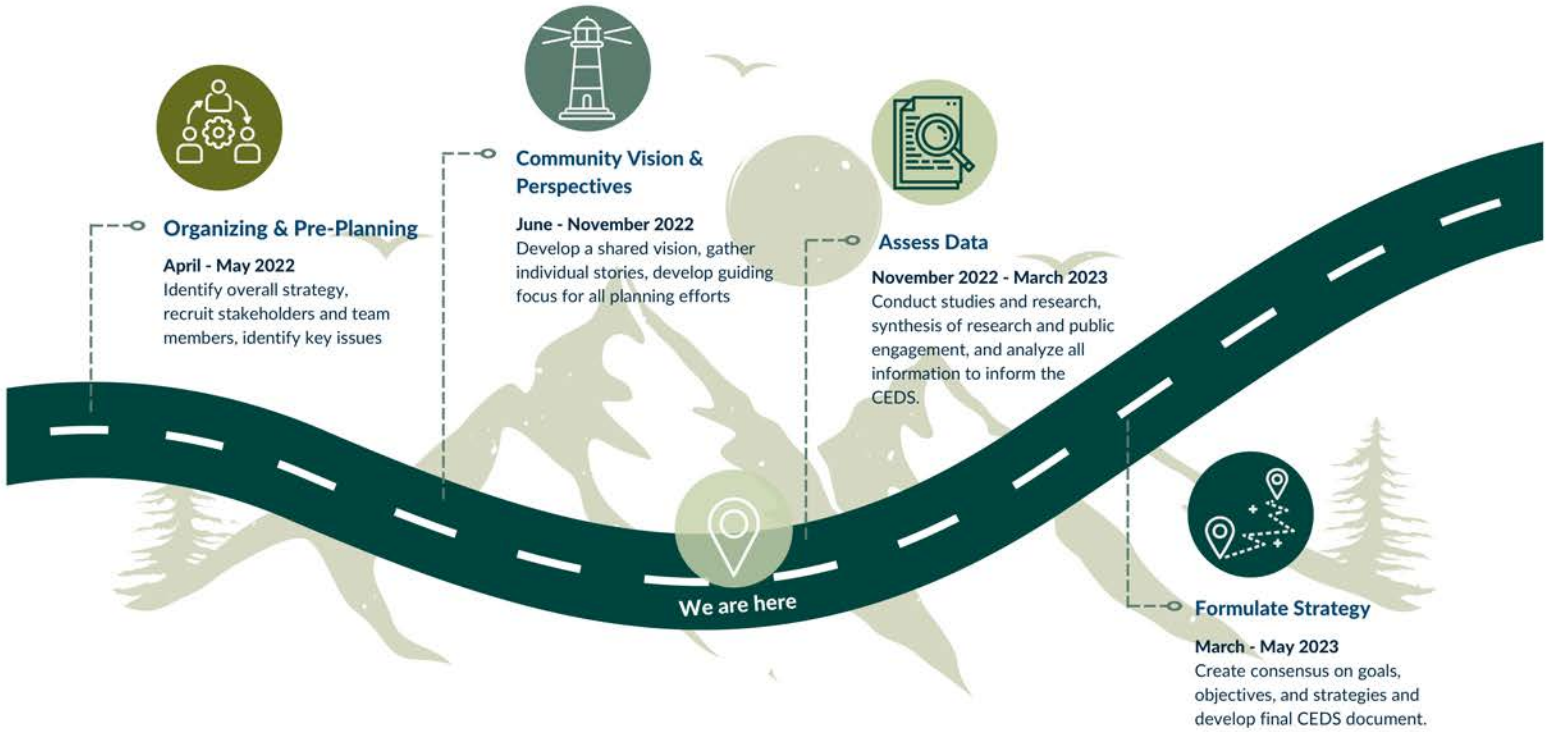
NICHE MANUFACTURING

“We have an amazing number of skilled craftsmen and artists, both modern and traditional, doing it their own way—and succeeding.” Our local culture is a great “incubator” environment for small makers to grow into internationally-successful manufacturing companies.

- Participants identified several challenges to manufacturing businesses, including:
 - Several comments pointed out our rural and isolated location—the “Redwood curtain” making it challenging to export beyond our local area.
 - Lack of a power grid to support company growth.
 - Unclear or difficult regulations.
 - High cost of goods sold for manufacturers needing to import goods.
- Participants shared a desire to increase carbon neutrality within all industries—how do we incentivize this?
- Where can we combine efforts, collaborate to increase purchasing power, share training and best practices, and foster that incubator environment for micro businesses?

Humboldt has it all. This is an area with all the qualities most people cherish. What has worked in the past will be amplified in the future. We create jobs by turning resources (dirt, worms, recycled glass, wood, fabric, goat milk, sugar, grains and creative artists) into vibrant, successful enterprises, many of which are world award-winning and recognized around the world.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?



Step 1: Listen

We are committed to hearing from all perspectives and diverse voices throughout Humboldt County because equity starts with listening. We will continue to offer a variety of ways for citizens, businesses, and organizations to share their perspectives, opinions, and insights. With conversations rooted in candid optimism, we won't shy away from the complex challenges our community is facing, but we will choose a hopeful perspective for our future.

Step 2: Develop

Based on the underlying themes and patterns in what our community is sharing, we will develop our plan for the next five years. Regional plans, such as CEDS, are what help guide decision-making at the Local, State, and Federal levels. This plan will help shape our Board of Supervisors' strategic framework, support local organizations in applying for state and federal funds, qualify our entire region for funding through the Economic Development Administration (EDA), and act as an informational guide to how Humboldt County prospers.

Step 3: Rise

Completing the CEDS is only the beginning. Drawing on our differences and collaborating around our commonalities, Humboldt County will continue to take steps toward our outlined goals. We know effective change doesn't happen overnight, but through incremental progress, we are confident that Humboldt will continue to progress into a place that we feel proud to call home.

Stay involved and get the latest updates in our economic development process by visiting HumboldtRising.com. For more information, email Economic Development Coordinator Dianna Rios at drios@co.humboldt.ca.us.