



## Economic Development Action Plan 2024-26

Committed to coordinated actions with our partners to build a resilient, diversified economy that leverages our unique cultural and natural resources, embraces innovation, entrepreneurship and small businesses, and maintains a high quality of life for all.

Collage of NC places of business, people (residents and employees), marque events, recreation assets, agriculture, and beauty shots of communities

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**Board Resolution** Adopting Action Plan

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the more than 30 organizations and 80 individuals who provided insights, ideas and input that shaped this two-year Economic Development Action Plan, including Gil Mathew and the ERC Board, Kristen York, Steve Frisch, Leslie Williams, Robert Trent, Bob Burriss, Robin Davies, Stuart Baker, Jessica Penman, Nicole Gagnon, Tom Last, Edward Vento, Kathy Hinman, Holly Navo, Steve Medina, Teresa Dietrich, Eliza Tudor, Heather Heckler, Kelly Cutler, Cristine Kelly, Kristine Zuazua, Maryanne Connelley, Amy Schulz, Ted Owens, Scott Neeley, Heidi Hill Drum, Evan Schmidt, Trish Kelly, Tim Kiser, Sean Grayson, Jennifer Callaway, Hilary Hobbs, Scott Lay, Diana Gamzon, Jon Binder, Colleen Dalton, Alison Lehman, Trisha Tillotson, and Ariel Lovett. Supervisors Heidi Hall, Ed Scofield, Lisa Swarthout, Susan Hoek, and Hardy Bullock provided clear direction and feedback from beginning to end. Special thanks to Kimberly Parker, the leader of the Nevada County Economic Development Office, for her steadfast commitment and many contributions that led to the final work product.

## WHY NOW?

In 2023, the Nevada County Board of Supervisors approved funding for the creation of a two-year Action Plan for economic growth and resilience. The Action Plan would focus on increasing *alignment* between and amongst the various economic and community groups and the County, building on existing work and practices, rather than duplicating them. It would serve as an economic development “playbook” for the County’s new economic development office and its leader, Kimberly Parker, in step with business, community and economic development partners. Further, the Action Plan would help the County address changes and hardships experienced by local employers post-pandemic and be a useful tool for attracting unprecedented federal infrastructure and program investments. Last but not least, the Action Plan would make clearer the County’s roles and responsibilities in the economic development arena in partnership with the private sector.

Not merely an internal planning process, the aim of this new effort was to engage and listen closely to the needs and concerns of local employers, the leaders of over a dozen business, trade, and community groups, and to the managers of cities and towns to better understand the forces and challenges shaping the local economy, and to determine where joint action could yield tangible results.

## PROJECT OBJECTIVE AND GOALS

The twin objectives of this seven-month project were to deliver a set of realistic and actionable economic development strategies and tactics that will (1) guide the actions and investments of the County, its elected officials, department leadership and staff; and (2) increase alignment in the actions between the County and its various economic development and community partners to leverage economic activity and achieve goals. It is based on the belief that economic development is not a solo endeavor but a collaborative, multi-faceted, and strategic “team sport” requiring alignment, cooperation and coordination among various players.

*Lift: “Evidence shows that when an entire community decides to come together to solve problems or seize opportunities working as one team, concrete results will follow. This is the vision driving our economic development action plan.” – Hardy Bullock, Board Chair, District 5*

**Inset box: Goals of the Action Plan:**

- Increased economic activity
- Increased tax revenues
- Improved business retention and expansion
- Improved County competitiveness and win rate for federal and state investments and grants
- Improved branding and awareness inside and outside the County about Nevada County assets and advantages
- Stepped up communication and knowledge-sharing between the County and local businesses
- More support for entrepreneurs and local small business
- Increased alignment between the County and economic development stakeholders on a shared set of measurable priorities

**METHODOLOGY**

In the summer of 2023 Nevada County contracted with Integrated Communications Strategies (ICS), a strategic consulting firm with unique experience in inclusive economic development engagement and planning. With a mandate to produce an Action Plan quickly, ICS designed a rapid three-step process to deliver a narrow set of actionable economic development strategies, tactics and performance measures for which there was alignment, economic justification, and widespread support.

**Exhibit 1: Project Timeline**

Phase 1: Discovery	Phase 2: Synthesis & Validation	Phase 3: Production & Presentation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Building awareness</li> <li>▪ Internal interviews</li> <li>▪ External interviews</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More Information gathering</li> <li>▪ Key theme identification</li> <li>▪ Workshopping results</li> <li>▪ Action Plan framework emerges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Testing framework</li> <li>▪ Drafting and presenting action plan</li> <li>▪ Outlining next steps</li> </ul>
August through October	October through December	December through January

**Key Informant-Driven**

At the onset of this engagement, ICS worked closely with the County to identify a list of key informants for ICS to interview about the economic priorities, demands and limitations facing the County currently and over the next two years; priority investment areas; key socio-economic and industry trends; and general advice. ICS conducted single person and group interviews, synthesized the findings to identify common themes, gaps and assets, and then tested these findings with the key informants and the County to make adjustments and refinements.

ICS first interviewed personnel in County leadership, followed by individual interviews with each of the five County Supervisors. Then ICS turned to external partners for information and insights. Below is a partial list of the individuals who contributed to this body of work.

**Exhibit 2: List of Key Informant Interviews**

<b>Organization:</b>	<b>Participants:</b>
Nevada County Economic Resource Council (ERC)	Gil Mathew, CEO Plus ICS presentation to the ERC Board
Sierra Business Council (SBC) SBDC operator, etc.	Kristin York, Vice President Steve Frisch, President & CEO
Sierra Commons	Robert Trent, Executive Director
Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC)	Bob Burris, Deputy Chief Economic Development Officer
Greater Grass Valley Chamber of Commerce	Robin Davies, CEO
Nevada City Chamber of Commerce	Stuart Baker, Executive Director
Truckee Chamber of Commerce	Jessica Penman, President and CEO
Penn Valley Chamber of Commerce	Nicole Gagnon, Executive Director
Visit Truckee-Tahoe	Colleen Dalton, CEO
Nevada County Contractors Association	Tom Last, Executive Director
Contractors Association of Truckee Tahoe	Edward Vento, Executive Director
Nevada County Association of Realtors	Kathy Hinman, Executive Director
Nevada County Arts Council	Eliza Tudor, Executive Director
Community Foundation of Nevada County	Cristine Kelly, Interim CEO
Alliance for Workforce Development, Inc.	Kristine Zuazua, Executive Director, Maryanne Connelley, Business Service Rep.
Sierra College	Karen O’Hara, Executive Dean, Nevada County campus Amy Schulz, Dean, Division of Business and Technology
Tahoe Forest Health System	Ted Owens, Foundation Executive Director and Director of Strategic Alliances
Sierra Nevada Memorial Hospital	Scott Neeley, MD, FACP, President and CEO
Grass Valley City Manager	Tim Kiser
Nevada City City Manager	Sean Grayson
Truckee Town Manager	Jennifer (Jen) Callaway
County Superintendent of Schools	Scott W. Lay
Nevada County Cannabis Alliance	Diana Gamzon, Executive Director

**Designed as an Economic “Playbook” for the County and its Partners**

This Action Plan is designed as a playbook – a set of business or job-building activities or “plays” that can be activated based on best timing, available talent and resources, and the support of a “coalition of the willing.” The playbook approach empowers all individuals, groups, and communities to choose to enact the specific activities that match their priorities. But each play is directly linked to a larger vision and set of actions that benefit from each other. A playbook enables adaption and flexibility in rapidly changing times yet is built on fixed principles. In short, it’s the right approach for disruptive times.

*Lift: “This Action Plan will enhance the County's ability to withstand economic fluctuations, diversify our economic base, and promote sustainable growth.” – Kimberly Parker, Nevada County Economic Development Office*

## ACCOUNTING FOR KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RURAL AND URBAN ECONOMIES

This Action Plan accounts for the fundamental differences in the way rural economies function based on their unique economic base, infrastructure assets, investment profile, workforce make-up, the larger role that government plays, and their smaller, but more close-knit communities as described below.

**Exhibit 3: Critical Differences Between Urban and Rural Economies**

<b>Theme:</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>
<b>Economic Base</b>	Often revolves around financial, technology, and business services as base sectors with specialization in key industries like high-tech (Silicon Valley), biotech (San Diego), advanced manufacturing (Los Angeles), mobility (Sacramento), etc.	Often revolves around leveraging resource-based industries (e.g., agriculture, timber, mining) as well as latent healthcare, tourism, hospitality, and recreation-related activities concentrated there. Some industry concentration exists based on historical patterns, location, or unique market concentration (example: Grass Valley Group).
<b>Infrastructure Assets</b>	High density lends itself to pervasive high-speed broadband network access, the existence of smart transportation systems and alternative fuel systems, and a more reliable electric grid. Legacy roads, water, sewer, and commerce areas (e.g. aging corridors or malls) require high cost to build, maintain, or rejuvenate.	Low density combined with expansive and/or mountainous terrain make for subpar broadband service requiring greater per capita investments. The electric grid is more vulnerable due to frequent wildfires and forced system blackouts, encouraging distributed power and microgrids. Basic improvements to roads, bridges, and sewer are harder to fund due to the smaller tax base. Tourists/non-residents may place significant burden on local infrastructure.
<b>Scale of Investment</b>	In cities, big projects like skyscrapers and metro systems attract massive investments and also foreign direct investment.	Rural-scale projects, like business parks, community kitchens, small-scale farming, or business accelerators, generally require less capital.
<b>Workforce Skills</b>	Urban economic development often hinges on a highly skilled workforce, emphasizing continuing education and specialized training. There often can be a mismatch with a higher concentration of the populace with low education attainment and weak job prospects without socio-economic interventions.	Rural economic development often emphasizes career technical education aligned to existing industries (e.g., hospitality, tourism, recreation, construction, healthcare, etc.). Greater numbers of retirees can be viewed as a hidden workforce asset.
<b>Role of the Public Sector</b>	Government is proportionately a smaller contributor to the overall economic base in urban areas (exception: state capitol cities). Because of the number of major	Government is often a significant proportion of the economic and job base in rural economies (e.g., counties, cities, school districts, colleges or

	employers and economic activity concentrated in urban areas, levels of private capital investment are often proportionately higher.	universities). Also, public investment is often proportionately much larger in rural areas than private investment.
<b>Stakeholder Engagement</b>	Dense urban areas involve more stakeholders (both total number and wide range) making consensus more difficult. Broader, often more lengthy consultations, power sharing agreements, and strategic partnerships are common.	Rural economic development often involves close-knit communities that can assemble more easily and reach agreement, emphasizing collaborative decision-making and easier resource sharing.

In each case ICS has designed-in to the Action Plan strategies and tactics that embrace and leverage these economic differences for competitive advantage.

**ALIGNMENT WITH VARIOUS COUNTY AND CITY PLANS**

To the extent possible, the strategies and tactics featured in the Action Plan align with and seek to support the achievement of other planning documents that exist and those in development. These include economic development planning documents, like the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy, or CEDS, currently being updated by the Sierra Business Council. It also includes government planning documents including, but are not limited to the County General Plan, special Area Plans, the County Energy Action Plan, the County Recreation and Resiliency Master Plan, climate vulnerability assessments and environmental sustainability plans, Ag-related plans, infrastructure investment plans, municipal general plans and housing elements, economic development game plans, and more. This integration promotes efficiency, as coordinated strategies address multiple societal, economic, and environmental needs simultaneously, such as improved and mobility, energy efficiency, or environmental sustainability, maximizing outcomes through a more holistic, systems-level approach.

## WHERE ARE WE NOW?

### **Inset box: Key Socio-Economic Facts** [County logo]

- 102,293 Population
- 4.1% unemployment rate (Jan 2024) vs. 5.1% for California (Dec. 2023)
- 49.7% of population are working age (18-64)
- 29.5% are over age 65
- 38.8% have a bachelor's degree or higher vs. 35.9% for California
- 54,366 housing units of which 74.9% are owner-occupied
- \$79,395 median household income
- \$625,000 median home sale price in the County, December 2023
- 3,230 total business establishments
- 24.5% of working families are struggling to make ends meet (see chart)

**Sources:** 2022 U.S. Census, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, California Department of Finance, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Lewis, and Redfin.

Located in the Sierra Nevada region of California, Nevada County is known for its rich history, stunning natural landscapes, recreational opportunities, and as a haven for those with arts and cultural backgrounds. This picturesque county, once a hub during the California Gold Rush, is dotted with historic cities like Nevada City and Grass Valley that offer a glimpse into life in the 1800s and early 1900s alongside thriving outdoor destinations with high-end amenities like the Town of Truckee in the East County. The County's diverse geography ranges from lush river valleys surrounded by dense forests to rolling hills and high mountain peaks, making it a popular with outdoor enthusiasts from all over the globe. Activities like skiing, hiking, kayaking and mountain biking are extremely popular. The Yuba and Bear Rivers, with their scenic beauty, are considered hidden gems, offering both recreation and tranquility just an hour north of Sacramento.

### **Economic Profile:**

Nevada County boasts a diverse economy rooted in technology, tourism, agriculture, and healthcare. Known for its tech sector, the County is home to numerous small and medium-sized technology and advanced manufacturing firms, leveraging its historical telecommunications industry legacy dating back to the 60s and 70s. Tourism plays a significant role, driven by mountain recreation hotspots like Truckee, as well as the County's rich Gold Rush history to the west with nationally-renown arts, cultural, and sporting events. Agriculture, particularly organic farming, cannabis, and vineyards, contribute significantly to the County's economy, reflecting the County's commitment to sustainability and support for small, often family-owned businesses. The County's biggest job sectors are government and healthcare which are positioned for growth over the next two-years. Construction, tourism, and retail trade are other top ranked sectors and are also projected to grow, according to recent labor market research from the Centers for Excellence. The County is known for its high quality of life, high performing schools, low crime rate, and low cost of living relative to the rest of California, making it a popular destination for remote workers and entrepreneurs wanting to launch a business, raise a family, avoid big city issues, while staying connected.



### Local Trends to Watch:

- The inflow and outflow of people over the past several years has resulted in relatively low population growth rate (1.8% growth from 2017 to 2022) for the County when compared to rapid population increases in nearby counties like Placer, El Dorado, and Sacramento.
- The number of working age adults has been in decline the past several years while the proportion of people over 65 in the County has risen to roughly one-in-three.
- Typical of rural counties, the government, education, and healthcare sectors are the largest employers with good paying jobs but are susceptible to layoffs and belt tightening during state and federal budget deficits and down economic cycles.
- Nevada County residents are better educated, with an education attainment rate higher than state average, and higher than surrounding rural counties.
- Recent data shows that there is net loss of County residents driving outside the County for work vs those driving in to jobs each day, although this net loss is smaller than it was pre-COVID. The net loss is now 2,599 workers, or 5.6% of the County's total workforce, per day.
- Nevada County's median sale price for a home (\$625,000 in Dec. 2023) is lower than nearby Placer County (\$635,000) but significantly higher than Sacramento County (\$515,000).
- A resident earning the County's median income of \$79,395 can afford a home valued at \$310,000, assuming a 30-year-loan at 6.5% interest with a traditional 20% down payment. As of this writing, only three (3) homes were available on MLS at this price-point, and all new construction in one community.
- Roughly 89% of all properties in Nevada County (n=164,988) face a severe risk of wildfire, according to insurance estimates.
- Climate-related changes to precipitation patterns, snowpack, extreme heat, and wildfires are already having an impact on Nevada County's employers and local governments and are projected to intensify, hitting higher elevation communities the hardest.

**Sources:** U.S Census, California Employment Development Department, Sierra Business Council research, and Redfin, 2022-23 figures.

### **Inset graphic: Share of Nevada County population in families that struggle to make ends meet**



Donut chart: 61% non-struggling. 13.5% struggling non-working families. 24.5% struggling working families.

**Source:** Brookings Institute analysis of University of Washington Sufficiency Standard and American Community Survey one-year public record use microdata sample. 2019-2021. Part of the California Jobs First body of work.

### **SWOT PLUS ASSESSMENT**

ICS completed independent fact-finding combined with analyzing the body of key informant input to produce the following assessment of the County's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT), then categorized areas where the County should invest/maximize, decide, defend, and exit based on this assessment. See Exhibit 4 below for details.

**Exhibit 4: SWOT Plus Assessment**

  <p><b>Economic Development Action Plan</b> SWOT+ Version 3.0</p>		<i>Outside the County</i>		
		<p><b>Primary Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Activate one economic gameplan</li> <li>▪ Streamline government permitting</li> <li>▪ Capture new federal and state funding</li> <li>▪ Signal through County planning and investment where growth should occur</li> <li>▪ Leverage tech manufacturing, food and ag, health, and sustainable construction</li> <li>▪ Leverage large resident creative class</li> </ul>	<p><b>Primary Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Development polarization</li> <li>▪ Slow fix to missing middle housing</li> <li>▪ Shrinking number in the workforce</li> <li>▪ State cost shifting</li> <li>▪ Difficulty obtaining insurance</li> <li>▪ Ongoing global discord</li> <li>▪ Impacts due to the changing climate</li> </ul>	
<i>Inside the County</i>	<p><b>Primary Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ County is high functioning, responsive, and well managed</li> <li>▪ Historic downtowns and Truckee</li> <li>▪ Outstanding schools</li> <li>▪ Proportionately large creative class</li> <li>▪ Unique natural and recreational opportunities</li> <li>▪ Joint partnerships and practices</li> </ul>	<p><b>Maximize / Invest</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Embrace grow-from-within strategy</li> <li>▪ Emphasize start-up community and small business support</li> <li>▪ Launch a business retention and expansion (BRE) program</li> <li>▪ Improve workforce-to-employer alignment and supports</li> <li>▪ Launch a Live-Work-Play marketing effort</li> </ul>	<p><b>Defend</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High quality of life</li> <li>▪ Events and festivals that demonstrate the County’s past, present, and future</li> <li>▪ Treasured outdoor spaces</li> <li>▪ Spirit and value placed on collaboration</li> </ul>	<i>Areas for Action</i>
	<p><b>Primary Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Polarized community / NIMBYism</li> <li>▪ Missing middle housing</li> <li>▪ Lack of adequate tourist overnight accommodations (e.g., hotels)</li> <li>▪ No mechanism to be in regular touch with employers to know needs</li> <li>▪ 24-miles off the nearest interstate</li> </ul>	<p><b>Decide</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How to increase recreational tourism without hurting place or unduly burdening residents</li> <li>▪ Role of cannabis in economic development efforts</li> <li>▪ County Econ. Dev. staffing levels</li> <li>▪ Best ways to open County procurement opportunities for local businesses</li> </ul>	<p><b>Exit</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Migrate away from activities and investments that are out of sync with the new Action Plan</li> </ul>	

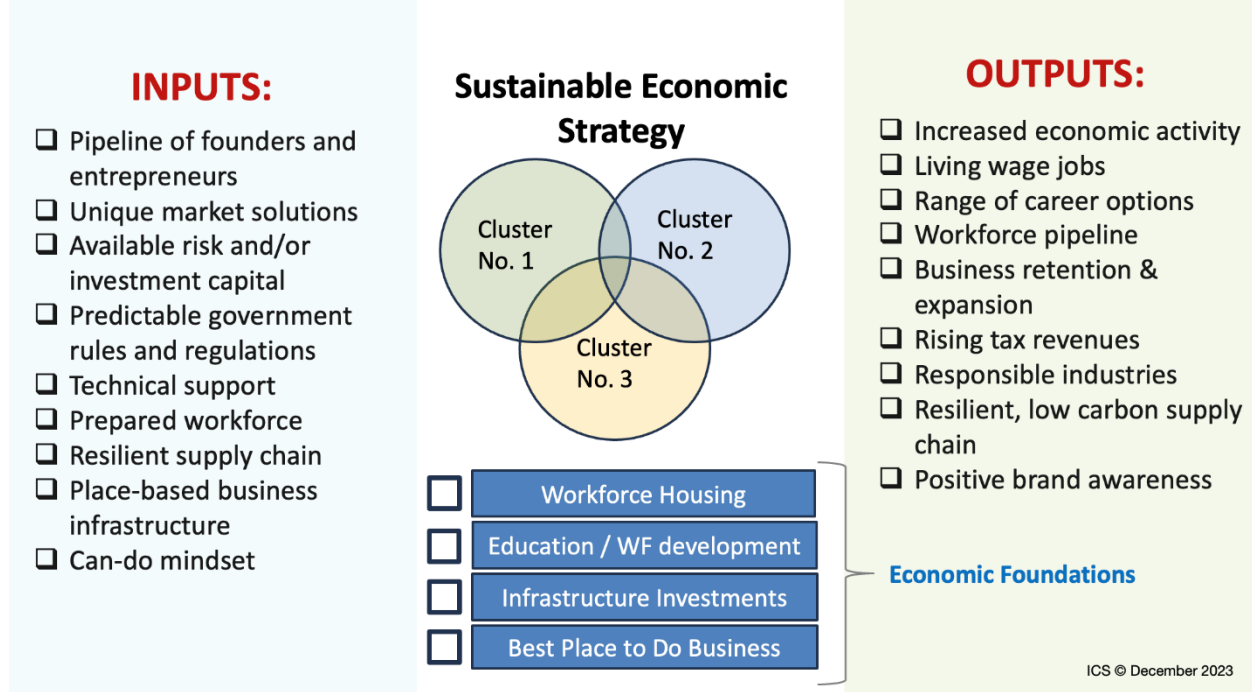
Note that ICS limits this particular assessment to “primary” strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to improve strategic clarity. Additional input and back up information is found in the appendix categorized as assets and opportunities.

**ACTION PLANNING FRAMEWORK**

Economic development can mean many different things to different people based on their familiarity, training, direct experience, occupation, or role in the community. ICS uses the framework found in Exhibit 5 to give stakeholders a “mental map” of how the components of economic development relate to one another which is vital for common understanding, collective planning, and problem-solving. It’s a system of interrelated activities.

The necessary inputs for jobs and business growth are on the left and the outputs are on the right. In the middle are overlapping circles depicting the specialized areas or industry sectors where a county or a region has a competitive advantage. Evidence of a competitive advantage is a concentration of firms that are market leaders or, if early results are not picked up in publicly available data sets yet, there’s evidence of a set of factors that, if combined and organized, could create market value. Examples of this in California is the tech specialization in Silicon Valley, biotech in San Diego, and entertainment arts in Los Angeles.

**Exhibit 5: ICS Economic Input-Output Model Used for Diagnosis**



In Nevada County this could be a number of things, from doubling down on recreation and tourism opportunities where they can be sustainably accommodated, to audio-visual manufacturing and IT, creating unique agricultural products, or a focus on sustainable construction materials and practices. More direct research is needed to shed light on what a few areas of concentration ought to be, but an online research review confirms that technology and advanced manufacturing, health care, recreation and tourism, and sustainable construction are the right spaces to emphasize at this time.

**Sidebar: Action Plan Alignment with California Jobs First (CJF)**

The State Legislature and Governor Newsom approved a \$600 million investment in California’s economic regions following COVID-19 to advance the creation of good paying jobs, especially in under invested communities, all linked to the state’s transition to a low carbon economy. Nevada County is part of a larger eight-county planning region that includes highly urbanized areas like Sacramento County, to mountain resort areas like Tahoe to the east and more ag-based rural areas like Colusa County to the northwest. An initial planning phase for this planning region is expected to wrap up in the first half of 2024 with the selection by the State later this year of a set of ready-to-launch projects that align with each regions’ economic development strategy. This Action Plan for Nevada County utilizes the same economic performance data generated for CJF, is engaged with economic and government partners representing Nevada County in the CJF planning and implementation process, and embraces inclusive practices and investments designed to benefit all residents and communities in Nevada County and beyond. To learn more about CJF, visit [www.valleyvision.org/projects/community-economic-resilience-fund/](http://www.valleyvision.org/projects/community-economic-resilience-fund/)

## WHERE DO WE WANT TO GO?

### 2024-26 FOCUS AREAS:

- 1. Align around a “grow-from-within” mindset to build a strong foundation.**
  - 1.1 Place sharp focus on investing in local entrepreneurship, small business formation and support, and the County’s creative economy strengths.
  - 1.2 Determine a cost-effective way to maintain a current inventory of businesses located chiefly in the unincorporated areas of the County to enable efficient two-way communication and early intervention/support.
  - 1.3 Organize a cross-sector team with local partners to regularly engage with local firms where the need is greatest, starting with the largest employers first, to understand and resolve business pain points as part of Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) effort.
  
- 2. Concentrate business startup, retention, recruitment, and expansion activities in five sectors.**
  - 2.1 Technology and advanced manufacturing
  - 2.2 Healthcare and social services
  - 2.3 Recreation and sustainable tourism
  - 2.4 Food and agriculture, including cannabis
  - 2.5 Sustainable / green construction
  
- 3. Increase County economic development support and investment.**
  - 3.1 To the extent financially feasible, increase direct County financial support for business, trade, and community groups on activities closely aligned with the new Action Plan.
  - 3.2 Take steps to improve internal coordination amongst and across County departments and various planning processes (e.g., general plans, recreation master plan, economic development, etc.)
  - 3.3 Signal through County planning and infrastructure investment where business relocation and growth will be encouraged, with particular emphasis on properties surrounding the Nevada County Airport.
  - 3.4 Double-down on efforts to capture federal funding for infrastructure and clean, low-carbon industries for which the County has natural advantages.
  - 3.5 With environmental and community safeguards in place, fast-track approvals that lead to more workforce housing at all price points.
  - 3.6 Expand public contracting opportunities to boost local procurement.
  - 3.7 Organize a quarterly Economic Partners meeting for coordination and joint action.
  
- 4. Boost the visibility of the County and its assets.**
  - 4.1 Build upon the existing “Go Nevada County” website, adding content, resources and stories oriented towards business and worker retention and attraction.
  - 4.2 Evaluate approaches for increased marketing and tourism and visitation in West County.
  - 4.3 Support ongoing efforts among Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), trade associations, chambers, and community groups to raise the County’s profile with key audiences.
  
- 5. Add additional tools and information to support local business growth.**

- 5.1 Create an incentive fund to induce business expansion or relocation commitments with specific and measurable obligations on the recipient.
- 5.2 Explore landing or creating a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) to support business startups and scaling.
- 5.3 Create a “How to do business in Nevada County” guide and ensure it is widely available.

**HOW ARE WE GOING TO GET THERE?**

**Putting the strategies into action:** Every strategy is designated with an “I,” “ST,” or “LT” to designate how quickly it can be put into action: whether Immediate (I), Short-Term (ST), or Long-Term (LT). Although this Economic Action Plan has been designed to focus on the next two years, it is acknowledged that some of the Long-Term strategies will extend beyond this timeframe.

Immediate	Short-Term	Long-Term
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Can enact immediately</li> <li>▪ No permissions required</li> <li>▪ Little to no expense</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Can enact within 12-months</li> <li>▪ Some internal permission(s) required</li> <li>▪ Negligible expense</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enact over next few years</li> <li>▪ Permission(s) required, both internal and external</li> <li>▪ Exceeds typical expense</li> </ul>
<i>“I” designation</i>	<i>“ST” designation</i>	<i>“LT” designation</i>

**A note about the centrality of workforce preparedness:** In virtually all meetings, identifying, educating, and training a qualified workforce with the necessary technical and soft skills (e.g., workplace expectations, effective communications, 7-step problem-solving, etc.) was emphasized by local economic development professionals and educators as a top priority, as well as persistent gap. Talent has risen to the top as *the* essential ingredient in a technology-laden and knowledge-dependent economy. Rather than calling this out in a stand-alone category, ICS has instead infused each strategy with a workforce development component to ensure it is locked into the plan. We encourage the Economic Development Office and its partners to continue to partner closely with K-12 and higher education and area workforce agencies regularly in problem-solving discussions, career fairs, apprenticeships, and internships as a means to develop wide and diverse pathways to “destination jobs” within the county.

**Goal 1: Align around a “grow-from-within” mindset to build a strong foundation.**

Economic research data shows that the vast majority of new jobs and economic gains are created by businesses that are already located in a community. That’s why Nevada County and its partners are concentrating their energies and resources on helping home-grown entrepreneurs, young firms, and local businesses survive and grow as a pathway to long term economic resilience and growth. This emphasis requires a combination of predictable and efficient local permitting and policies, delivering the right sort of business supports, financing and technical assistance at the right time, and being in close touch with entrepreneurs and employers (and the organizations that help them) to understand and meet their ever-evolving needs.

Objectives:

Strategies:

<p><b>1.1 Place sharp focus on investing in local entrepreneurship, small business formation and support, and the County’s creative economy strengths.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Prioritize County investment and support towards entrepreneurship and small business:</b> As part of the annual investments the County Economic Development Office makes, prioritize funding for activities that incentivize forming and scaling new and existing firms within the County that demonstrate measurable results. In addition, allocate not less than 50% of the new County incentive fund towards activities that support startups and small business success. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Support existing forums for entrepreneurs to help them understand and tap into the larger ecosystem:</b> Consistently convene entrepreneurs for community building, collaboration, co-mentorship, and joint problem solving, or join forums where this is already occurring. Survey those thinking of starting a business, founders, entrepreneurs, and support organization teams (e.g. Sierra Commons, SBDC / Sierra Business Council, etc.) about assets, gaps, and opportunities. Work towards creating a live ecosystem map available 24/7 noting assets and resources available locally. Collaborate to create a long-term entrepreneurship support vision for the County. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Build on efforts that make the important connection between local business groups and the arts community for economic advantage.</b> Recruit local artists, designers, musicians, performers, and others to be business mentors and advisors for entrepreneurship ventures possessing marketing, financial planning, strategic development, and other skills. Consider collaborative arts and business projects, workshops, and shared events. (I-ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Encourage business solutions to originate locally:</b> Work with large anchor employers to give regular insight into their “pain points” that local firms might be able to satisfy. Relatedly, see 3.6 regarding expanding local procurement. (I)</li> <li>▪ <b>Leverage e-retail:</b> To create a bigger customer base that is more durable during market swings, offer local retailers (new and existing) technical assistance to extend their market reach to consumers outside the local area for improved business resiliency and growth. (ST-LT)</li> <li>▪ <b>Support local education and training pathways to entrepreneurship:</b> Working with K-12 educators and administrators, especially high school and community college leadership, invest in and broaden local entrepreneurship pathways that include outreach and student engagement, entrepreneurial education, skill training, business plan development, networking, mentorship, financial support, and connections to co-working spaces and other infrastructure to support entrepreneurs of all types on their journey. (LT)</li> <li>▪ <b>Celebrate small business success:</b> Explore creation of an annual awards program to report local success stories and challenges as a</li> </ul>
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	<p>complement to current, local awards programs. Consider the value of an annual Entrepreneurship Summit focused on local leaders. Likewise, promote Global Entrepreneurship Week (GEW) each fall (2024 dates are Nov. 11-17) and develop County-associated GEW events and marketing. (ST)</p>
<p><b>1.2 Determine a cost-effective way to maintain a current inventory of businesses located in the unincorporated areas of the County to enable efficient two-way communication and early intervention/support.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Needs assessment and benchmarking:</b> Research existing business contact activities and programs in incorporated and unincorporated areas of the County; conduct surveys, interviews, and best practice research on preferred contact models and processes; and review applicable local and state laws to understand boundary conditions, limitations, or preemptions. Engage with affected firms and their support organizations to gather input. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Develop a practical strategy:</b> Outline the proposed contact program, the types of businesses involved, the technology tool(s) available and process for engagement, and expectations of participants. Decide on the administrative body responsible for managing the program, staffing requirements, and associated costs (direct and indirect). (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Program launch:</b> Provide resources and workshops for employers to understand the contact program. Develop communication materials and frequently asked questions to respond to queries and concerns. Officially start the program with a clear opening date. (ST-LT)</li> <li>▪ <b>Evaluation and adjustment:</b> Gather information, note patterns and needs. Regularly assess the contact program’s effectiveness and adjust policies and program features as needed. (ST-LT)</li> </ul>
<p><b>1.3 Expand on existing business support programs by organizing a cross-sector team to regularly engage with local firms where the need is greatest, starting with the largest employers first, to understand and resolve business pain points as part of Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) effort.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Introduce the BRE program to the community and gain support:</b> Build awareness and determine business segment readiness before pursuing activities. A BRE assessment chart can identify readiness levels. (I)</li> <li>▪ <b>Organize a BRE Task Force:</b> The task force should include organizations that are already engaged in business support activities, as well as diverse public and private stakeholders reflective of the community’s demographics. Schedule and hold task force meetings. The task force will discuss what businesses and industries should be targeted (e.g., mainstreet business, companies associated with a specific industry, or large anchor employers). A questionnaire can then be developed that asks firms about their needs and pain points. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Announce the effort and gather information:</b> The survey is announced publicly to the intended segment of the business community using trusted messengers and the media to give the program credibility and make it easier to book appointments. Electronic surveys are sent in advance of the visits. Once surveys are returned, individual task force members will be assigned to selected businesses according to the firms’ preference. (ST)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Analyze the results:</b> The response data, both from the surveys and interviews, are logged and analyzed. Information is given “green flags” and “red flags” for follow-up action by the task force. <b>(ST)</b></li><li>▪ <b>Initiate fixes:</b> The task force will determine which specific strategies to use to address the issues that surface, noting those within local control and those that require non-local actors to solve (e.g., state or federal action). <b>(ST-LT)</b></li><li>▪ <b>Report Findings:</b> A brief report is issued by the task force identifying areas of strength and specific areas of concern or need revealed by employers during the study. Results are then communicated to local government, educators and workforce development agencies, business and trade groups, and to the media to elevate public awareness and to catalyze action. <b>(ST-LT)</b></li></ul>
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*Lift: “Forging connections between local business groups and members of the arts community can lead to a vibrant cultural scene that enhances economic development, fosters community engagement, and enriches our quality of life.” – Eliza Tudor, Executive Director, Nevada County Arts Council*

**Sidebar: Emphasizing Nevada County’s Creative Economy Advantages**

Popularized by economist Richard Florida, the Creative Class is defined as people in design, arts, music, entertainment, and education whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or creative content. Research shows that Nevada County has higher proportion of artists, designers and creatives than other counties, which also helps to explain why the County his home to two State-designated cultural districts – Grass Valley / Nevada City and Truckee. A recent arts impact study completed by Americans for the Arts found that the nonprofit arts and cultural sector generated \$66 million in total economic activity in 2022 and supports \$39.4 million in household income and nearly 1,400 jobs for local residents. To learn more, visit [www.nevadacountyarts.org](http://www.nevadacountyarts.org)

**Include call out:** \$66m in annual economic impact. 1,400 jobs. \$39.4m in household income.

**Goal 2: Concentrate business startup, retention, recruitment, and expansion efforts in five specific sectors.**

Nevada County and its partners believe in the importance of building on their existing strengths, listening closely to demand signals, and positioning to capture market opportunities that have great promise today and in the years to come. This strategy has the added value of not putting all our eggs in one basket, but instead diversifying our economic base to better weather volatility and increase chances for success.

Objectives:

Strategies:



<p>2.1 Support the growth of technology and advanced manufacturing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ <b>Support technology hubs and business incubators:</b> Back private and public-sector spaces where founders and entrepreneurs can access affordable office space and shared resources (like office equipment and business services) to foster innovation, collaboration and networking. Link and leverage existing programs and offerings, like StarterHaus Truckee or Lift workspace, to larger regional entities like the <a href="#">Growth Factory</a>, based in Rocklin, CA, and to university-based tech accelerator programs in both California and Nevada. (I-ST-LT)</li><li>▪ <b>Assess existing accelerator programs and support new efforts:</b> Understand the existing make up of business accelerator programs and activities in the County geared to support IT and advanced manufacturing and seek to grow programs that offer intensive, short-term support to startups, including mentorship, training, technical assistance services, and access to investors. (ST-LT)</li><li>▪ <b>Increase access to funding and investment:</b> Facilitate greater access to seed funding and venture capital through partnership with local investors, angel networks, and venture capital firms such as Sierra Angels, Sacramento Angels, Impact Venture Capital, or DCA Capital. Work with partners to organize pitch events, facilitating meetings between firms and investors and providing guidance on securing investment. The County can also offer grants, subsidies, or tax incentives to support retention, expansion, and relocation objectives. See Objective 5.1 for details. (I-ST-LT)</li><li>▪ <b>Focus on workforce development and talent attraction:</b> Using existing business-education partnerships in the county, tailor education, vocational, and training programs to match destination jobs in targeted industry areas in Goal 2. This includes courses on high-demand technical skills, as well as soft skills including problem solving, effective communications, and teamwork. To the extent local talent is unavailable or cannot be developed in time with employer demands, consider developing campaigns to attract and retain professionals critical to key industries. This could include housing incentives, flexible work conditions, partner / spouse assistance, or peer networks for community building and career advancement. (ST-LT)</li><li>▪ <b>Creating a supportive local regulator environment:</b> To the extent possible, streamline or harmonize permitting and regulatory processes for starting or scaling a business in the County. (ST-LT)</li><li>▪ <b>Step up industry-academia partnerships:</b> Link and leverage available academic and vocational training programs and initiatives offered by Sierra College, Sacramento and Chico State, U.C. Davis, and other institutions that match Nevada County’s growth industries to improve outcomes. (ST-LT)</li><li>▪ <b>Networking events and innovation challenges:</b> Support and expand existing partner events that bring together founders, entrepreneurs, investors, and professionals to exchange knowledge, boost</li></ul>
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	<p>collaboration, and form new partnerships. Consider hosting innovation challenges and competitions to solve local problems, stimulate creativity, and showcase local talent, with winners receiving cash prizes, mentorship, and support in bringing their solution to market. (I-ST)</p>
<p><b>2.2 Support the growth of healthcare and social services.</b></p>	<p><b>In addition to aforementioned strategies that could be geared for this industry, consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Audit existing healthcare and social service-specific economic development and workforce activities in East and West County. Where need is greatest, consider the value of forming an employer-led healthcare work group, organized with support from County partners, whose members would come together several times a year to identify current challenges and opportunities, serve as a forum for information gathering and dissemination, and surface needs and priorities that business and trade groups, educational institutions and workforce agencies, and local governments could act upon. (ST)</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.3 Support the growth of recreation and sustainable tourism.</b></p>	<p><b>In addition to aforementioned strategies that could be geared for this industry, consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leverage the existing recreation and tourism work being done by tourism and business groups, the County, and the State of California to maintain a standing forum to track progress and surface needs and priorities that business and trade groups, educational institutions and workforce agencies, and local governments could act upon. (ST)</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.4 Support the growth of Food and Agriculture, including cannabis.</b></p>	<p><b>In addition to aforementioned strategies that could be geared for this industry, bring special attention to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Audit existing food, ag, and cannabis-specific economic development and workforce activities in East and West County. Where need is greatest, consider the value of forming an employer-led Ag and Food work group, organized with support from County partners, whose members would come together several times a year to identify current challenges and opportunities, serve as a forum for information gathering and dissemination, and surface needs and priorities that business and trade groups, educational institutions and workforce agencies, and local governments could act upon. (ST)</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.5 Support the growth of Sustainable / green construction.</b></p>	<p><b>In addition to aforementioned strategies that could be geared for this industry, bring special attention to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leverage the existing construction sector work being done by contractor associations, business groups, labor, the County, and the State of California to maintain a standing forum to track progress and surface needs and priorities that business and trade groups, educational institutions and workforce agencies, and local governments could act upon. (ST)</li> </ul>

**Goal 3: Increase County economic development support and investment.**

This Action Plan process was undertaken with the understanding that the County has a unique role and responsibility in driving shared strategies with its private sector and nonprofit sector partners to promote more local employment, jobs with higher wages, greater investment, and a growing tax base that supports public safety, great schools and community services, and Nevada County’s extraordinary quality of life.

**Side bar: Making Critical Broadband Investments**

In today's digital age, high-speed internet is essential for businesses to compete in global markets, enabling small and large firms alike to reach customers, access suppliers, engage in e-commerce, as well as create new digital advantages that improve agriculture, water resources, and land management. For rural communities with smaller customer bases and greater distance from job centers, broadband access helps bridge the digital divide, allowing residents to engage in remote work and allowing business to recruit talent and access markets. Residents also gain access to expanded online education and training opportunities and greater to quality healthcare options via telemedicine, promoting equity for rural communities. The Nevada County region is slated to receive nearly \$75 million for broadband upgrades thanks to funding from the California Public Utilities Commission. While very significant, ongoing investments will be needed to continue to connect the County to economic opportunities locally and around the globe.

Objectives:

Strategies:

<p><b>3.1 To the extent financially feasible, increase direct County financial support for business, trade, and community groups on activities closely aligned with the new Action Plan.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Establish a baseline:</b> Conduct an internal review of existing County contracts let by the County Economic Development Office for economic development services performed by external organizations and form an assessment based on performance reports and outcomes. (I)</li> <li>▪ <b>Use an outcome-based approach:</b> Based on available funding, develop a list of desired outcomes that could be achieved through annual underwriting and consistent with the Economic Development Action Plan and create an “Invitation to Participate” process by which existing and new 501c3 economic development and community organizations would be invited to fulfil critical activities independently or by teaming up with others. Utilize performance criteria not limited to value factor, capacity, experience, tactics, population and geography served, to make investment selections. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Stay aligned with the Action Plan:</b> Set regular meetings with the funded group to ensure coordination, communication and collaboration. (ST)</li> </ul>
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<p><b>3.2 Take steps to improve internal coordination amongst and across County departments and various planning processes (e.g., general plans, recreation master plan, economic development, etc.) on economic development-related matters.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Conduct internal workshops and information sharing sessions:</b> Apprise department leaders and staff of the rationale, content, and desired outcomes of the Action Plan. Explain the cross-linkage between the Action Plan and other planning activities, tools and processes and the way in which the Economic Development Office should be involved and informed in internal decision-making that impact Plan participants or outcomes. <b>(I)</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Bring customer-centric experiences to light:</b> Elevate examples of “green flag” and “red flag” events experienced by local businesses, current and prospective, and the experiences from business membership and trade groups on a regular feedback for affirmation as well as course-correction opportunities. <b>(I)</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Consider forming interdepartmental task forces:</b> To the extent practical, form cross-functional teams spearheaded by the Economic Development Office and made up of members of different departments to tackle specific challenges or opportunities. Maintain a method that allows information to be shared easily and efficiently across departments. Clarify how disputes or conflicts will be resolved between departments quickly and constructively. <b>(ST)</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>3.3 Signal through County planning and infrastructure investment where business relocation and growth will be encouraged, with particular emphasis on properties surrounding the Nevada County Airport.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Complete a comprehensive needs assessment:</b> Identify current and future business-related infrastructure needs via a thorough analysis, comparing County holdings to market needs and expectations. Review the state of existing infrastructure (e.g., property improvements, water and sewer systems, roads, broadband, etc.) to identify areas that require maintenance, upgrades or new construction. Align with planned investments by other entities. Prioritization considerations include the criticality to business, cost-benefit-analysis including economic gains, and capacity to achieve economic, community, and environmental objectives. <b>(ST-LT)</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Create an investment framework:</b> Align infrastructure investments to short and long-term goals and objectives within specific prioritized areas. Ensure the framework is integrated across various departments to promote synergy and maximize value. <b>(ST-LT)</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Financing and Implementation:</b> Identify various funding sources including local budgets, state and federal grants, public-private partnerships, and innovative financing mechanisms like infrastructure banks or green bonds. Create financial plans. Include timelines, responsible parties, performance milestones to track projects so they are completed on time and within budget. <b>(LT)</b></li> <li>▪ <b>Resident communication and marketing to potential end users:</b> Clearly and regularly communicate to local residents where business development and growth will be focused in the County to establish widespread understanding and agreement. Actively promote available business infrastructure to existing and prospective employers wishing to expand or relocate within the County. <b>(I)</b></li> </ul>

<p><b>3.4 Double-down on efforts to capture federal funding for infrastructure and clean, low-carbon industries for which the County has natural advantages.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Pursue what’s already working:</b> Continue the County’s practice of utilizing contract grant writers and close regular collaborations with groups like the Rural County Representatives of California (RCRC) to monitor funding opportunities and to position the County and its partners for available funding programs. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Prioritize investable projects:</b> Maintain a prioritized list of investable projects and programs that are investment ready and continually renew. Regularly evaluate with County partners for awareness and input. (I)</li> <li>▪ <b>Obtain expert assistance:</b> Contract with grant writers familiar with economic development-related grant offerings from the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Energy, Homeland Security, Defense, etc., and draft submissions in coordination with the County Economic Development Office and its partners to support enactment of elements of the Action Plan. (ST)</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.5 With environmental and community safeguards in place, fast-track approvals that lead to more workforce housing at all price points.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Organize for success:</b> Expand the reach or duplicate the offerings of the <a href="#">Mountain Housing Council</a> (MHC) in Truckee to cover western Nevada County in order to bring together local governments, special districts, corporate partners, nonprofits, and networks to tackle the housing crisis in the area using public outreach, events, communications and advocacy. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Determine the crux of the issue(s):</b> Based on best practices from MHC and other communities in the mountain west, conduct a regional workforce housing needs assessment using public, private, and foundation funding to accelerate a range of solutions. (ST-LT)</li> <li>▪ <b>Clarify how government can help and take prompt action:</b> Borrowing the playbooks of policies, programs, and partnerships from other jurisdictions, take action to streamline environmental review and permitting processes and make longer-term infrastructure investments in place making that reduces time for approvals and construction. (ST-LT)</li> <li>▪ <b>Involve the Economic Development Office</b> in progress reporting, communications with impacted stakeholders, especially as the liaison to local firms and business groups, and in problem-solving. (I)</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.6 Expand public contracting opportunities to boost local procurement.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Research what’s happening now:</b> Assess the involvement of local firms in procurement opportunities with the County, the Cities of Grass Valley, Nevada City, Town of Truckee, and area schools and related agencies. Consider a similar exercise involving the top five largest private sector employers to determine locally based suppliers and supply chain opportunities. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Pinpoint both challenges and opportunities:</b> Through dialogue with procurement staff and separately local firms, understand current policies and practices that may limit local procurement as well as business opportunities for local sourcing. (ST-LT)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Launch a County-based local procurement initiative:</b> Using best practice, select department procurement opportunities with low barriers to entry to initialize the program, learn, and adjust pathways to enable greater local supply chain opportunities. (ST-LT)</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.7 Organize a quarterly Economic Partners meeting for coordination and joint action.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establish an annual meeting schedule and publicize. (I)</li> <li>▪ Seek a roster of participants that is broad based. (I)</li> <li>▪ Create group norms and expectations. (I)</li> <li>▪ Formulate a standing agenda for two-way information sharing, status updates from allied organizations, shared decision-making, joint pursuit of initiatives, grants, or research, and aligned action. (I)</li> </ul>

**Sidebar: Missing Middle Housing, Defined**

According to the Mountain Housing Council, there is a gap between traditional affordable housing programs and available housing in the Tahoe-Truckee region [and beyond] — people who make too much to qualify for affordable housing developments, but too little to buy or rent market rate homes. This group includes teachers, firefighters, business owners and many, many others. Ultimately they’re being forced to move away, leaving employers unable to staff businesses, emergency responders struggling with response times and impacting the region’s economy, culture and vitality. Overcoming the missing middle housing gap can help. It refers to a lack of medium-density housing between single-family and large-scale apartments such as townhomes, duplexes, or courtyard apartments that were common in the pre-WWII U.S., and therefore, “missing.” Build costs for such home-types are lower, increasing access and affordability, and these housing products match today’s needs across a wide age spectrum as well as a market desire for tighter-knit communities and walkable neighborhoods. **Sources:** Mountain Housing Council, Wikipedia, Missing Middle Housing.com.

**No silver bullet:** Research shows that that making homes more accessible and affordable to a wider range of renters and buyers requires a multifaceted approach, combining regulatory reforms, financial incentives and strategic partnerships. A partial list of interventions includes down payment assistance, local funding for affordable developments, jurisdiction land contributions, community land trusts, inclusionary zoning or in-lieu fees, State Project Homekey funds, deed restrictions, establishing a housing trust fund, accessory dwelling units (ADU), short term rental restrictions, second home to long-term rental assistance, code simplifications, employer-assisted housing, fee waivers or deferrals, housing choice vouchers, and/or senior-specific housing.

**Goal 4: Boost the visibility of the County and its assets.**

Nevada County’s economy benefits from thoughtful and strategic storytelling about place, people, and unique experiences and attractions. Effective marketing drives increased economic activity through lodging, dining, retail, and recreation activity, increased tax revenues, and celebrates local arts, crafts, and locally produced goods. It also puts a spotlight on place through signature events, festivals, and celebrations. With intention, marketing can also be used to attract and retain workers, businesses, and investors and build increased local pride. This goal area builds on existing marketing plans, activities and platforms including [www.gonevadacounty.com](http://www.gonevadacounty.com) to promote all communities in the County. It also

recognizes strong east-west distinctions in capacity and need, elevating the call for stepped-up visitation marketing, organization, and collaboration west of Truckee-Tahoe.

Objectives:

Strategies:

<p><b>4.1</b> Build upon the existing “Go Nevada County” website, adding content, resources and stories oriented towards business and worker retention and attraction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Audit existing activities:</b> Examine the current reach and impact of this web platform upon key business segments and stakeholders inside and outside the County to establish a baseline. (I)</li> <li>▪ <b>Set measurable goals:</b> Come to agreement on a narrow set of desired marketing outcomes that are achievable. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Work closely with employers, business groups, and marketing experts</b> to develop targeted messages and campaigns focused on local employee and business retention goals; reasons why Nevada County is a great place to set up and do business; and elevating Nevada County’s outstanding quality of life. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Report and celebrate results:</b> Provide ongoing evidence of various marketing campaign’s positive effects on business activity, tax receipts, as well as positive survey results from employers, business groups, and residents. (LT)</li> </ul>
<p><b>4.2</b> Evaluate approaches for increased marketing and tourism and visitation in West County.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Audit existing activities:</b> Collaborate with tourism and business groups, staff and consultants to document existing marketing activities, audiences served, reach and frequency, and budgets to understand reach, impact, and areas of opportunity. (I)</li> <li>▪ <b>Engage a broad base of stakeholders:</b> Collaborate with hoteliers, wineries, tourist and visitation groups, outdoor recreation groups, business and ag organizations, etc., to determine what makes communities in West County unique and shine. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Set measurable goals:</b> Come to agreement on a narrow set of desired marketing outcomes that are achievable. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Clarify funding sources:</b> Identify public, private, and community fund sources. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Develop a set of strategies to achieve West County goals:</b> Tap local expertise and connections to map out a set of strategies and tactics to accomplish the desired results leveraging making full use of existing assets, resources, activities, events, and talent.</li> <li>▪ <b>Leverage State Tourism marketing plans:</b> To the extent practical, match local marketing efforts to Visit California’s regional tourism strategic plan for the Gold Country. Continue to participate in stakeholder update and planning meetings with Visit California. (ST)</li> </ul>
<p><b>4.3</b> Support ongoing efforts among Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs), trade associations, chambers, and community groups to raise the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Maintain regular communication:</b> Engage regularly with County marketing partners to share results of marketing efforts, build awareness of new campaigns in the making, provide regular feedback, and share best practices. (I)</li> <li>▪ <b>Report and celebrate results:</b> Provide ongoing evidence of various marketing campaign’s positive effects on visitation totals, tax</li> </ul>

County’s profile with key audiences.	receipts, as well as positive survey results from employers, business groups, and residents. (LT)
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**Goal 5: Add additional tools and information to support local business growth.**

Having the right tools and information on-hand can make a huge difference when people need to make sense of complexity, when extra help is required, or when opportunity strikes. Statewide and local data shows that the biggest challenge to economic resilience and growth is having access to the financial resources, people, and technical knowledge necessary to help startups, young firms, or more established companies take the next step in their evolution.

Objectives:

Strategies:

<p><b>5.1 Create an incentive fund to induce business expansion or relocation commitments with specific and measurable obligations on the recipient.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Inventory County-based non-cash incentive offerings:</b> Working with the County executive office, department leaders, and County staff, identify a mix of potential non-cash offerings within the law and valued by current and prospective firms, including fee reductions, tax breaks, subsidized loans, financial protections, and/or improvements in infrastructure. Research working programs in other jurisdictions as guide. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Define the scope and mechanics of the initial program:</b> Clarify the objectives, eligibility criteria, application process, and metrics for success of the incentive program based on non-cash and cash-based offerings. Incorporate feedback loops to ensure continual learning, adjustment and program improvements matching employer needs. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Secure funding and deploy:</b> Identify and secure initial capital from government grants, other financial institutions, private investors, and philanthropic sources to support fund needs. Carefully negotiate and secure incentive fund commitments, tracking performance milestones in step with incentive tranches. See appendix no. 3 for budget details. (ST-LT)</li> <li>▪ <b>Communicate outcomes:</b> Report status updates and results to the Board and to economic development partners, nonprofits. (ST)</li> </ul>
<p><b>5.2 Explore landing or creating a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) to support business startups and scaling.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Clarify the mission:</b> Working with the County’s economic development partners, especially the federal Small Business Development Center operated by the Sierra Business Council, clearly define the economic development goals and target market the CDFI will serve. (ST)</li> <li>▪ <b>Research CDFI alternatives:</b> Look into existing CDFI’s providing economic development services in Northern California and virtual CDFI’s licensed to operate in the State to determine if expanding their offering in Nevada County is possible or if launching a CDFI is most practical and cost-efficient. (ST)</li> </ul>



<p><i>“Created by Congress in 1994, the CDFI program was designed to combine federal money with private capital to help qualified financial institutions meet the need of underserved communities that typically lack access to affordable loans and safe financial services.”</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Develop a Nevada County-specific CDFI business plan:</b> Create a comprehensive plan detailing the services to be offered, operational strategies, funding sources, financial projections, and governance mechanisms to ensure accountability. If applicable, formally establish tax-exempt status or utilize the status of an existing organization. (LT)</li> <li>▪ <b>Certify the CDFI fund:</b> Apply for CDFI certification through the U.S. Treasury Department, making sure to satisfy all the requirements for serving the target market and business segments that have been identified and agreed upon. Visit: <a href="https://www.cdfifund.gov/programs-training/certification">https://www.cdfifund.gov/programs-training/certification</a> (LT)</li> <li>▪ <b>Secure funding and deploy:</b> Identify and secure initial capital from government grants, other financial institutions, private investors, and philanthropic sources to support investment and the initial day-to-day operational expenses of the CDFI fund including financial advisor(s) and make targeted investments. (LT)</li> </ul>
<p><b>5.3 Create a “How to do business in Nevada County” guide and ensure it is widely available.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <b>Research and gather information:</b> Compile detailed information on local business regulations, licensing requirements, tax structures, and available resources for startups and existing firms. Consult with local government agencies, business groups, chambers of commerce, and trade and professional groups. (I)</li> <li>▪ <b>Organize and structure the guide:</b> Divide the guide into clear, easy-to-navigate sections include how to start a business, legal and tax obligations, a list of local resources, and ways to address common questions. (I)</li> <li>▪ <b>Publish and distribute:</b> Make the guide available online on the County’s website, seeking cross-linking opportunities to promote the guide with cities / townships and private business groups and nonprofits. Regularly update the guide to reflect any changes in regulations or resources. (ST)</li> </ul>

### Objectives and Strategies Scaled to a Two-year Activation Window

Making this Action Plan realistic within existing resource constraints (staff bandwidth, known financial resources, and time) was critical to the inclusion, prioritization, of the different activities outlined in the five focus areas above. These activities will lay a concrete foundation for the County and its economic and community partners from which to build upon in future years.

### ARE WE GETTING THERE?

## **Putting the Action Plan to Work**

Over a quarter of the strategies in the Action Plan can be enacted immediately and require no new permissions (i.e., “I” or immediate category). Nearly 70% of all the strategies in the Action Plan strategies can be implemented in the near term once additional permissions are obtained and funding is allocated (i.e., “ST” or short-term category). The balance of action will take more effort and time to implement and require additional funding and permissions from both inside and outside the organization (i.e., “LT” or long-term category).

## **Annual Work Plan Defines the Priorities for that Year**

The Nevada County Economic Development Action Plan spells out a clear short-term direction for the County and its partners that is intended to be operationalized each year via an annual work plan complete with annual priorities selected from this playbook with due dates and owners. This approach maintains operational flexibility for the County and its partners to adjust to evolving needs and changes in the operating environment while staying focused on an agreed-upon course.

## **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)**

Key Performance Indicators, or KPIs, are a set of quantifiable measures used by organizations to gauge their overall performance. Examined as a group and routinely measured, KPIs can be useful for determining the areas of an Action Plan are making progress or falling behind, sparking efforts to address identified challenges. The existence of KPIs can also make benchmarking against similar efforts easier to compare for continual improvement. Tracking performance to this degree requires dedicated staff time; the regular collection of data; and subsequent analysis and reporting. The County’s Economic Development Office and business and community partners should consider which KPIs are best to track and feasible to measure within existing systems.

### **Possible Key Performance Indicator Types (for example only):**

- County and other dollars invested in priority economic development actions over baseline\*
- Number of new businesses started
- Total number of jobs created or retained
- Increase in sales over baseline
- Dollar value of capital invested, including grants, loans, and/or other financing
- Business longevity / survivability rates
- Wage growth
- Industry growth
- Education attainment level
- Income levels at or above cost of living
- Housing availability and affordability scores
- Founder, entrepreneur, and small business success stories (qualitative)
- Total dollars programmed for upgrades in County business infrastructure over baseline

\*Baseline is defined as performance levels achieved in 2023.

## **Performance Evaluation**

After selecting a set of subset of the aforementioned metrics that accurately reflect progress towards Action Plan execution each year, baseline data will be gathered to provide a comparison point. Then on a quarterly basis similar data will be collected from the County, its partners, and other sources and analyzed to compare results. Results will be analyzed to identify changes that can be attributed to various economic development actions and the extent to which external factors could have influenced the outcomes, such as macro-economic trends, policy changes, or unforeseen events. The County Economic Development Office will engage with partners, economic development experts, and other stakeholders to gather feedback on the perceived impact of the economic development initiatives to gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of various initiatives and actions and areas for improvement. A short report detailing the findings of the evaluation, including data analysis and stakeholder feedback will be issued and made available to the Board of Supervisors, partners, and other stakeholders to improve awareness and education and to identify areas for Action Plan success and improvement.

By systematically evaluating the impact of the Economic Development Action Plan using these steps, decision-makers can ensure that the objectives and strategies are effectively contributing to the economic resilience, growth and prosperity of the County and its communities. This process also promotes accountability, transparency, and the efficient use of resources.

## APPENDIX

### Appendix Item 1: Economic Assets:

(Drawn from extensive interviews and independent research gathered by ICS.)

- The County is viewed by external users and partners as high functioning and responsive.
- Historic downtowns that are treasured by locals and repeat visitors, with unique event offerings.
- Proportionately large creative class (i.e., people in design, education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or creative content) and relatedly, the County's two cultural arts districts.
- Unique natural resources that lend themselves to memorable recreational experiences, including downhill and cross-country skiing, river sports, mountain biking, road cycling, and hiking.
- Mild climate, good soils, ready access to clean water, and relatively easy access to outside markets position the County and its farmers and ranchers to produce fruit of all varieties, small grains, hay, wine grapes, cannabis, sheep and cattle, and wood products. Ag land in active production acts as an environmental asset (e.g., watershed replenishment, air quality, etc.), a highly effective carbon sink, channels growth into existing developed areas, presents great opportunities for business formation and growth, and contributes greatly to community aesthetics and high quality of life.
- Vast forest lands that are well suited for forest and watershed treatment-related businesses and next-generation biomass plants that generate clean energy while cleaning the forests.

- Existence of effective land trusts with cooperative agreements, such as the Northern Foothills Partnership, to increase the protection of historic ranches, oak woodlands, and important watersheds for landscape-scale conservation and connectivity.
- Nevada County’s high number of retirees require more health and social service demand and often lower tax generation but also represent a largely untapped workforce asset with individuals possessing experience and knowledge, a strong work ethic, mentoring and training abilities, and flexible work time for employers (part-time, full-time, or project-based work).
- Post pandemic, the County has a higher level of remote workers earning middle to high wage income deployed locally who possess business connections outside the County, valuable business knowledge, and potential capital to allocate locally.
- Existence and close-knit collaboration between Sierra Business Council, it’s SBDC, Sierra Commons, the Nevada City Chamber, and the ERC to support startups, micro businesses and entrepreneurs with technical assistance and training.
- A proportionately large number of nonprofit organizations that provide supportive services as well as employing thousands.
- Two locally anchored health systems (e.g., tax base, employment base, community support, business leadership).
- Sierra College’s Nevada County campus and suite of Career Technical Education (CTE) offerings to Nevada County residents of all ages, including Mechatronics and Construction Skills Bootcamp.
- Existence of education-workforce-business collaboration efforts to support County youth (i.e., ERC Talent Team).
- Relative to California, Nevada County has a small population (103,487 in 2021, according to the U.S. Census) whose leadership can assemble more easily and attempt new initiatives quickly which serve as a competitive advantage.

**Appendix Item 2: Economic Opportunities:**

(Drawn from extensive interviews and independent research gathered by ICS.)

- Clarify the County’s role in the economic development space
- Streamline the permitting and business approval process at the County
- Create a “How to Do Business in Nevada County” guide and ensure it is widely available
- Organize to capture historic federal funding for infrastructure (e.g., highways, roads, streets, bridges, broadband), clean, green industries, and more
- Launch a formalized business retention and expansion (BRE) program to support employer needs and to serve as an early warning system

- Launch a County-scale destination marketing program, carried out by an independent third party, to drive year-round visitation, enhance transit occupancy tax (TOT) revenues, restaurant and retail activity, and boost Nevada County’s perception as a great place to live, work, and play
- Create a county business license program to improve understanding of local business, increase communication, and increase connection to County support services
- Launch an incentive fund to help induce business expansion or relocation commitments with specific and measurable obligation on the recipient
- Signal through County planning and investment where business relocation and growth will be encouraged in the County based on available infrastructure including high speed broadband, roads, sewer, and water infrastructure, recognizing the business advantages in proximity to the Nevada County airport
- Leverage the County’s heritage as a first mover in solar and photovoltaic manufacturing and deployment, its prime location and natural assets, together with the existence of small, advanced manufacturing firms to create a supportive ecosystem that positions and supports local firms to capture market opportunities in the transition to a low carbon economy
- Leverage the County’s agricultural assets, heritage, and institutions to emphasize the production of locally sourced food, food education, food culture, and food tourism. Include closed-loop production with support for community kitchens, a modern mobile slaughterhouse serving local farmers and ranchers, and increasing local food procurement practices by large institutions, like the two hospitals. Current CSA programs and supporting the development of food trucks would improve public awareness and buy-in and lend towards a positive live-work-play message and culture in the County
- Leveraging Visit California’s Regional Tourism Strategic Planning process and the County’s own recreation master planning process
- Development of a County Film Office similar to Placer County’s offering
- Increased local procurement

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## **ABOUT THE OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

- **Office staff:** Kimberly Parker
- **Office created:** July 25, 2022
- **Our mission:** committed to coordinated actions with our partners to build a resilient, diversified economy that leverages our unique cultural and natural resources, embraces innovation, entrepreneurship and small businesses, and maintains a high quality of life for all.
- **Regular partners:** local business groups, chambers, trade and professional organizations, local, state, and federal business technical assistance program providers, and various community and arts groups in the County. Also coordinates closely with regional organizations supporting economic development and sustainable growth.

## **ABOUT ICS**

Integrated Communications Strategies, LLC provides policy and crisis communication, issues management, government relations, and strategic planning services. The firm also specializes in facilitating stakeholder engagement to solve complex economic development challenges. Raised in Nevada County and a 1983 graduate of Nevada Union, Action Plan project lead Bill Mueller has over 33-years of experience delivering concrete results from unique public-private partnerships as a strategic consultant, CEO of Valley Vision, global business leader for Intel Corporation, vice president of policy and programs for the Sacramento Metro Chamber, and as staff to elected officials in California and Washington, DC. ICS Partner Jerry Azevedo has over 20-years of experience as a trusted advisor to senior executives in public agencies, industry groups and corporations looking to advance a policy agenda or dealing with reputational or crisis issues. To learn more, visit [www.integrated-comms.com](http://www.integrated-comms.com)

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Collage of NC places of business, people (residents and employees), marque events, recreation assets, agriculture, and beauty shots of communities

## LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

This Economic Development Action Plan, adopted by the Board in March 2024 is a living document, subject to regular progress checks by the Board of Supervisors and adjustments in the face of new events or changing needs. We wish to thank the many partners in our communities throughout Nevada County who contributed to this Action Plan and their ongoing advice and support in carrying it out together, as well as our regional and state partners who are committed to our success.

### To Learn More:

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