



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

STAFF REPORT

To: ESCOG Joint Powers Authority
From: Elaine Kabala, ESCOG Staff
Subject: ESCOG Budget and Capacity Planning Strategy Discussion
Meeting date: April 22, 2026
Prepared on: April 15, 2026
Attachments: A) None

BACKGROUND

Over the past several years, ESCOG has expanded its role in regional coordination, project development, and grant administration. This growth is tied to significant new and anticipated funding streams, particularly in wildfire resilience, broadband infrastructure, and regional economic development. At the same time, several existing funding sources that support ESCOG's operations and staffing are scheduled to conclude over the next one to two fiscal years.

Given these evolving conditions, the Board has requested a strategic discussion to assess ESCOG's overall capacity landscape, understand shifting resource needs, and consider organizational adjustments necessary to support ongoing and emerging responsibilities. This conversation is intended to inform future budget development and staffing planning.

ANALYSIS

1. Current Capacity Landscape

ESCOG's available capacity is influenced by several major funding programs:

a. Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG)

- Provides funding for two full-time equivalent positions over five years (totaling \$1,159,600).
- Includes 20% administrative overhead on the total CDFW award (\$414,432).

b. Sierra Jobs First (SJF)

- Funding expected to expire September 2026.
- Currently supports the Economic Development and Recreation Coordinator.
- Loss of this funding will reduce ESCOG's capacity for economic development and recreation planning unless alternative funding is secured.

c. California Advanced Services Fund (CASF)

- ESCOG anticipates receiving an award in Q1 of FY 2026–27.

- Funding would support broadband capacity and project implementation.
- d. **Inyo National Forest Liaison Funding**
 - Expires in 2027.
 - Provides ongoing support for the Sustainable Recreation Coordinator role.
- e. **Economic Development District (EDD) Designation**
 - Application in progress.
 - If awarded, would provide approximately \$70,000 in annual capacity funding.

As certain grants sunset and others come online, ESCOG will need to adjust staffing models and organizational capacity to maintain continuity and achieve strategic objectives.

2. Executive Director Role Allocation

The Board will discuss expectations for how the Executive Director should allocate time across competing responsibilities, including:

- a. Day-to-day operations and administrative management
- b. Strategic development, regional convening, partnership building, and outward-facing leadership

Currently, unallocated member agency contributions provide funding for approximately 20% of the Executive Director's salary costs. As ESCOG's project portfolio and cross-agency coordination responsibilities grow, a clearer framework for allocating the Executive Director's time will help ensure both operational continuity and the ability to advance strategic initiatives. Establishing expectations for the next 12–24 months will also inform priorities for supporting staff and contractors.

3. Supportive Capacity Needs

ESCOG's evolving project and grant portfolio requires additional supportive capacity across several functional areas:

- a. Project management for CWDG, CASF, and SJF initiatives
- b. Grant compliance, reporting, and administrative oversight
- c. Communications and outreach to member agencies, partners, and the public
- d. General administrative support

Current staffing levels leave gaps in several of these areas, and sustained or increased workload from new and existing funding sources may require reallocating or expanding support capacity.

4. Staffing, Resourcing, and Budget Requirements

To support ongoing and anticipated workload, the Board will consider potential adjustments to staffing, consulting contracts, and shared-services models, including:

a. CWDG Staffing:

- One FTE Regional Project Manager to coordinate implementation, including alignment with CAL FIRE-funded county wildfire coordinators.

- One Administrative Support position providing grant management, reporting, compliance, communications, and administrative support.
 - Staff recommends consideration of a project-management-office (PMO) contract model in partnership with Mono County or another member agency, similar to current Inyo County agreement.
- b. CASF Staffing:**
- Recommendation to advertise for a contractor to support broadband project management and implementation.
- c. Economic Development Staffing:**
- Contingent on EDD designation.
 - Would provide recurring funding for Executive Director responsibilities and enhance ESCOG's convening and strategic planning capacity.

This discussion will help clarify which roles should be prioritized, which tasks can be shared with partner agencies, and how ESCOG should structure its future budget to sustain critical functions.

BUDGET IMPACT

No immediate fiscal impacts result from this discussion. Future recommendations regarding staffing and budget adjustments will return to the Board at a subsequent meeting.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the ESCOG Board conduct a strategic discussion regarding current and projected capacity needs, staffing implications, Executive Director role allocation, and budget planning for FY 2026–2027.