

# Sonoma Mendocino Economic Development District (SMEDD)

## December 2024 Update

### Team Members

- Brad Johnson, Special Projects Analyst
- Katherine DiPasqua, Director

### New Partnership Planning Grant Application and Cycle (2025-2028)

The primary source of funding for the Sonoma Mendocino Economic Development District comes from the US Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration's (EDA) Regional Partnership and Planning Grant. Supported and by a 1:1 match of in-kind staffing hours from the Sonoma County Economic Development Collaborative and the Mendocino County Economic Development Department, the grant provides \$210,000 of total federal funding over the period of three years.

On Friday 11/15/2024, the SMEDD Board of Directors approved the next three-year partnership and planning grant for submission to the EDA. Leveraging this funding, the SMEDD conducts its baseline work of facilitating an annual Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) update, and monitoring progress on regional projects that are aligned with the CEDS. Below is a complete three-year workplan for the proposed application.

#### 1. Management and Maintenance of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Process

- Annual CEDS Update:** Gather and integrate feedback from local industry and sector stakeholders, the CEDS strategy committee, and/or committed project partners to ensure the CEDS remains aligned with evolving regional priorities and projects. This will involve facilitating roundtables, one-on-one interviews, digital surveys, and possibly sector specific events to understand the latest challenges and opportunities facing stakeholders.
- Project Repository Expansion:** Regularly solicit and update a repository of regional projects that align with CEDS goals, supporting the district's strategic economic development goals and tracking project outcomes.
- 2027 CEDS Five-Year Revision:** Complete the CEDS five year revision of the district's CEDS due in 2027. This task will partially fund necessary activities to collect, analyze, draft, and integrate districtwide data, stakeholder feedback, and goals into the revision.

#### 2. Stakeholder Engagement and Alignment

- Industry and Sector Convening:** Regularly engage stakeholders—including businesses, local governments, CEDS Strategy Committee, tribes, nonprofits, and community organizations—through quarterly convenings to align individual and regional projects with CEDS objectives. This engagement will focus on identifying shared priorities, collaborative opportunities, and regionally impactful projects.
- Feedback Collection for CEDS Update:** Circulate surveys to ensure that community perspectives and emerging trends are integrated into the CEDS updates.

### 3. **Development and Dissemination of District Newsletter**

- a. **Monthly Resource Newsletter:** Establish and distribute a bimonthly newsletter that acts as a regional resource. Content will include updates on funding and job opportunities, project highlights, and industry-related events, increasing the visibility and awareness of regional economic development initiatives.

### 4. **Capacity Building and Support for Project Development**

- a. **Identification and Support of Regional Projects:** Develop SMEDD's capacity to help stakeholders identify how their projects that align with CEDS goals, providing technical assistance as needed for project planning and funding applications.
- b. **Tracking and Reporting on Project Impacts:** Implement and manage a structured process to monitor, report, and analyze the outcomes and impacts of projects supported by SMEDD under the CEDS.

## **AG Tech Innovation / California Jobs First Collaborative**

Leveraging the facilitation and outcomes from the 2023 Ag-Tech Innovation Hub seminar hosted by SMEDD, The Sonoma County EDC submitted a project proposal for \$300,000 to fund an Ag-Tech Innovation Hub Feasibility Study for the North Bay that will leverage the May 2023 SMEDD Ag-Tech Brainstorming Session. The funding opportunity is through the California Jobs First Collaborative Catalyst fund, which is \$9,000,000 of competitive funding between nine Bay Area Counties for pre-development activities, such as feasibility studies. This study would investigate key partnerships, regionally unique focus areas, functions, services, phasing options and location alternatives for a potential North Bay Ag-Tech Innovation Hub. Additionally, the feasibility study will include a pilot project that will analyze the reuse and repurpose of the Manzana facility that is scheduled to be vacated in 2026. The facility currently employs 180 people and is the primary market provider for Sonoma and Mendocino Apple growers. The Bay Area Jobs First Collaborative is expected to announce awards by the end of December.

## **2025 CEDS Update**

Each year, the SMEDD monitors progress on the region's comprehensive economic development strategy and reports to the EDA. This process is named the annual CEDS update and is separate from the mandatory 5-year revision. In the past, the SMEDD has used projects listed in the CEDS repository as a means of measuring progress. Moving forward, the SMEDD is taking a different approach and conducting more intentional outreach to County Supervisorial Districts, Industry Stakeholders, Tribes, and Cities/Towns to include new projects that align with the CEDS four primary goals of the CEDS:

- 1) **Develop Innovative Value-Added Sectors:** This goal focuses on fostering new industries and strengthening existing ones by leveraging partnerships and innovation. Specific objectives for this goal include expanding the blue and green economies and creating synergies between tourism and creative industries to drive job and industry growth.
- 2) **Increase Equitable Community-Wide Prosperity:** The aim of this goal is to create inclusive economic growth by improving access to essential services, infrastructure, and housing for all communities. Examples include strengthening rural connectivity, creating community hubs, and increasing housing opportunities through better permitting and zoning flexibility.

- 3) **Support People:** This goal centers on empowering individuals by increasing access to essential services like childcare, supporting paths to entrepreneurship, and offering workforce development opportunities.
- 4) **Plan for & Implement Resilience:** This goal focuses on ensuring the long-term sustainability and safety of communities by preparing for environmental and economic challenges. Example projects include developing water and energy infrastructure, enhancing emergency preparedness through plan development, and addressing climate change through technology and economic adaptation.

Feedback will be primarily collected via a survey and short interviews, if needed. Submitting a project through this survey helps demonstrate a project's alignment with regional goals and provides opportunities to connect with potential partners, funding opportunities, technical assistance, and letters of support. Projects in the CEDS repository are reviewed annually for progress updates, with non-responsive or inactive projects being archived. Using this strategy, the CEDS update will be more inclusive of new projects to keep the document current and will take the focus off finite projects to align the update to be more centered around progressing the goals of the CEDS.

A project is defined as an initiative that contributes to economic development, community benefit, or environmental sustainability in conjunction with one or more of the CEDS overarching goals. Projects can take many forms, but generally, they aim to improve infrastructure deployment and planning, support industry growth, or enhance community well-being.