

I found yesterday's meeting (Oct 23, 2014) really inspiring and the room to be filled with great potential for economic growth in the region. I have some ideas to share regarding the purpose of a SWOT analysis (**S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, **T**hreats) and then how to integrate a community-informed analysis into a prioritization for next steps and implementation of identified projects. *HG added urls*

1) Quick analysis of existing programs/projects to engage with now - take advantage what is already in place that you can utilize to help promote your community's/county's assets-

- Sierra Nevada Geotourism project - <http://www.sierranevadageotourism.org/index.php> - SNC has staff (Lynn Campbell) who is very proficient in training interested parties on how to nominate a project/special event for the SNGT website/map. A training session with Lynn could be scheduled in your region - we have done this in other regions.

- Visit California website - <http://www.visitcalifornia.com/> - event producers/program managers can upload information about upcoming events/activities onto their website - it's self-populated. Visit CA is very aggressive about driving visitors to the website - access to this free tool should be integrated into everyone's marketing campaigns.

- Visit California "What's New" - <http://industry.visitcalifornia.com/Publications/Whats-New/> - they produce a quarterly communication tool that highlights new developments/activities in each of their designated regions. They are always looking for content to include in their newsletter. "What's New" is shared with all of the Visit CA international offices and those offices use the information to inform their distribution list of media/travel buyers.

- Engage with regional rural marketing region - as you're probably already aware, you guys are at the southern end of the Shasta Cascade region (<http://www.visitcalifornia.com/Explore/Shasta-Cascade/>), with Sierra County at the northern end of the Gold Country region (<http://www.visitcalifornia.com/Explore/Gold-Country/>). Presents a great opportunity to connect with both regions. These regions do have meetings and outreach efforts to look at ways to leverage the funding they receive from Visit CA. These regions also do things like co-op trade show attendance and collateral marketing materials that you might want to engage with.

2) Quick SWOT analysis to provide overview of assets you do have and where there might be gaps. I would frame this from a destination perspective - what are your region's strengths/assets that differentiate you from other rural destinations? What are your region's weaknesses/vulnerabilities that potentially impact visitation to your region (lack of access, funding streams, things like this). What are the opportunities that are presenting themselves now - things like expanded broadband access, new businesses, new resources moving into the region, the tourism TBID being formed, etc). What are the threats to your region - things like weather, natural disasters/fire, etc.

With the completion of both of the analysis exercises identified above, you can then "prioritize" some short term and long term efforts. Priorities might be established by available resources to help complete the efforts - uploading upcoming special events to the SNGT website is free, but requires some manpower - might be a top priority because it doesn't require additional funding. The development of a special event might be a long term, lower priority project because of the need to find resources to help produce it.

3) A third Next Step might be to make sure your region is absolutely engaged with the efforts of the Tourism Council. A revenue stream is going to be established through the formation of the TBID, and your stakeholders will want to participate in discussions about how those funds might be used in the future.

4) Regional collaboration seems to be a big opportunity for you to pursue. I saw/heard lots of energy in the room last week - the group might want to consider how to structure that collaboration for more consistent efforts. Determine who might take on what tasks/commitments in order to achieve some of the priorities established. While there was some question raised about who is or isn't in the room, if you start with the willing parties, others will become interested in participating. Having a little structure lets people know how they can engage with your effort.

- The next steps I offered above were focused on the tourism segment of your region's economy and specifically on short term steps to add to marketing and promotion efforts already being done - kind of one dimensional. My disclaimer is that the above focus didn't include other growth opportunities such as expanded development in other sectors such as artisan products, manufacturing, retail development, outdoor recreation experiences, etc. I think the work SBC is doing might shed some light on those growth opportunities in those other segments. Perhaps when Nicole comes forward with their survey, we can do some analysis to determine some next steps for development.

- An additional short term next step might be a quick assessment of who is already doing what in your region...identifying the organizations already in place that have some level of existing capacity - executive directors, staff, websites, etc. Doing this type of capacity assessment helps identify what resources you can tap into now to help deliver some of the external short term steps referenced below. Meaning, if it's determined you want to load your region's upcoming special events for the next 6 mos, then you can "assign" a staff member of an existing organization to take on that task. Basically, divvying up some assignments among existing capacity.

- Having a good plan in place helps make decision-making a bit easier - a road map provides direction and helps allocate available resources efficiently and effectively. Perhaps SNC can provide some capacity to do some research on possible resources that might be accessed to help develop a strategic plan. Resources like rural development grants or CDBG grants might be a way to go. I think you also need to get a better understanding of the product that SBC is developing for the region, because it might be a plan that can be implemented and then resources could be identified to help with implementation, not development.

I wanted to make sure I provided the context for my comments. Your region has some great assets to utilize to help stimulate some economic growth, it's a matter of strategically using those assets and looking for additional growth opportunities. Let's keep the dialog going... Danna Stroud, SNC,