



The Economic Development Division staff is holding a meeting series by industry sector within Mendocino County to foster collaboration and create actionable goals for industry economic sustainability and advancement. Our next meeting is for the Agricultural sector, please visit the [Economic Development Division](#) page for details.

### Grant Applications Status

- **Awarded** – CDBG PI Microenterprise Technical Assistance - This grant has been awarded as of 4/30/2025 and will provide in-house technical support to microenterprises. The main objective of this program is to help micro-enterprises overcome the various barriers they face, especially those related to government regulations, permits, licenses, and other areas where business and government intersect. - \$407,385
- **Pending** – Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Recreation Economy for Rural Communities (RERC) Grant Program provides Technical Assistance from the EPA for planning support to bring community members together to develop an economic growth plan through outdoor recreation opportunities in the areas of Laytonville, Covelo, and Leggett/Piercy

### Economic Development by Industry Meetings

Division staff is holding a meeting series by industry sector within Mendocino County to foster collaboration and create actionable goals for industry economic sustainability and advancement. Below are the scheduled meetings for this calendar year. Two meetings have been held, and industry priorities have been identified. Staff is working with the Behavioral Health Department, and the Cannabis Department on priorities related to their respective industries.

- 3/3/2025 - Behavioral Health - **Completed**
- 3/27/2025 - Cannabis Cultivation Industry – **Completed**
- 5/21/2025 - Home Hardening and Fire Safe Construction - **Completed**
- 7/17/2025 - Agricultural: Farmers and Livestock – **Time & Date Coming Soon**
- Date TBA - Forest Health and Biomass Utilization
- Date TBA - Arts and Tourism

## Home Hardening and Fire-Safe Construction Sector Meeting

On Wednesday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, division staff facilitated a public meeting regarding the home hardening and fire safe construction industries. Attendance included North Coast Builders Exchange, Mendocino Office of Education, Mendocino Fire Safe Council, CalFire, and private industry.



Housing stock in Mendocino County is limited and aging. Staff has heard in other sector meetings that there is a lack of market-rate and professional housing available. This limits recruitment of qualified employees to Mendocino County. At the same time, much of the housing stock in the county is aging and maintenance has been deferred.

These two factors create a fragile ecosystem for our housing inventory. Housing shortages already exist, and current housing is vulnerable to wildfire. In the event of a wildfire and the loss of housing/structures, most homeowners will not be able to afford to rebuild, exacerbating availability and affordability.

The outcomes of the home hardening and construction sector meeting take into consideration both of the above issues while contributing to job creation and workforce development. Home hardening can be defined as an emerging industry. It is an industry sector that is arising out of a demand by homeowners and local jurisdictions to prepare homes and structures to withstand wildfire. Adjacent to the home hardening industry, is fire-safe new construction. There is a growing demand for fire-safe building methods, that not only meet CA and local code, but implement practices learned from new information available about what helps a building survive during a wildfire event.

Given it is an emerging and adapting industry, staff used a strategic planning framework to gather information about the current and potential state of the home hardening and fire-safe construction and develop project concepts with attending participants. Below is a summary of our discussion.

### Strengths

- **Active Fire Safe Councils** – strong community engagement and grassroots initiatives.
- **Educational Infrastructure** – local college construction and training programs support workforce development.

- **Grant Eligibility** – the County qualifies for many grant programs based on income, population, and demographics.
- **Environmental Familiarity** – deep local knowledge of rural living, beneficial fire practices, and wildfire experience.
- **Community Initiative** – strong grassroots knowledge and motivation to take action.
- **Land Stewardship** – interest and experience in using prescribed and cultural fire and maintaining forested areas.

### Weaknesses

- **Underutilized Local Knowledge** – rural and traditional land management knowledge isn't fully leveraged.
- **Lack of Awareness** – many property owners don't understand the risks or mitigation steps. Many contractors are not familiar with Zone 0 and home hardening priorities.
- **Limited Markets** – limited financial capacity to invest in property improvements.
- **Siloed Efforts** – individuals and organizations often focus narrowly on “my issue” or “my project.”
- **Communication Gaps** – limited coordination and outreach across agencies and stakeholders.
- **Grant Funding Challenges** – reimbursement grant structures are difficult for small organizations to manage, future availability of funding unknown.
- **Limited Organizational Capacity** – small orgs often lack staff or bandwidth.
- **Transportation Issues** – challenging to reach training sites, work locations, or educational programs.
- **Skilled Educator Shortage** – difficulty finding trades instructors.
- **CAL FIRE Inspector Staffing** – difficulty recruiting Forest Aide positions (defensible space inspectors) due to housing shortages and the seasonal nature of the work; an opportunity exists to recruit/employ local youth.
- **Regulatory Uncertainty** – unclear direction and evolution of home hardening and fire safety regulations.
- **Indifference or Lack of Prioritization** – general mindset of “this won't happen to me” or “not here.”

### Opportunities

- **Collaboration & Partnerships** – across agencies, community orgs, schools, and contractors.
- **Knowledge Sharing** – promoting best practices and community-driven insights.
- **Education & Training**
  - Teach property owners what they can do themselves vs. when to hire a contractor.
  - Integrate home hardening into local college/trades programs and high schools.
  - Public education campaigns (video series, open houses, weekend projects).
  - Create a materials and methods database.

- Host workshops (e.g., “How to Pay Prevailing Wage,” “Top Priorities for Home Hardening”).
- **County Code Alignment** – streamline with best practices in home hardening and defensible space.
- **CAL FIRE Resources** – support and distribute Zone 0 inspection information.
- **Workforce Development**
  - High school programs + Mendocino Fire Safe Council partnerships for bootcamps/internships.
  - Train local youth for seasonal fire safety roles.
- **Contractor and Retail Engagement** – collaborate with county stores (e.g., Mendo Mill) to educate contractors and consumers.
- **Community Events**
  - Logging Conference-style event (education, vendors, scholarships, career pathways).
  - FSC Firewise Tours and "Home Hardening Beauty Contest."
- **Grants & Funding**
  - Seek collaborative grant projects.
  - Align plans to increase competitiveness.
- **Biomass Utilization** – explore energy generation from fire hazard/fuel reduction materials.
- **Small Parcel Forestry** – promote use of Timber Harvest Plan exemptions to simplify land management.

### Threats

- **Regulatory Complexity** – evolving fire severity zone designations and unclear future regulations.
- **Inspection Backlogs** – due to staffing shortages and low public participation.
- **Aging Workforce** – skilled tradespeople are retiring without replacement.
- **Barriers to Education** – access, cost, and awareness challenges.
- **Unstable Funding** – government budget uncertainties and lack of consistent funding streams.
- **Property Owner Resistance** – low interest in inspections or investing in safety improvements.
- **Insurance Requirements** – costly mandates without meaningful incentives.
- **CAL FIRE Staffing Limitations** – hiring challenges due to lack of housing and seasonal job status.
- **Community Prioritization** – many residents underestimate wildfire risks.
- **Economic Barriers** – local income levels limit the affordability of implementation.

### Current Projects from Sector Meetings

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Project</b>	<b>Status</b>
Behavioral Health	Stipend Pay Structure for County Internship Programs	In-Process – Working with Behavioral Health and County Counsel to explore feasibility
Cannabis	Collaboration between Cannabis and Tourism Organizations	In-Process – First meeting set Local Chambers and Orgs
Cannabis	Appellations	Information Gathering – Ag Commissioner working with CDFA
Cannabis	Regional Marketing Collaboration	Researching
Home Hardening + Construction	Support Education/Awareness - Increase distribution of materials to contractors and owners, distributing	Completed – material distributed to PBS, City of Ukiah Community Development. In-process - Ft. Bragg, Willits, Pt. Arena
Home Hardening + Construction	Collaboration with MFSC, NCBE and MCOE - student education and work in home-hardening	In-process – Initial/follow-meeting completed. MFSC, NCBE, MCOE and Mendocino College are coordinating training and informational sessions for students.
Home Hardening + Construction	Workshop/training for Contractors and Construction Students	In-process – working with IBHS, MFSC, Mendocino College and potentially other orgs to create a half or full day training for contractors and students pursuing contractor’s license
Home Hardening + Construction	Information or instructional material and resources in one place for professionals and homeowners – videos, database of online materials	Researching – Information gathering

## Regional Economic Strategic Planning Activities

### Sonoma Mendocino Economic Development District (SMEDD)

- Staff is serving as Co-District Manager to the SMEDD with our counterpart in Sonoma County.
- Next SMEDD Board meeting is Friday, June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

### Redwood Region RISE (California Jobs First)

“Redwood Region RISE (Resilient Inclusive Sustainable Economy) announces the preliminary selection of Catalyst Awardees who will receive a total of \$9 million in funding to boost economic development throughout the Redwood Region. With North Edge Financing as Fiscal Agent and the California Center for Rural Policy (CCRP) at Cal Poly Humboldt as Regional Convener, this California Jobs First initiative will support pre-development projects that align RRRISE’s 10-year Regional Roadmap. Preliminary Catalyst Awardees Include:

- BLBS GRID Workforce Training Tiny Home Construction (\$331,702)
- Career Pathways: Fire, Forest, Fish & Facilities (\$1,127,936)
- Del Norte Performing Arts and Civic Center (\$268,250)
- Fire Lines & Fiber Bioregions: A Regional Wool Industry Cluster (\$607,856)
- Lake County Healthcare Education and Simulator (\$650,000)
- Middletown Rancheria Community RISE Project (\$500,000)
- North Coast Resilient Food Systems Initiative (\$2,306,574) - Del Norte Meat Processing Facility and North Coast Food System Network
- Red Hills Bioenergy Facility & Central Wood Processing Plant (\$345,316)
- Timber & Workforce Development Initiative (\$1,959,897) - Carving a Legacy: Tribal Traditions, Woodworking, and Workforce Development - Connecting Mass Timber to Regional Housing and Building Needs - Developing a Climate Forward Workforce and Innovation Pipeline
- Redwood Corridor SEEDS Network (\$450,000)
- Tribal Energy Sovereignty Initiative (\$795,316) - Pinoleville Solar Port & Renewable Energy Workforce Development - Pinoleville Pomo Nation with Red Hills Bioenergy

**Source:** <https://ccrp.humboldt.edu/redwood-region-rise-news/catalyst-awards>