

Recreation & Tourism Working Group Meeting Recaps

Updated: June 16th, 2026

Arts, Culture, & Placemaking

June 15th

Presenting Projects:

- [Eastern Sierra Regional Trail System and Job Creation](#)
- [Sierra Seven Arts Alliance](#)

High-Level Recap:

- Participants emphasized that “places that cause pause” are the connective tissue that allows residents and visitors to form deeper relationships with place, other and the economy.
- Many of the spaces and assets needed for vibrant arts and placemaking already exist across the seven counties; the gap is one of strategy, connectivity, and visibility.
- Placemaking that serves residents and placemaking that serves visitors are not the same project. The region needs placemaking that increases local belonging, income, food security, youth opportunity and stewardship initiatives, not only placemaking that markets to outside audiences.

Key Actions for Arts, Culture, & Placemaking

- Treat placemaking initiatives as economic development pillars with measurable ROI.
- Activate empty and underutilized spaces like storefronts, public building, and underutilized civic spaces as platforms for placemaking, drawing on creative reuse models, art walks, and empty storefront programs.
- Integrate arts into county and regional planning through codified language and dedicated funding mechanisms in the same way that other economic sectors are recognized.
- Elevate the visibility of tribal artists through place stewarding

Top Five Immediate Priorities for Arts, Culture, & Placemaking

- Develop a regional connectivity and awareness strategy that surfaces existing arts, cultural, and placemaking assets across the seven counties.
- Fund arts and cultural plans at the county and city level across all seven counties.
- Elevate tribal artists and cultural infrastructure within regional placemaking and visitor engagement strategies.
- Invest in downtown built environments as anchors for arts and cultural programming.
- Educate local government leaders and policymakers about the

Tensions That Must be Addressed:

- Navigating visitor facing vs. resident facing placemaking initiatives.
- Finding creative ways and steady funding avenues to carry this work forward.

To see all meeting materials, the full recording, and original comments gathered from Working Group Participants on June 15th [visit the website](#).

Workforce Development

May 18th

Presenting Projects:

- [Pathways to Prosperity: Motherlode Bicycle Coalition](#)
- [Sustainable Mobility Partnership Program](#)

High-Level Recap:

- Participants connected the workforce conversation to structural questions of how seasonal recreation and tourism jobs can be knit together into year-round, sustainable career pathways
- The region lacks middle management and supervisor-level talent needed to scale important projects, a gap that is clearly connected to housing and training pipeline shortcomes.
- Housing was repeatedly named as a central barrier to workforce development, with cost of living and seasonality compounding the challenge of attracting and retaining qualified workers.

Key Actions to Enhance Workforce Capacity:

- Knit seasonal roles into year-round employment by introducing collaboration across recreation operators, ski resorts, operators, event organizers, forestry programs, & small business owners.
- Use Challenge Cost Share agreements and similar mechanisms to supplement the loss of federal workforce capacity on public lands.
- Partner with regional institutions to develop management and leadership training that addresses the supervisor-level talent gap.
- Build training programs that recognize transferable skills between wildfire resilience, recreation, hospitality, and trades to open career ladders for workers seeking higher-paying opportunities.

Top Five Priorities for Workforce Development:

- Establish year-round employment models that combine seasonal recreation and tourism patterns with natural resource and skilled labor roles.
- Address workforce housing across the seven counties as a foundation for workforce investment.
- Build guest service/frontline training programs to improve the visitor experience and retention.
- Create youth internship & entrepreneurship pathways that allow workers to build balanced work lives in the region.
- Develop a regional hub or housing entity capable of addressing workforce housing needs.

Tensions That Must Be Addressed:

- Address how organizations should navigate the gap between large-scale funding opportunities and local project needs and a path for building sustainable programs.
- Determine pathways for enhanced regional coordination to enhance workforce development.

To see all meeting materials, the full recording, and original comments gathered from Working Group Participants on May 18th [visit the website.](#)

Climate Resilience

April 20th

Presenting Projects:

- [Collaborative Sustainable Recreation Assessment: SNA, WWA, and FOI](#)
- [Creative Reuse of Creative Arts Center; Tuolumne County Arts Alliance](#)

High-Level Recap:

- Climate change is already reshaping how tourism-dependent communities operate, compressing seasons, shifting visitor patterns, and straining capacity in real time.
- Rural gateway communities are on the front lines of climate adaptation, but receive little support relative to the burden of sustaining these landscapes.
- Climate resiliency is inseparable from organizational capacity. A region cannot adapt to a changing climate without the people, funding, and institutional infrastructure to respond.

Actions for Climate Resiliency in the Sierra Region:

- Establish congruency between assets promoted and experiences on the ground.
- DMOs and recreation organizations are pivoting messaging and programming to support shoulder-season and midweek visitation as snowpack becomes unreliable, with the goal of supporting a resilient and year-round visitor economy.
- Connecting outdoor access to physical and mental health outcomes, not just as a values statement, but as a financing strategy. Health system community benefit spending is an underutilized resource that aligns directly with recreation workforce and infrastructure investment.
- Leverage climate and climate-adjacent funding for broader recreation and workforce goals through recognizing rural tourism as essential infrastructure for climate resilience.
- Foster more support from local governments and explore revenue generation potential.

Top Five Priorities for Climate Resiliency:

- Recognition of outdoor recreation and tourism as economic drivers in rural communities.
- Local government investment in NGOs on the front lines of climate adaptation.
- Support for expanded staff capacity to pursue climate grants.
- Infrastructure for funding cross-sector communication and coordination, because information-sharing is itself a climate resiliency tool.

Tensions That Must Be Addressed:

- Recognize rural gateway communities as providers of public goods and fund them accordingly.
- Adjust funding opportunities away from scale and speed and towards piloting approaches tailored to rural communities.

To see all meeting materials, the full recording, and original comments gathered from Working Group Participants on April 20th [visit the website.](#)



Regional Identity and Funding

March 16th

Presenting Projects:

- [Sierra Sourced; Tuolumne County Chamber](#)
- [Gold Rush Path; Tuolumne County Transportation Commission](#)

High Level Recap

- Participants zeroed in on how to actually move projects from idea to reality, tying funding strategies to a stronger regional identity.
- Funding does not line up cleanly with local needs, and even when it does, long-term maintenance money and lack of capacity
- Participants zeroed in on how to actually move projects from idea to reality, tying funding strategies to a stronger regional identity.

Actions for Capacity and Advocacy:

- Utilize consultants, non-profit developers, and fiscal agents to help backfill where public agencies might be understaffed
- Partner with entities like Career Nexus and local community colleges to train and hire locally based staff for recreation and tourism
- Leverage the region's role as a primary water provider into an identity that resonates with

Top Five Immediate Priorities:

- Develop standard protocols that allow prioritized projects to streamline work to nimble non-profit entities when necessary.
- Deploy asymmetrical capacity by pre-vetting a roster of consultants, contractors, and non-profit developers who can backfill for public agencies or sustain projects during reimbursement periods.
- Scaling sustainable recreation tours for legislators to advocate for capacity building.
- Determine who is best positioned to raise the region's voice at the state level.
- Integrate a general resource narrative which connects the Sierra's health to CA's urban centers.

Tensions That Must Be Addressed:

- Balancing the need for a unified regional identity without losing the uniqueness of local spaces.
- Addressing the risk that a regional model may favor jurisdictions that already have the most capacity or population, leaving disinvested or less populous communities behind.
- Bridge the gap between how residents define place-based work versus how visitors and legislators perceive the region (brand-based).

To see all meeting materials, the full recording, and original comments gathered from Working Group Participants on March 16th [visit the website.](#)

Policy Barriers

February 23rd

Presenting Projects:

- [Tri-County Economic Impact Analysis of Recreation in Inyo, Mono, & Alpine Counties](#)
- [Chipmunk Canyon Existing Conditions Analysis: ESCOG](#)

High-Level Recap:

- Participants used three hypothetical scenarios to identify the policy barriers and structural gaps that prevent projects within the region from reaching shovel-ready status.
- The meeting highlighted the disconnect between the recreation assets that generate economic activity for the region, and the limited administrative capacity to execute local priorities.
- Emphasis was placed on the necessity of regional 'brokers', such as Joint Powers Authorities, NGOs, and Counties, to stand in the gap where legacy institutions cannot keep pace with regional needs.

Key Functions // Actions for Policy Navigation:

- **Invest in the net community benefits:** Use quantitative data to shift the conversation from maintenance costs to investment opportunities.
- **Institutionalize art and placemaking as assets:** Transition arts, culture, and placemaking work into foundational economic assets by pursuing formal strategic plans to ensure buy-in.

Top Five Immediate Priorities for Asset Mapping:

- Establish agreements for funding and managing work across multiple jurisdictions
- Adopt regional data playbooks to inform capital allocation and grant applications.
- Codify Arts/Cultural plans across the region
- Pursue dedicated maintenance funding.
- Explore one-stop permitting pilot projects.

Tensions That Must Be Addressed:

- **Federal Mandates vs. Local Diversification:** Navigate the policy barriers where federal decision-making limits a local community's ability to diversify the economy.
- **Public Access vs. Revenue Generation:** Balance community concerns regarding equity when transitioning from free public assets to fee-based revenue models.
- **Political Will vs. Administrative Capacity:** Managing the risk of stakeholder disenfranchisement when high-level political support fails to translate into timely approvals.

To see all meeting materials, the full recording, and original comments gathered from Working Group Participants on February 23rd [visit the website.](#)

Asset Mapping January 20th

Presenting Projects:

- [Eastern Sierra Regional Education & Recreation Jobs Creation; MLTPA](#)
- [Eastern Sierra Regional Campground Improvements & Jobs Creation; MLTPA](#)

High-Level Recap:

- Participants emphasized that the primary function of the asset mapping exercise is to catalog the existing resources for the creation of a possible unified regional ecosystem.
- The current siloed nature of funding/data prevents assets from reaching their full economic potential. More coordination across often disparate efforts is desired by participants.
- Move towards a dynamic regional service layer that integrates human capital, technical tools, and explores cross-jurisdictional funding or stewardship methods.

Key Functions // Actions for Asset Mapping:

- **Align Funding with Regional Realities:** Transition from localized/county-line spending toward regional models (e.g. ESSRP) that allow resources to flow where the impact is greatest.
- **Issue-Based Coordination:** Organize stakeholders around specific challenges, (e.g. workforce housing or trail infrastructure) to eliminate administrative duplication.
- **Institutionalize Stability:** Demonstrate institutional longevity and ground-level engagement.
- **Technical Literacy:** Bridge the digital gap and modernize grant writing and project management.

Top Five Immediate Priorities for Asset Mapping:

- Centralized GIS Inventory of Physical Assets
- Public-Public Partnership Scaling
- Technical Capacity Building
- Private Investment Incentivization
- Workforce Pipeline Integration

Tensions That Must Be Addressed:

- **Data Sharing vs. Data Security:** Balancing the need for a transparent, centralized regional database with the privacy and proprietary concerns of individual organizations.
- **Regional Vision vs. Local Burden:** Addressing the burden on local staff who must balance high-level regional planning with the day-to-day work of project execution.
- **Visitor Growth vs. Resident Sentiment:** Navigating the disconnect between tourism promotion and the local community's understanding of economic impact and quality-of-life concerns.

To see all meeting materials, the full recording, and original comments gathered from Working Group Participants on January 20th [visit the website.](#)

Regional Governance

November 17th

Presenting Projects:

- [ESSRP \(Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership\); MLTPA](#)
- [Regional Collaborative; ESCOG \(Eastern Sierra Council of Governments\)](#)

High-Level Recap:

- The primary function of the entity is relational and network driven, focused on breaking silos to facilitate conversations and foster genuine connections across sectors and geographies.
- The regional entity should be developed from the ground level, highlighting the uniqueness of each community, and should avoid imposition from outside entities.
- This entity should prioritize implementation and funding of projects, highlight common issues and advocacy across the region, and provide guidance and expertise to expedite projects and navigate barriers.

Key Functions // Action Bias of Regional Entity:

- **Action Over Planning:** Focus on implementation & funding of projects.
- **Unified Advocacy:** Focusing on common issues and advocacy across the seven counties.
- **Technical Assistance:** Expertise and guidance to expedite projects and navigate barriers.
- **Environmental Anchor:** Centralized commitment to preserve natural resources.

Top Five Immediate Priorities for a Regional Entity:

- **Secure Funding Sources**
- **Asset Mapping & Needs Assessment**
- **Relationship Building & Information Sharing**
- **Define Tribal Engagement Protocol**
- **Establish Project Prioritization Method**

Tensions the Regional Entity Must Address:

- **Control vs. Coordination:** Frame the entity as a Regional Service Layer that *enables* local action, rather than *mandating* it.
- **Speed vs. Deliberation:** Focus on "Quick Wins" and ensure follow-through on projects to build momentum while the foundational structure is allowed to evolve informally.

To see all meeting materials, the full recording, and original comments gathered from Working Group Participants on November 17th [visit the website.](#)