

Mendocino County Economic Summit: Charting a Path Forward

January 31, 2019

Summary

On January 31st, the Economic Development & Financing Corporation held an economic summit for Mendocino County. Nearly 150 attendees gathered in the Community Room at Willits City Hall, representing local governments, organizations, and agencies from across the county along with speakers and partners from around Northern California.

These representatives convened with a threefold purpose:

- Develop relationships with the other partners working in the field of economic development
- Expand each organization's understanding of the current resources available
- Identify ways to work together and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our work

The summit was the first step for EDFC in developing Mendocino County's Economic Recovery and Resiliency Strategy. This strategic document will serve as a guide for collaboration and partnership between organizations working to build the local economy and improve resiliency.

Building a Strong Local Economy



Dr. Keith Taylor from the UC Cooperative Extension in Davis kicked off the conference with a presentation on alternative strategies for rural economic development. A specialist in this field, Dr. Taylor focused on two main ideas: 1) using cooperative models to support economic development and 2) developing local entrepreneurial skills.

Heidi Pickman and Susan Brown from the California Association for Microenterprise Opportunity (CAMEO), followed up the presentation by elaborating on an existing project in Mendocino County, Local Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Project (LEEP) to talk specifically about how local communities can foster local business development through five elements: coaching, capital, culture, connections, and climate.

The Five C's of the
Entrepreneurship Ecosystem



The slide presentations from the event are available on [the post-summit website](#).

Break Out Sessions

Following the presentations, attendees participated in two break out group sessions. The first break out session was topic-area specific and participants were asked to choose one of the following groups to which they could contribute:

Entrepreneurship & Access to Capital

The Entrepreneurship & Access to Capital group further explored the concept of the local entrepreneurial ecosystem of Mendocino County. Facilitators Heidi Pickman and Susan Brown looked at the existing resources available in the county to support entrepreneurship and how those organizations can build stronger partnerships.

Poverty Alleviation

The Poverty Alleviation group, facilitated by Rachel Ebel-Elliot, explored the most vulnerable members of our local economy, those below the poverty line struggling with homelessness, health, and limited community infrastructure. There are a number of organizations in Mendocino County trying to support individuals living in poverty, and this group discussed how stronger partnerships, holistic case management, and additional programs can help fill some of the gaps in service.

Agriculture and Natural Resources (including Cannabis)

Facilitated by John Bailey from the UC Agriculture and Natural Resource Extension Center in Hopland, this group discussed the changing climate of the agriculture industry. Some important topics included the need to preserve and improve the diversity of crops, preparing for climate change, changes in water resource availability, as well as the lack of profitability that presents an ongoing challenge for small farmers.



Interdisciplinary Economic Development with Keith Taylor

Dr. Taylor followed up his initial presentation with a working session to discuss how local control and cooperative structures can improve the local economy. In particular, Dr. Taylor suggested looking at how existing cooperatives can work together. There was a discussion about local utility cooperatives as well as food and agricultural cooperatives and collaboration between local non-profits to leverage resources, collectively write grants, and deliver programs across the county.

Workforce Development, Education, and Employment

Facilitated by Bruce Wilson of the Workforce Alliance of the North Bay, workforce development emerged as a key issue that resonated through all groups present. There are a number of organizations locally participating in workforce development at the Career Point North Bay Center in Ukiah. There is a

strong partnership between the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act Program (federal government), Mendocino College, and the schools, however, there is a need to get youth more engaged and prepared to work in some of the priority fields.

One of the most successful programs recently launched was the North Coast Construction Corps. This partnership between the North Coast Builders' Exchange, Career & Technical Education, Mendocino College, and local contractors provided training and job connections for nearly 20 students.

Business Owners

The business owners focus group, facilitated by Scott Perkins of the City of Fort Bragg looked at the good, the bad, and the complicated aspects of operating a business in Mendocino County. Some of the key discussions included finding and retaining employees, housing for middle-income employees, child care, and the changes in the local economy.

Tourism and the Arts

The Tourism and the Arts group, facilitated by Alyssum Wier of the Arts Council, discussed the positive impacts of tourism, the arts, and related industries on the local economy. They also considered the potential effects of increasing attractions in the county such as public art. This is an increasingly important economic driver in the community and there are many existing partnerships between chambers, Visit Mendocino and the Arts Council.



Recovery, Resiliency, Infrastructure & Broadband

Facilitated by Diann Simmons of EDFC, this group dug into some of the extremely challenging aspects associated with public infrastructure including water systems, transportation, and fire prevention. The need for ongoing collaboration and communication between entities was highlighted as well as the lack of important community assets such as broadband internet, ambulances and volunteers for fire departments.

Housing

The housing issues faced by Mendocino County came up in every discussion, but this group, facilitated by Brandon Ellis and Daniel McIntire from Rural Community Housing Development Corporation, focused specifically on the issue. The complex makeup of the industry involves everything from homeless services to market rate housing developments and low income government funded projects. There is a need across the spectrum for housing of all types and local organizations and jurisdictions are working on many projects. The rising costs of living and building in Mendocino County and the region in general were an important focus of this group.

Cross Pollination Session

Following the break-out groups participants engaged in “cross-pollination” discussions. Attendees were asked to move to a new group with one member from each of the previous groups. In the cross pollination sessions there were three prominent topics: collaboration and communication between existing partners, housing, and workforce development.

Collaboration:

Mendocino County is rural, which makes service delivery and inter-organizational connections a challenge. Most groups identified a need for improved collaboration between partners. Some of the ways that this might take shape in the future included:

- Build on existing strategic partnerships
- Identify and reduce the duplication of efforts
- Increase networking opportunities and non-profit/for-profit partnerships
- Identify an organization to support/facilitate non-profit coordination
- Develop cooperative structures for food, agriculture, and other businesses
- Collective grant writing and leveraging of funds to make money go further
- Technology as a means of connection between geographically distant areas
- Reducing barriers to implementation of projects, such as increasing public art
- Build knowledge of and connections between existing community assets
- Engage proactive and organized collaborations



Housing

The topic of housing dominated most of the conversations. The lack of affordable housing across the spectrum is one of the greatest barriers to economic development at the present. As noted in the housing group's discussion, the lack of homeless services, low-income housing, and market rate housing for middle income workers has presented a major barrier for employers trying to recruit and retain employees. It negatively impacts the cost of living for the most vulnerable populations, particularly those that live in poverty. The City of Ukiah, Mendocino County, and the City of Fort Bragg are all actively engaged in projects to address the housing crisis. Additionally, there are two local housing organizations, the Community Development Commission and the Rural Housing and Community Development Corporation. There is a need for additional collaborations and programs like the North Coast Construction Corps which represent a unique partnership between Mendocino College, the North Coast Builders Exchange, and the Community Foundation. Housing will be an area that will continually need to be addressed as we explore recovery and resiliency in our local economy.

Workforce

Workforce was a major topic of discussion at the summit. It touched all areas from poverty alleviation to housing availability. There are a number of organizations and entities involved in workforce development including the Workforce Alliance of the North Bay, the Mendocino Private Industry Council, Mendocino College, the County Office of Education, Regional Occupation Programs, and entrepreneurial development trainings through West Business Development Center.

Analysis: Resources and Gaps

One of the key purposes of this event is to start to get a mutual understanding of what we have and what we need to better support economic development in Mendocino County. Based on sorting the overall results of the summit, the following is a break-down of the existing resources available in Mendocino County and identification of the existing gaps.

Resources

Housing

- Local housing authorities and a housing development corporation (Community Development Commission, Anderson Valley Housing Association, and Rural Communities Housing Development Corporation)
- Tribal housing authorities including Northern Circle and Round Valley Indian Housing Authority.
- Healthy Mendocino Housing Action Groups
- Local government housing projects
- Mendocino County Construction Corps
- North Coast Opportunities
- Local government housing elements (part of General Plans)

Entrepreneurship

- Coaching and Training: West Business Development Center, Mendocino College
- Capital: EDFC, Arcata Economic Development Corp., banks, Superior Economic Development
- Connections: Chambers, Wine Growers Associations, County of Mendocino's Broadband program (facilitated by EDFC), Broadband Alliance, wireless internet service providers (WISPs), new technology
- Culture: Over 80% of businesses have fewer than 10 employees
- Climate: Visit Mendocino, Ukiah, Fort Bragg programs, long term investments in and local support for "Access to Capital" program and training and coaching program

Agriculture

- Wine Growers/Farm Bureau
- UC Cooperative Extension and Natural Resource Field Station in Hopland
- Farmers Markets
- Good Farm Fund
- Ukiah and Point Arena Food Co-ops
- Independent grocery stores (Down Home Foods, Corners of the Mouth, Mariposa Market, Harvest Market, etc.)
- NCO Food Hub and other farm projects
- Food Policy Council
- Cannabis Cultivator Industry Groups
- Mendocino College
- EDFC Rural Microentrepreneur Assistance Program

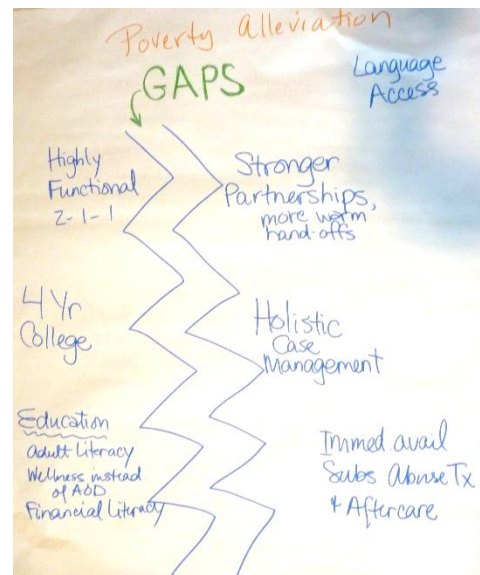
Poverty Alleviation

- Workforce Development (Workforce Alliance of the North Bay)
- Federally Qualified Health Clinics
- Alcohol and Drug Prevention Programs
- Technology and Broadband
- Employment Development Department
- Department of Rehabilitation
- Redwood Community Services

- Mendocino Private Industry Council, Inc.
- Legal Services of Northern California
- Family Resource Centers (Fort Bragg, Ukiah, Point Arena, Willits, Laytonville, etc.)
- Community Development Block Grant Programs
- Microenterprise Technical Assistance
- United Way of Wine Country
- Healthy Mendocino
- Mendocino College
- North Coast Opportunities
- First Five Mendocino
- AmeriCorps (Vista)
- Mendocino County Public Health
- Ukiah Valley Association for Habilitation
- Credit Unions
- Mendocino County Social Services
- Community Foundation of Mendocino
- EDFC (a certified Community Development Financial Institution)
- West's Women's Business Center Program

Arts and Tourism

- Visit Mendocino
- Visit Ukiah
- Visit Fort Bragg
- Visit Willits
- Chambers of Commerce
- Arts Council of Mendocino County
- Entrepreneurial Development Entities (West and EDFC)
- Artist Cooperatives
- Youth Art Programs



Recovery, Resiliency, and Infrastructure

- Mendocino County Recovery Coordinator & Executive Office
- Credit Unions
- EDFC Loan Programs
- Local Tribal entities
- Adventist Health Ukiah Valley/Willits
- Mendocino Coast District Hospital
- Mendocino Council of Governments
- Mendocino County Dept. of Transportation
- Mendocino County and local city IT departments
- Local Wireless Internet Service Providers
- Fire Safe Councils

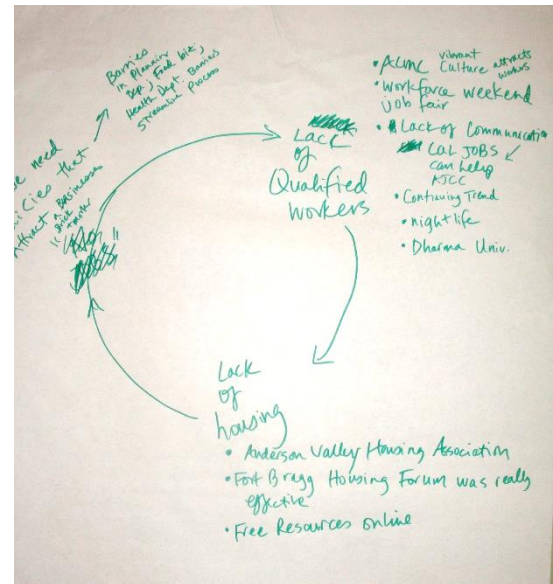
- Regional Municipal Advisory Councils
- Local Granges
- North Coast Builders' Exchange
- California Conservation Corps
- Cal Fire and Cal OES
- CareerPoint Mendocino
- Arts Council of Mendocino County (commissioning commemorative art by fire survivors)

Workforce Development/Education

- Workforce Alliance of the North Bay
- Mendocino Private Industry Council
- California Conservation Corp
- AmeriCorps Vista
- Workforce Partnership
- Leadership Mendocino
- Mendocino College
- Mendocino County Office of Education
- Employment Development Department (CA)
- North Coast Opportunities (Rural Child Care Program)
- Mendocino County Construction Corps
- Community Foundation
- Ukiah Valley Association for Habilitation (Parents of Friends), etc.

Economic and Community Development Resources

- Economic Development and Financing Corporation/EDFC
- Grass Roots Institute
- County and City leaders (staff and elected)
- Engaged local businesses
- Chambers of Commerce
- Visit Mendocino
- Arts Council of Mendocino County
- Healthy Mendocino Project
- North Coast Opportunities
- Community Foundation of Mendocino County
- Tribal Governments
- Mendocino Council of Governments
- Municipal Advisory Councils
- Redwood Forest Foundation Inc.
- Workforce Alliance of the North Bay
- CareerPoint Mendocino



The Gaps

There are a number of overlapping areas for different partners. For example, workforce development, poverty alleviation and entrepreneurship have significant overlap. It is important to identify these overlaps (positive and negative) and also identify gaps. At the Summit, the following gaps were identified. It is important to note that in a rural region with mountains, rivers, and difficult terrain, there will be gaps that are difficult to overcome and will require significant effort.

- There are reportedly over 600 non-profits in Mendocino County and there is room for more meaningful collaboration that could include:
 - Joint funding requests
 - More streamlined referrals of clients
 - Improved communication of services and offerings
- Skilled workforce and qualified workers:
 - There are a number of trades in Mendocino County that lack properly trained workers, from construction to medical care; overall there is a need for a more well prepared workforce
 - Housing and cultural opportunities for workforce
- Housing:
 - A number of entities are working on low-income/homeless housing but there is a lack of a market-rate housing strategy
 - Regulations mean that market-rate housing developments are not attractive to for-profit developers (not enough population to do large tract housing)
- Shared vision in the community for economic and community development
- Youth involvement in program/training of local youth for Mendocino County's future needs
- Youth education around financial management and life skills
- Broadband and high speed internet access is a barrier for all aspects of community and economic development
- Technology is changing faster than local capacity to upgrade infrastructure (even in places where it does exist)
- Water, Natural Resources, and Climate Change constrictions on development
- Lack of Return on Investment for For-Profit agricultural processing facilities (meat and other food products)
- Leadership of the collaborative process for economic and community development
- Funding – there is always a shortage of funding for work that needs to be done
- Inclusivity of programs – outreach to underserved populations (bilingual, trilingual, etc.)
- Lack of banking for cannabis industry – lack of federal legalization puts industry in a bind
- Disconnect between local businesses and local government
- Infrastructure is challenged on all fronts (water, transportation, fire, ambulances, forest fuel load mitigation, volunteers for fire departments)

Opportunities

Mendocino County has a number of issues that it faces in the future but also many opportunities. The first step was to convene local leaders to identify what is already being done and what we need to do in the future. Again, the summit was only a first step in an ongoing process which will focus on economic

recovery and resiliency planning for the future. In this initial phase, several opportunities were identified and as this project progresses over the next two years, we will be looking at how to take advantage of different opportunities.

- Non-profit network in Mendocino County (with paid staff)
- Eliminate and reduce duplication of efforts
- Improve broadband/high-speed internet access
- Cooperative and other collaborative market rate housing development
- Improving collaboration between businesses (e.g. Ukiah Natural Foods and other co-ops)
- Opportunities to generate new businesses based on supporting existing economy
- Collective grant writing
- Value-added collective agriculture
- Expanding the North Coast Construction Corps model to other industries
- Encouraging creative and cooperative uses of vacant commercial spaces
- Follow through on planning and organizing for community-based economic development (e.g. EDFC's application for a federal Economic Development Administration grant)
- Streamlining government/business interactions
- Solarization and localization of energy

Next Steps

EDFC's Commitment

EDFC has been awarded funding from the Economic Development Administration in partnership with Mendocino County to develop an "Economic Recovery and Resiliency Plan." EDFC will use this funding to move to the next phase of the planning process for economic recovery and resiliency. We expect to start the full two-year planning effort to begin in June of 2019.

EDFC will begin providing a quarterly economic development newsletter. Please sign up for the newsletter on our website or the event website. This newsletter will include information about the current status of Mendocino County's economy, economic news, and information about activities or events that support economic development. We will also report on economic development activity in the county.

We need your help!

Please provide feedback, regardless of whether you participated in the forum we would like to know if there are other resources, gaps, or opportunities that we've missed. Again, we are at the beginning of a process and your input is greatly valued. Please send any comments to heather@edfc.org by June 15, 2019.

Additionally, if you would like to be involved and continue following this process, please sign up for our email list at either our EDFC website, or via the event page.

We learned a lot at the summit, and most importantly, economic development takes partnerships and collaboration. We challenge you to look at your organization and how you can utilize what you learned to improve your communication and collaboration with other organizations in the county.

Want to Get Involved?

These community-based organizations are all working on economic development issues including workforce development, housing, and poverty alleviation. (If we missed your group and you would like it added, please let us know!)

Economic Development and Financing Corporation

EDFC is a county wide collaborative economic development organization with representation from the cities, county, and partner organizations. Board meetings are open to the public and occur on the 2nd Thursday of the month from 2-4pm. If you are interested in learning more please contact EDFC at 707-234-5705.

Workforce Alliance of the North Bay Mendocino County Sub-Committee

The Workforce Alliance of the North Bay is the main workforce development agency of Mendocino County. Meetings are open to the public and occur quarterly. For more information, contact Stacey Caico at 707-530-2322.

Poverty Action Team – Healthy Mendocino

This group is open to anyone who is interested in participating in efforts to reduce poverty in Mendocino County. The group meets on the 4th Thursday of the month from 11:30 – 12:30. Contact Julie Fetherston for more information at 707-467-3200 ext. 224

Community Development Commission

CDC is Mendocino County's Housing Authority. The commissioners are appointed by the Board of Supervisors. For information on meetings and activities contact CDC at 707-463-5462.

Housing Action Team – Healthy Mendocino

This "team" is working on grass-roots solutions to the issues around housing in Mendocino County. Contact Patrice Mascolo at Healthy Mendocino/ NCO 707-467-3228 to find out more about how to get involved.

Thank you to our event sponsors:

Pacific Gas and Electric
County of Mendocino
City of Willits
City of Ukiah
City of Fort Bragg
City of Point Arena