



Introduction

In September 2025, the Economic Development Division officially launched the Microenterprise Technical Assistance Program, met with stakeholders to advance projects developed from industry sector meetings, met with Sonoma County staff and stakeholders regarding the future of SMEDD, and held the Forest Health Sector Meeting (9/17). Visit the [Economic Development Division](#) page for more details.

Economic Development by Industry: Upcoming Sector Meetings

Division staff continue to hold meetings for the economic development by industry sector series to foster collaboration and create actionable goals for economic sustainability and growth. Five meetings have been held in 2025. The final meeting for 2025 will be held in November for the Tourism sector – bringing together Arts, Culture and Recreation for sustainable tourism. Details are available on the Economic Development Division webpage.

Economic Development by Industry: Sector Projects

Sector projects have been developed from the completed. Economic. Development. by. Industry meetings. Each project is based on the feedback and input from the public sector meetings. Division staff are working with other County departments, and community partners to move each project forward. Below is a list of current projects.

Forest Health and Sustainability – (Meeting held 9/17/2025)

- Due to the timing of reporting and staff schedules, projects will be included in the next CEO Report. The meeting notes are listed at the end of this report.

Agriculture – (Meeting held 7/17/2025)

- Explore the feasibility of animal processing facility with regional partners in Lake and Sonoma County. Research grant opportunities and possible operators
- Work with Workforce Alliance of the North Bay (WANB), Mendocino Wine Growers Association (MWGA), Mendocino County Farm Bureau (MCFB) to coordinate WANB resources to align with training needs
- Survey local farmers and agricultural producers regarding missing support services, relay information to local SBDC, chambers and other agencies to share with local entrepreneurs as potential new business or additional services

- Facilitate establishing a committee to develop county-wide/regional branding, or support further development of “Love Local Mendo” buy local campaign with Visit Ukiah
- Coordinate educational opportunities for farmers to learn cost saving or effective ways to develop additional cash flow streams

Behavioral Health – (Meeting held 3/3/2025)

- Mendocino College Behavioral Health Internships
- Stipend Structure for County Internships

Cannabis – (Meeting held 3/27/2025)

- Collaborative Marketing w/Tourism, Wine, Arts and Heritage
- Co-Operative Regional Branding
- Appellations
- Microbusiness License Code Updates
- Explore Feasibility for inclusion in the Business Improvement District

Construction and Home Hardening – (Meeting held 5/21/2025)

- Collaboration with Mendocino Fire Safe Council, North Coast Builders Exchange and Mendocino County Office of Education for student education and work experience in home hardening through existing training programs
- Workshop or training for Contractors and construction students
- Support creation of informational or instructional materials, videos and resources in one place for professionals; support distribution of materials through local building departments

CDBG PI Microenterprise Technical Assistance Grant

The CDBG PI Microenterprise Technical Assistance Grant Program Manual was approved by the Board of Supervisors on September 9th. A press release announcing the program was released shortly after the Board of Supervisors approval.

This grant provides funding for in-house technical support to microenterprises. The main objective is to help microenterprises overcome the various barriers, especially those related to government regulations, permits, licenses, and other intersections of business and government. There are currently two businesses enrolled and three with open applications and several inquiries which have been answered.

Small Business Technical Assistance

Division staff continue to manage the Microenterprise Technical Assistance Grant contracted to West Business Development Center, as well as providing in-house technical assistance to local businesses. The West Business Development Center Contract was completed on August 31, 2025 and staff is working to begin closing out the grant cycle.

Sonoma Economic Development District (SMEDD)

The Sonoma Mendocino Economic Development District (SMEDD) is an Economic Development District recognized by the Economic Development Administration (EDA) as an Economic Development District and is responsible for maintaining the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDs) for the region. With the creation of California Jobs First, there is redundancy in economic development strategic planning. Staff at both County of Sonoma and Mendocino are exploring options for future of SMEDD with consideration of return on investment and budgetary constraints. A SMEDD Board Meeting was held on October 10th to update board members on staff recommendations.

Forest Sustainability and Health Sector Meeting Notes from 9/17/2025

The following is a summary of the discussion on the current state of the industry by the public meeting participants.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Synchronize permitting (2-year bill – CA legislation) timber harvest and fuel reduction
- Career and Technical Education (CTE) Programs – practical skill training through community college or other non-profit agencies
- Shift from industrial owners to family-owned businesses, more open to Sustainable solutions
- Job opportunities – Repairing damage of past and creating healthy forests and ecosystems, connect kids and forests for awareness of possible careers
- Ability to create positions within industry for people to grow into
 - Support/training/mentoring/connect to resources
 - College – utility/chainsaw /fire science/ construction – intro to trades
 - Truck driving – training/school – need for more accessibility
- Redwood Region Resource Rally (logging conference) – introduces youth to industry, expand and build upon this and hold Economic Development Day on logging day – every other year in Ukiah
- Take the time to develop your workforce – leadership skills, work ethic, decision making and performance
- Fire safety/abatement projects – how to creatively utilize fuel removed, cheaper California Vegetation Treatment Program (CalVTP) fire prevention exemption but still expensive, leave 50% canopy and money back to project
- Opportunity to create an apprenticeship training center
- More foresters to move into more roles to mentor/oversee crews to develop experience under a forester. Possibilities for opportunities to work under foresters:
 - CALFIRE Summer Forest Aids – Jackson Forest has positions for forest technicians
 - Workforce alliance of North Bay – Ecosystem alliance training

DIFFICULTIES/CHALLENGES

- Insurance – costs and availability

- Regulations – (1) fish and wildlife (2) regional water quality (3) timber harvest plan
- Costs of doing business
- Land that’s been “left alone” – overgrown and unprofitable – how to address:
 - Care for land long term, economic and environmental balance
 - Longterm how to do and fund the work - grants won’t cover it all – especially maintenance
- Boom and bust cycle of agriculture/forestry
- How to bridge what youth want to do and opportunities in industry
- Truck drivers – hard to find and no training in the county
- For non-profits request for proposals (RFP) is a bottle neck for projects

WORKFORCE NEEDS

- More in-house training, access to working under a forester to gain experience for forester exam, and how to keep people moving upwards in developing their careers
- Basic skills – soft skills generational (came from 1st job, school or home historically) - Skill building starting later and taking more time
- Younger generation sees future differently – need for lots of communication and development
- Work ethic, need ability to grind/stay focused day after day – will build position for the right people
- Reskilling for adults - Career and Technical Education (CTE) program training, career development for working adults to Foresters
- Broader ecological knowledge such as plant identification skills
- Curriculum at schools is changing - Forestry 4-year degree is more fire education and less forestry basics now
- Lots of retirements, how to help youth enter or access careers
- Supply chain of workforce in timber harvesting: Logging (Independent contractors) -> Transportation (Mix of contractors and mill) -> Millsite processing (Mill company) -> Mill workforce includes mechanics, biologists, restoration, heavy equipment operators) lots of different skills needed from start to finish
- Shift in how people look for jobs/obtain information
 - Show where jobs can grow to/viability
 - People look online (videos etc.), don’t look to other people for information
- Young folk mostly must leave county to find training – how to get them to see themselves working here as a viable future