



Eastern Sierra Council of Governments (ESCOG) Joint Powers Authority Agenda

MEMORANDUM

To: Deston Dishion, City Administrator City of Bishop
Nate Greenberg, County Administration, Inyo County
Sandra Moberly, County Administrator, Mono County
Rob Patterson, Town Manager, Town of Mammoth Lakes

From: Elaine Kabala, Executive Director, ESCOG

Subject: Comparison of Member Agency Strategic Plans and Alignment with Current ESCOG Activities

As requested by the Regional Managers of the Member Agencies of the ESCOG, please find below an analysis of each jurisdiction's strategic plans and their relationship to current ESCOG activities. This analysis assumes support for current ESCOG activities in economic development, outdoor recreation, wildfire mitigation and housing as the organizing principle to identify similarities between each strategy and how their goals are supported by ESCOG. Additional opportunities to leverage regional collaboration are also identified: however, this analysis should be considered a basis for initial discussion and an opportunity to potential roles not identified.

Many of the priorities in each strategic plan reflect commitment to quality municipal services. Those goals are internal to the organization and ESCOG has no role in implementation. Additionally, comparison of individual member agency goals does not encompass potential opportunities presented by regional collaboration, such as capacity for regional coordination and representation in current and future state initiatives (California Jobs First, requirements for demonstrated regional partnership under Proposition 4, etc) or establishment of a federal Economic Development District. Regional initiatives may present opportunities that provide benefits to each jurisdiction that aren't included within the traditional roles of local government.

Summary:

With relationship to ESCOG's powers of authority, the City of Bishop, Town of Mammoth Lakes, Inyo County, and Mono County share priorities around economic development, housing, sustainable natural resource management, responsible outdoor recreation, and wildfire mitigation.

Economic Development is identified as a priority for all jurisdictions, however there is limited staff dedicated solely to economic development activities. The member agencies identify the need to address housing shortages, beautify and revitalize communities, support small businesses, attract

new industries, and diversify local economies. The strategic plans mention regional collaboration, workforce development, and leveraging state and federal resources. Each jurisdiction also emphasizes the need for investments in public infrastructure. Although this is not currently an ESCOG program, establishing an Economic Development Administration (EDA) Economic Development District (EDD) could assist with accessing federal infrastructure funds, support business expansion and downtown revitalization, and support other regional workforce development goals.

Other common themes included commitment to natural resource management, climate resilience, wildfire mitigation, and sustainable outdoor recreation. These goals were more emphasized by the Counties and the Town of Mammoth Lakes, which have more established natural resource, wildfire and outdoor recreation programs and capacity. Wildfire mitigation and preparedness is identified primarily by Inyo County including commitments to vegetation management, home hardening, and project planning, but has previously been expressed as a regional priority. Similarly, even though sustainable outdoor recreation isn't included in each strategic plan, it is recognized by local communities as a cultural and economic asset. Opportunities to enhance the regional recreation economy include investments in trails, recreation destinations, visitor management, and public education.

These shared priorities are directly supported by the ESCOG through its regional initiatives:

Economic Development: ESCOG is administering implementation of the regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), including regular coordination meetings with regional economic development partners, annual updates, and development of an application to establish an Eastern Sierra EDD. The establishment of a regional Economic Development District (EDD) positions the region to compete for federal EDA funding for infrastructure, workforce, and industry investments that align with local economic development goals. ESCOG also serves as a regional partner supporting the California Jobs First (CAJF) / Sierra Jobs First (SJF) initiative, representing the unique opportunities and needs of Inyo, Mono and Alpine Counties. Under SJF, Through ESCOG is supporting seed funding for the Eastern Sierra Business Resource Center, which will provide business creation, attraction, retention, and expansion capacity for the region.

Outdoor Recreation: ESCOG has served as a partner in the implementation of projects identified in the regional Sustainable Recreation and Tourism Initiative through pilot projects such as the Buttermilk Infrastructure and Recreation Planning Initiative and the and the Towns to Trails feasibility plan. These projects demonstrated pathways for regional collaboration between local stakeholders and federal land managers to invest in outdoor recreation management and assets. Tourism is the base export economy of the region, therefore strengthened interjurisdictional partnerships and project development support business development. Sustainable recreation and tourism is identified as economic development strategy in both the regional CEDS and the Sierra Jobs First Strategic Plan and the first recommended actions include developing regional collaborative structures to identify recreation needs and opportunities. ESCOG's CAJF applications (in partnership with other organizations including Cerro Coso's Sustainable Outdoor Leadership workforce development program), seeks to find opportunities for workforce development that support the recreation economy. The Business Resource Center can also offer entrepreneurial counseling for recreation based business establishment and expansion.

Wildfire Mitigation: ESCOG has provided a critical coordination role by administering and aligning grant funding for cross-jurisdictional mitigation efforts. Specifically, the Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator has supported building capacity in NGO partners to support landscape scale project

planning and implementation. Similarly, vegetation management and forestry have also been identified in the SJF strategy and by workforce development partners as an economic expansion activity.

Areas for regional program expansion that further support member agency goals include:

Regional Housing Strategies: A unified approach to market demand analysis, affordable housing programs, workforce housing and partnerships could help small jurisdictions share housing opportunities/needs data and access funding more effectively.

Shared Business and Economic Development Resources: Build a network across counties to support business retention and entrepreneurship (e.g. expand the reach of the Eastern Sierra Business Resource Center).

Regional Grant Coordination: Jointly identify and prioritize grant opportunities for wildfire mitigation funding, infrastructure investments (including recreation/tourism infrastructure), and other relevant programs. Create centralized capacity for grant administration.

Regional Recreation Planning: Expand initiatives like Towns-to-Trails to invest in regional recreation destinations, experiences and assets that curate the landscapes and unique culture of Eastern Sierra communities.

Shared Visitor Management: Coordinate on education and messaging, wayfinding, and maintenance to enhance visitor experience while protecting natural resources (e.g. the “Ignite” campaign).

Unified Wildfire Resilience Strategy: ESCOG can lead a regional wildfire mitigation framework that aligns planning, fuels reduction, and public education (e.g. the Eastern Sierra Wildfire Alliance).

Collective Legislative Advocacy: Present a unified voice to the state and federal government on rural needs and funding priorities.