



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

For the meeting of: 4/28/2026

File #: 26-244

To: Board of Supervisors

From: County Administrative Office

Agenda Section: Departmental

Vote Requirement: Majority

SUBJECT:

Humboldt County Marketing Asset Inventory Analysis and Countywide Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy and Transient Occupancy Tax Fiscal Year 2026-27 Funding Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Receive a presentation on the Humboldt County marketing asset inventory analysis and Countywide Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy; and
2. Accept and adopt the attached Countywide Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy; and
3. Approve Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) allocations to be included in the fiscal year (FY) 2026-27 Proposed Budget, including Measure J, at the same level as FY 2025-26 with adjustments as outlined in the staff report.

STRATEGIC PLAN:

This action supports the following areas of your Board's Strategic Plan.

Area of Focus: A Diverse, Equitable & Robust Economy

Strategic Plan Category: 2002 - Promote a robust tourism economy

DISCUSSION:

On June 10, 2024, your Board allocated funding for a marketing asset and the development of a countywide strategic marketing framework.

In response, a Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued on Dec. 18, 2024, seeking qualified firms to conduct the inventory, access existing efforts and develop a comprehensive travel and tourism strategy. The RFP emphasized strong partner engagement and alignment with the County's tourism and economic development goals, including sustainable tourism, support for local businesses, unified branding, year-round visitation and inclusive community engagement.

The RFP closed on Jan. 22, 2025, with six proposals received. Following evaluation and staff recommendation, your board approved a professional service agreement with JayRay Ads & PR on June 13, 2025, in the amount of \$49,460.

Since then, JayRay Ads & PR has worked closely with County staff and community partners to complete this effort. This work included extensive research, two in-person site visits, 15 partner interviews, surveys of businesses, visitors and residents and a workshop with more than 45 participants. These efforts resulted in a comprehensive inventory of existing marketing assets, along with a detailed analysis and strategic recommendations.

Your Board will receive a presentation from JayRay Ads & PR outlining key findings and the proposed strategic framework. The strategy directly advances the county's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) and Board's Strategic Plan by establishing a framework for developing a unified brand and messaging, recommending governance structures such as a Tourism Advisory Board and identifying best practices for destination marketing. It also makes recommendations for integrating Indigenous cultural literacy and promotes a coordinated, triple-bottom-line approach to tourism.

Beyond tourism, the strategy supports broader economic objectives, including business attraction and retention and workforce development and recruitment. It highlights Humboldt County's quality of life and natural and cultural assets, while promoting responsible visitation that preserves these resources.

Implementation is designed as a phased approach, with the strategy spanning five years. For the upcoming FY, staff recommend maintaining current funding levels as a transitional period. This will allow the initiation of key actions, including establishment of a Tourism Advisory Board, developing a shared media asset library and issuing a Request for Proposals for a Destination Strategy Organization (DSO).

It should be noted that the scope of what was originally funded in FY 2025-26 expanded significantly when in the second quarter Economic Development, with the support of the County Administrative Office (CAO), assumed the responsibility for assets and administrative functions previously managed by the Humboldt County Visitors Bureau (HCVB). These assets alone are expected to exceed \$86,000 in annual costs, \$94,000 in staff time including Economic Development and the CAO - Public Information Team and county cost plan and internal service fund charges anticipated at \$23,000 for a total of \$203,000 just to maintain the existing assets in the interim period. This was not an anticipated expense or responsibility during prior funding allocations.

Economic Development staff continue to oversee nine Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) partner contracts with \$25,000 of recommended ongoing funding for staff to manage these contracts. In addition, Economic Development is also tasked with the Humboldt Lodging Alliance Tourism Business Improvement District and revenue generating initiatives in partnership with the Department of Aviation, formerly Project SOAR, with no associated funding.

A summary of the FY 2025-26 approved allocation is below:

TOT FY 2025-26

	Base TOT	Measure J	Total TOT
Gateway Communities:			
So Hum Visitors Bureau	\$ 71,079		\$ 71,079
Garberville Chamber	\$ 130,786		\$ 130,786
Orick Chamber	\$ 34,118		\$ 34,118
Willow Creek Chamber	\$ 34,118		\$ 34,118
Arcata Chamber	\$ 28,432		\$ 28,432
McKinleyville Chamber		\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000
Loleta Chamber		\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000
RREEL (Film Commission)	\$ 290,484	\$ 30,000	\$ 320,484
Economic Development	\$ 341,179	\$ 25,000	\$ 366,179
Economic Development Project Trellis		\$ 50,000	\$ 50,000
Ink People		\$ 150,000	\$ 150,000
Aviation		\$ 45,000	\$ 45,000
Local Housing Trust Fund		\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000
Total	\$ 930,196	\$ 435,000	\$ 1,365,196

Given the expanded scope of work and existing responsibilities, staff anticipate an increased workload and recommends sustained funding levels for Economic Development in FY 2026-27, while maintaining current contractual levels for gateway partners and continuing support for destination marketing through the Department of Aviation. If approved, contract amendments will be provided to our contractual partners using signatory authority which was delegated to the County Administrative Officer by your Board on April 22, 2025.

For FY 2026-27, staff recommend maintained funding levels to FY 2025-26 to ensure continuity during this transition and to support the implementation of the strategy. This includes:

- Nine existing contractual partners, totaling \$759,940, to allow time for organizational restructuring. The RREEL allocation is based on a percentage per their contract through FY 2026-27, therefore, this allocation has been adjusted as such.
- Destination marketing services, totaling \$45,000, while the county conducts an RFP process to establish a new Destination Stewardship Organization (DSO).
- Contribution to the Local Housing Trust Fund to support grant match for housing efforts in the amount of \$100,000.
- Support for Economic Development operations to manage expanded responsibilities and implement year-one strategic actions, totaling \$416,179. This includes reallocation of two previously directed FY 2025-26 allocations to support current operational needs associated with the Humboldt County Visitor's Bureau (HCVB) assets. This will allow Economic Development to maintain the existing structure and assets while implementing the first-year strategic recommendations.
 - \$50,000 for the marketing analysis and strategy
 - \$50,000 for Project Trellis

Based on the discussed changes for the upcoming year, staff recommend FY 2026-27 TOT allocations are as follows:

TOT FY 2026-27

	Base TOT	Measure J	Total TOT
Gateway Communities:			
So Hum Visitors Bureau	\$ 71,079		\$ 71,079
Garberville Chamber	\$ 130,786		\$ 130,786
Orick Chamber	\$ 34,118		\$ 34,118
Willow Creek Chamber	\$ 34,118		\$ 34,118
Arcata Chamber	\$ 28,432		\$ 28,432
McKinleyville Chamber		\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000
Loleta Chamber		\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000
RREEL (Film Commission)	\$ 246,407	\$ 30,000	\$ 276,407
Economic Development	\$ 341,179	\$ 75,000	\$ 416,179
Ink People		\$ 150,000	\$ 150,000
Aviation		\$ 45,000	\$ 45,000
Local Housing Trust Fund		\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000
Total	\$ 886,119	\$ 435,000	\$ 1,321,119

In conclusion, staff recommend your Board accept and adopt the Countywide Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy and approve sustained funding for FY 2026-27. This will enable Economic Development to maintain current operations, implement the first phase of strategic recommendations and provide partners with the time and support needed to transition into a more unified and effective model.

SOURCE OF FUNDING:

Transient Occupancy Tax (1100-181-107010)

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

Expenditures (Fund, Budget Unit)	FY25-26	FY26-27 Projected*
Budgeted Expenses	1,365,196	1,321,119
Total Expenditures	1,365,196	1,321,119

*Projected amounts are estimates and are subject to change.

Funding Sources (Fund, Budget Unit)	FY25-26	FY26-27 Projected*
General Fund	4,500,000	4,500,000
Total Funding Sources	4,500,000	4,500,000

*Projected amounts are estimates and are subject to change.

Narrative Explanation of Financial Impact:

At the mid-year budget report, staff reported an estimated \$4.5 million in TOT revenues including Measure J for FY 2025-26. While TOT revenues are starting to stabilize, and staff expect it to stay in that range going forward they are still in a period of transition and staff recommend maintaining allocations at the same levels as FY 2025-26. At mid-year staff recommended, your Board not plan for the additional \$1 million ongoing in TOT as the recommendations in this report will likely require the use of these funds for ongoing Travel and Tourism marketing efforts.

However, due to the expanded scope of work associated with managing the HCVB transition and the need to maintain existing

responsibilities staff recommend reallocation of the FY 2025-26 allocation for Economic Development in FY 2026-27 to appropriately support current operational needs.

STAFFING IMPACT:

Anticipated increases to workloads associated with travel and tourism related assignments will require funding for Economic Development to ensure allocation of appropriate staffing levels, however no new allocations are being requested.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

JayRay PR & Ads, Department of Aviation, Ink People, Humboldt-Del Norte Film Commission, Southern Humboldt Visitor's Bureau, Garberville Chamber of Commerce, Orick Chamber of Commerce, Willow Creek Chamber of Commerce, Arcata Chamber of Commerce, McKinleyville Chamber of Commerce, Loleta Chamber of Commerce

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

Your Board may choose not to approve of this countywide marketing and tourism strategy. However, this is not recommended. This proposal highlights the county's strengths and weaknesses, is directly aligned with the County's 2025 - 2030 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs), as well as supports the Board Strategic plan, and creates a framework consisting of transparency, equity and measurable outcomes.

Additionally, your Board may choose not to provide sustained funding levels and rather reduce funding, this is not recommended, as sustained funding is critical at this stage. Without it, the County risks losing momentum, disrupting existing partnerships and delaying implementation of a strategy that has been carefully developed through extensive community input. Continued investment will ensure stability, protect prior investments and position Humboldt County to achieve a more coordinated, effective, and sustainable approach to tourism and economic development.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. County-Wide Travel and Tourism Marketing Strategy

PREVIOUS ACTION/REFERRAL:

Meeting of: June 10, 2024; April 22, 2025; June 13, 2025

File No.: 24-969, 24-979; 25-502; 25-134