

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA Agriculture and Natural Resources

Trinity County CED Needs Assessment

Alec Dompka



Trinity County ([highlighted](#)) sits at the southeast edge of Dompka's service area.

Executive Summary

This report documents the needs of the UC ANR Trinity County Community Economic Development (CED) advisor's clientele. It also examines CED needs and priorities so the advisor's responses address areas that will have the most impact and fulfill UC ANR's goals. This report uses secondary sources ranging from local economic development agency reports to statistics from federal agencies and 12 interviews conducted by the advisor in 2024-2025.

Trinity County has the lowest income in California, high poverty, and lags CA in socioeconomic and community wellness statistics. With logging decline and frequent wildfires, the highly rural area struggles to attract and retain businesses, both traded and local sector businesses. The county primarily comprises Forest Service land, which limits County tax revenue. Despite these challenges, locals conduct CED work in their communities and partner with outside agencies to improve Trinity County. To succeed, the advisor must address the urgent lack of capacity among CED practitioners and support projects that build a stable local employment base and community.

Data and training needs

Interviews and research for this needs assessment showed the need for improved data availability and reliability on Trinity County's socioeconomic statistics. Many rural areas struggle with data unreliability and a lack of timely socioeconomic data collection. Interviewees mentioned a need for more detailed housing data and precise business data to reach new businesses and understand why businesses close in the county.

I found that economic development practitioners in Trinity are mainly in the “accidental economic developer” category, serving in other roles, such as city planners, nonprofit leaders, and elected officials. Trinity is served by highly skilled regional groups like Superior California Economic Development (SCED), which will be key partners in building the Trinity-based CED capacity. Training to address CED topics will need to meet local practitioners at their level of knowledge, be immediately applicable, and be tied to pressing needs. Because of this group's accidental entanglement with economic development, long, all-encompassing CED 101 classes (similar to CALED's classes) are less appealing to this group. With their limited interest or time available, clientele are interested in training on a select few CED topics. Training should emphasize opportunities to connect with local resources and clearly outline the next steps for attendees. Because interest in CED is often limited to one or two topics, trainings should be digestible a la carte.

Interviewees showed interest and momentum in building a series of small business support trainings. Interviewees were also interested in learning about models of successful tourism communities with applicable examples. This can be linked with the GNAR initiative, which is a framework/set of policies designed to make healthy and thriving tourism communities.

Fitting into Trinity CED

The 2021-2026 CEDS landed on 5 goals which are good places for the advisor to leverage ongoing momentum. These goals align with many of those expressed by the advisor's other two counties, Humboldt and Del Norte. The CEDS also found regional residents see business development, broadband, and infrastructure as top economic development priorities. These are not only areas to engage but can be used as metrics of how successfully the advisor is meeting stated needs.

Goal 1: Enhance Opportunities for Residents and Visitors to Leverage Natural and Outdoor Resources for Recreation and Industry

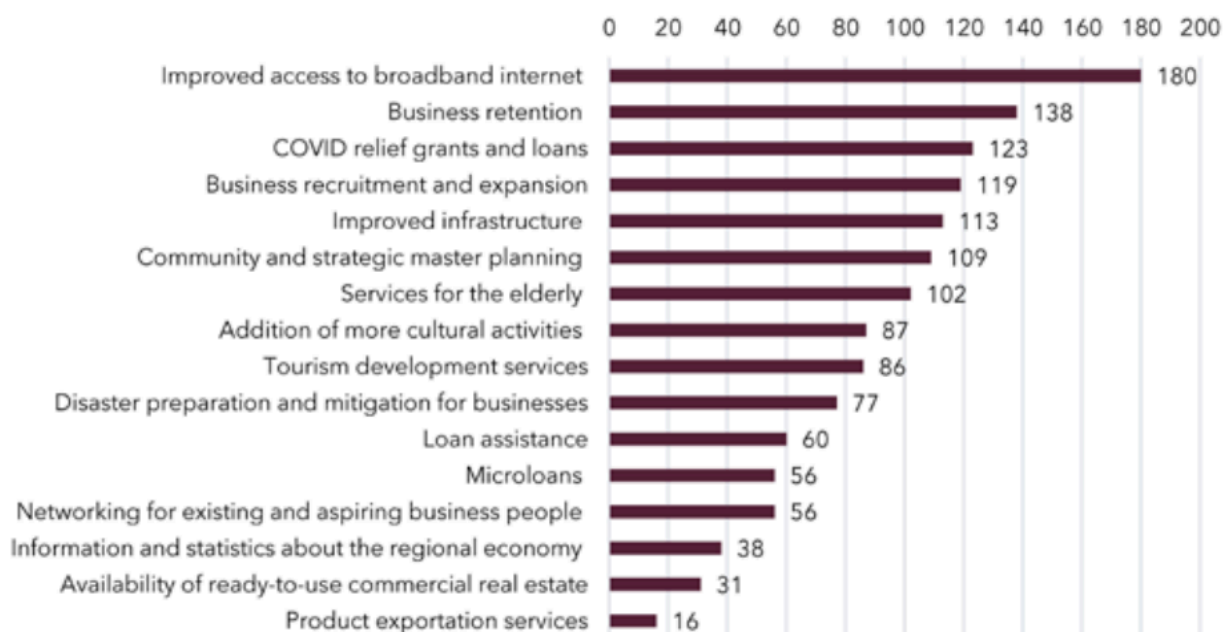
Goal 2: Improve Employment Opportunities By Supporting Existing Businesses and Encouraging Local Investment by Job-Creators

Goal 3: Broaden Interest and Opportunities for Young Professionals to Thrive within the Region

Goal 4: Maintain and Improve Cost-of-Living and Quality of Place in Rural Communities

Goal 5: Construct Additional Infrastructure that Enables Residents to Feasibly Live, Work and Transport Within the Region

Figure 10: What Economic Development Activities Is Your Community Most In Need Of Right Now? (Select Multiple)



Region residents self-reported their interest in broadband, business support, planning, and infrastructure. (4)

Purpose, Scope, and Structure

This report documents Trinity County's community and economic development (CED) needs and identifies clientele needs for the UCCE CED advisor covering Trinity County. The information is used to develop an applied research and extension education strategy for the advisor. This report explores the needs of CED clientele and the local community on various topics, some outside the traditional UC ANR scope. The report uses a Community Capitals Framework to categorize assets and needs. The report relies on a secondary data review and semi-structured clientele interviews with 14 clients.

Methods

The report organizes assets and needs using a Community Capitals Framework and explores where the advisor can leverage assets to address needs. Secondary data sources were chosen because they represent the region's most encompassing and up-to-date information on CED.

Interviewees were selected to represent the different fields contributing to economic development, focusing on organizations currently finding success and underserved communities. These interviews lasted between 0.5 to 2 hours, taking place online over the phone or in person. Clientele interviews were conducted with questions developed with help from Aaron Wilcher, UCCE Inyo-Mono CED advisor.

Community Capitals Framework Analysis

Natural Capital

Wildfires, namely the Carr fire, have deeply affected Trinity County. Trinity County was the 8th highest timber value county in CA in 2024 but lags behind local counties Humboldt, Siskiyou, and Shasta. (2) The region's lumber industry has shrunk, and Trinity has only one lumber mill, which is not even sourcing from Trinity County. Of Trinity County's 3,200 square miles, 76% are government-owned, and 14% are zoned for forestry or ag conservation, leaving relatively little land for private development. (3)

The Interviewees revealed an uneasiness originating from a lack of local control over releases from the Trinity Dam and the impacts of these releases on local fishing and recreation industries. The policies around Trinity Dam suggest that economic impacts are not considered when planning releases, despite their consideration at other local dams.

Cannabis

Cannabis is a large part of the economy, making up 5-10 times the combined sales value of all other agricultural projects. (1) Trinity County is the fifth largest legal cannabis producer in California. (4) Cannabis remains contentious in Trinity County, with opt-out zones being a point of contention. (2) Despite its large size, the industry has declined sharply after legalization, and the number of registered growers is shrinking. Interviewees note a lack of a "Trinity" brand, lack of market access, and continued federal prohibition as factors excluding cannabis businesses from critical economic development opportunities such as programs, training grants, joint regional marketing and financing. The lack of branding issue is shared by Trinity ag producers trying to sell to consumers, with some creating online or physical stores. (4)

Outdoor Recreation Tourism

Trinity tourism is centered around lakes, rivers, hiking, and mountain biking. There have been large swings in tourist visits to Trinity, attributed to wildfires and water flows. (3) A lack of a unified tourism strategy in Trinity County was cited as a tourism development stumbling block (2). Interviewees expressed interest in creating a cohesive tourism economic development plan and were especially focused on linking conscious outdoor recreation infrastructure building with marketing and business development.

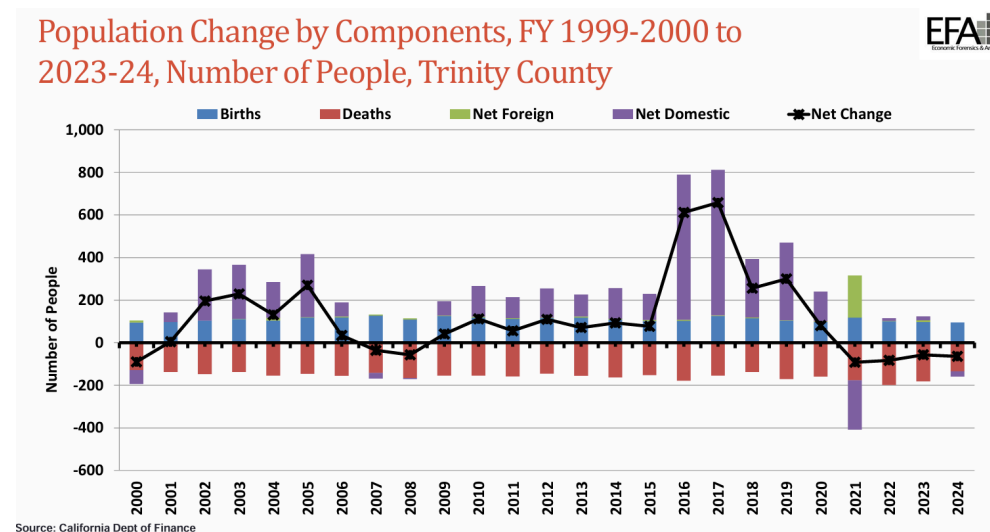
Cultural Capital

The rural character of Trinity extends to the residents, and interviewees often characterize themselves as independent, do-it-yourself, self-reliant, and eager to come together when collectively threatened. The [Trinity County Arts Council](#) organizes historical, cultural, and artistic events for the community and provides local artists with professional development skills/tools.

A significant highlight of the region's long and vibrant tribal history is the Redding Rancheria's Tribal Heath Center in Weaverville. The Nor Rel Muk Wintu Nation is active in the county and owns land in the West of the County. The Hmong population also adds an unexpected cultural element to Trinity County's melting pot. The towns in the county are sleepy, and most businesses are not open late.

Human Capital

Demographics (See Appendix 1 for Socioemomic indicator graphs)



The region has a large Hmong population, which the Census Bureau undercounted until adjustments finished in 2020, and we can see the correction reflected when 2021 correctly counted Hmong residents, resulting in a significant "Net Foreign" population change even though there was no actual influx of foreign residents. (4)

The population of Trinity County and the region is shrinking and aging. (1,4) Nearly 30% of the population is over 65, higher than in comparative areas of the state, which worries the county. Trinity also suffers a brain drain, with youth leaving due to of a lack of education, housing, broadband, and jobs. (3) Lack of housing and amenities are cited

as contributing to a lack of staffing and brain drain, especially in the county's most rural areas. (2)

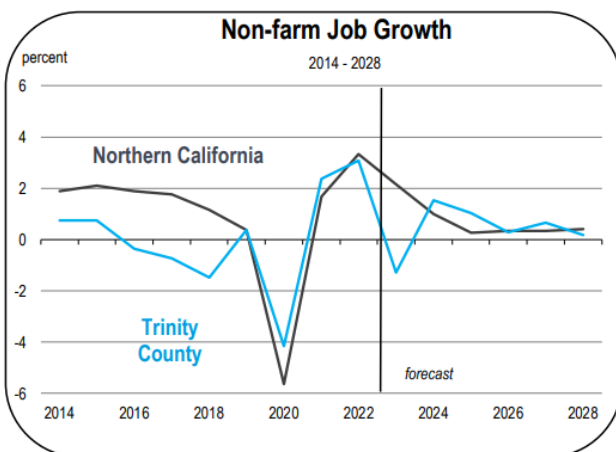
Residents lack a sense of identity and sometimes struggle to see the region's value. (3)
The region is at an economic crossroads in deciding what industries will replace logging and cannabis. Now more than ever, a unique understanding of the region's character will be critical to creating economic development in the proper direction.

Figure 9: How Satisfied Are You With The Following Community and Economic Factors?



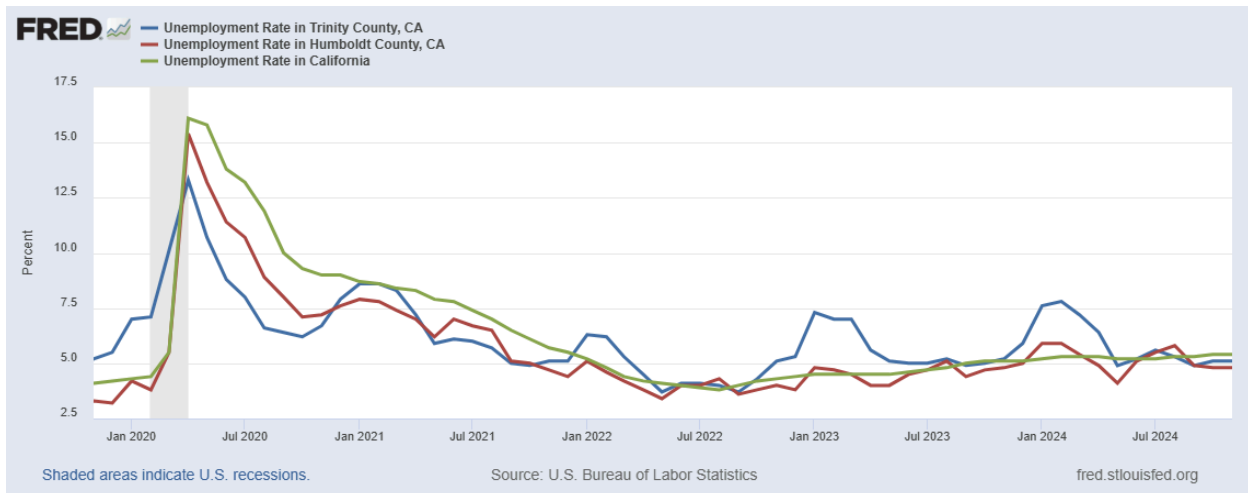
Residents are satisfied with Trinity's outdoor rec and tourism aspects but worried about fire, brain drain and rising cost of living. (4)

Labor Market



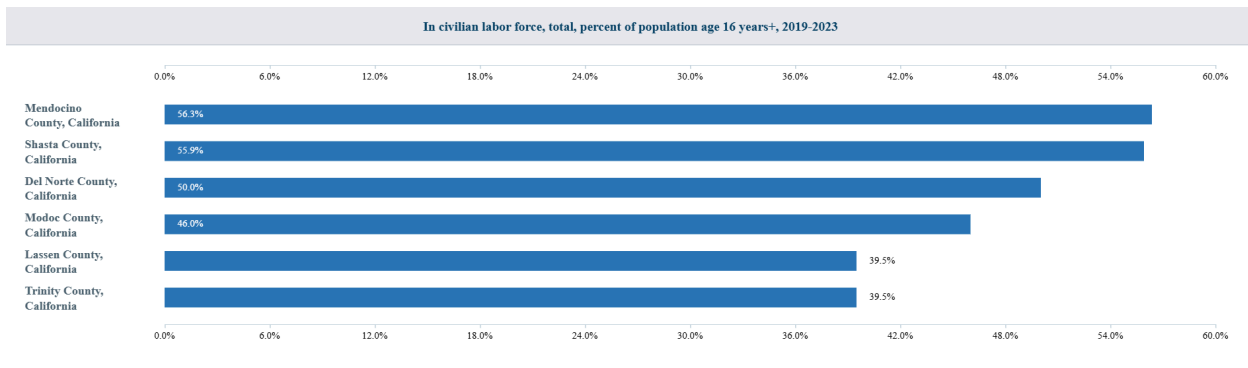
From Cal-Trans

Job growth in Trinity County is projected to be flat through 2028. (1) Cal-Trans stated in their analysis in 2023, “Because the county’s population is forecast to decline, it is unlikely that many new employment opportunities will be created in the county over the forecast,” which is cited to last until 2028. (1) Low 4-year degree attainment holds the labor force back, and a lack of high-skilled positions limits the need for job training programs, creating a self-defeating cycle. (3)



U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Unemployment Rate in Trinity County, CA [CATRIN5URN], retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/CATRIN5URN>, January 13, 2025.

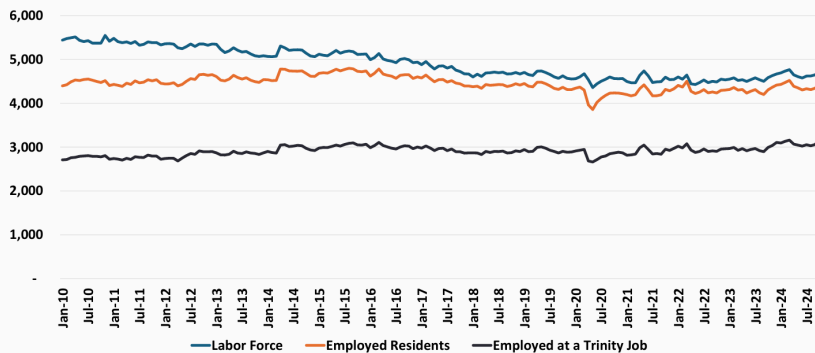
Trinity’s only major industry to show employment expansion since 2021 has been Health Care and Social Assistance. (3) Logging was historically a large employer but that has largely dried up.



[Lassen's low labor force participation rate may be affected by the prison at Susanville.](#)

The 2019-2023 ACS reports Trinity’s Labor force participation rate at [39.5%](#), which is lower than the counties around it and the state. It is in line with the high level of retirement-age individuals living in Trinity. Trinity County has the lowest per capita income of any county in California, totaling \$31,008 in 2023 dollars, and has the highest poverty rate in the region, [20.8%](#).

Employment and Labor Force Comparisons, Trinity County, Number of Workers, January 2010 to November 2024, Seasonally Adjusted



This chart from Economic Forensic & Analysis shows Trinty's low unemployment rate, the difference between the Labor Force and Employment Rate, and the large number of residents working outside the county.

Workforce development

The economic development ecosystem operating in Trinity County is minimal. (3) Despite this, the Smart Workforce Center, The Watershed Research and Training Center (WRTC), and the Trinity County Community Development Corporation are running workforce training programs. (2) Healthcare is a growing industry, and with the aging population, it will likely continue to grow. In the region, there are four industries, with 1,000 or more employees and a median salary of \$65,000: Finance & Insurance; Government; Professional, Scientific, & Technical Services; and Transportation & Warehousing. (4)

Economic Development Support Capacity

There are no professionals with full-time economic development positions in Trinity County. Economic development support and planning mainly comes from groups working in the region based in Redding or Siskiyou County. In Trinity County, volunteer groups like the Economic Development Taskforce contribute to economic development but are limited in capacity because of their volunteer nature. The county government does not have a dedicated economic development position, leaving county staff and supervisors to cover these needs as best as possible. The county supported a grant that funded a similar position stationed at the Chambers, but that program was not continued. Interviewees are interested in developing special districts and innovative ideas to supplement the limited tax base; ideally, these initiatives would simultaneously stimulate economic development. Trinity's limited tax base means the county government can rarely fund economic development projects. Thus, addressing funding gaps will be key to the advisor's success in this county.

Financial capital

Trinity County has an abnormally high rate of self-employment and young businesses. (3) Business support targeted to these groups will likely be most successful. Interviewees emphasized building a cohesive small business development system as a critical first step in

potential economic development. The Trinity County Chamber of Commerce and the SBDC are key parts of how Trinity County addresses small business management skills training needs through delivering training. Trinity County does not require a business license to operate, and the overall bureaucratic threshold/standard for opening a local business was considered low by interviewees. However, obtaining capital may be a struggle for businesses, as few commercial lenders service the area.

SCED notes that the Tourism and Recreation, Wood Products, Cannabis, and Healthcare codes are key industry clusters for the region, and medical is the only one growing. (2) The region's job market is around $\frac{2}{3}$ service-producing jobs and only $\frac{1}{3}$ goods-producing jobs. (4) In contrast, Shasta County has a surprising amount of outdoor gear manufacturing, which may lead to residual local manufacturing job opportunities for Trinity County Residents.

Built Capital

Infrastructure

The region has potentially large biomass, hydro, and geothermal energy resources with different levels of development across energy resources. (4) The region also has low energy costs due to the creation of the Trinity Public Utility District (PUD), the Trinity Hydroelectric Dam. (4) The PUD has assisted groups with CCA's and is an asset to others in the area interested in local control of energy.

70% of homes are served by broadband, the lowest in the region, and residents consider this a setback. (3)

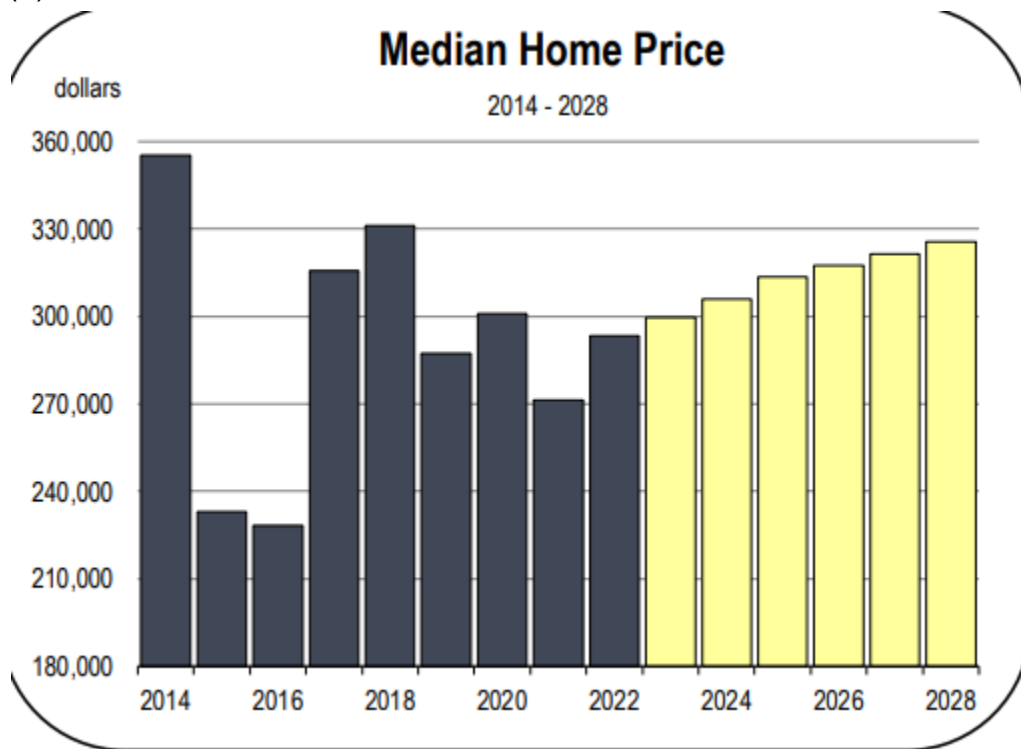
Trinity is very tied to Redding as the largest local city and it is an education and healthcare hub for the region. (4) Likewise, the county's closest airport is Redding.

Housing

Housing was the number 1 topic mentioned in interviews, and there is great interest and need to understand Trinity's housing situation better. Over the past few years, a substantial amount of housing stock has been lost to fires and has not been rebuilt. (1,3) This problem is exacerbated by the fact that most of the housing construction, a steady 40 houses a year, are vacation homes. (1) Moreover, the high cost of construction and frequent need to run utilities on vacant properties further limits new housing development. Construction costs are also high because labor and materials must be brought in from outside the county.

The region is suffering workforce shortages, partially because entry- and mid-level workers cannot find housing. (2) Interviewees noted housing impacted their ability to find workers. This issue has persisted despite the area's vacancy rate of 25.6% in 2022, indicating many of the homes are not occupied by/available to primary residents.

(1)



Trinity County's median home price has been quite volatile. From CalTrans

Social Capital

Trinity County has residents who are stepping up for economic development and there is also a great deal of resource sharing across county lines. Siskiyou Economic Development Corp, North Edge Financing, Shasta College, The Redding Rancheria, SCED, etc, are examples of groups working across county lines serving Trinity or its residents. Interviewees noted many times that this regional approach was working for Trinity, and this level of collaboration among rural counties is a massive social capital asset to Trinity County.

The Chambers, Weaverville Chamber, Hayfork Chamber, and Trinity Chamber are also driving force economic development forces and are based in Trinity. Interviewees cite an increasingly positive perception of the USFS, and the County has a good working relationship with them. Therefore, the advisor will need to continue building these relationships to further advance economic development of the region.

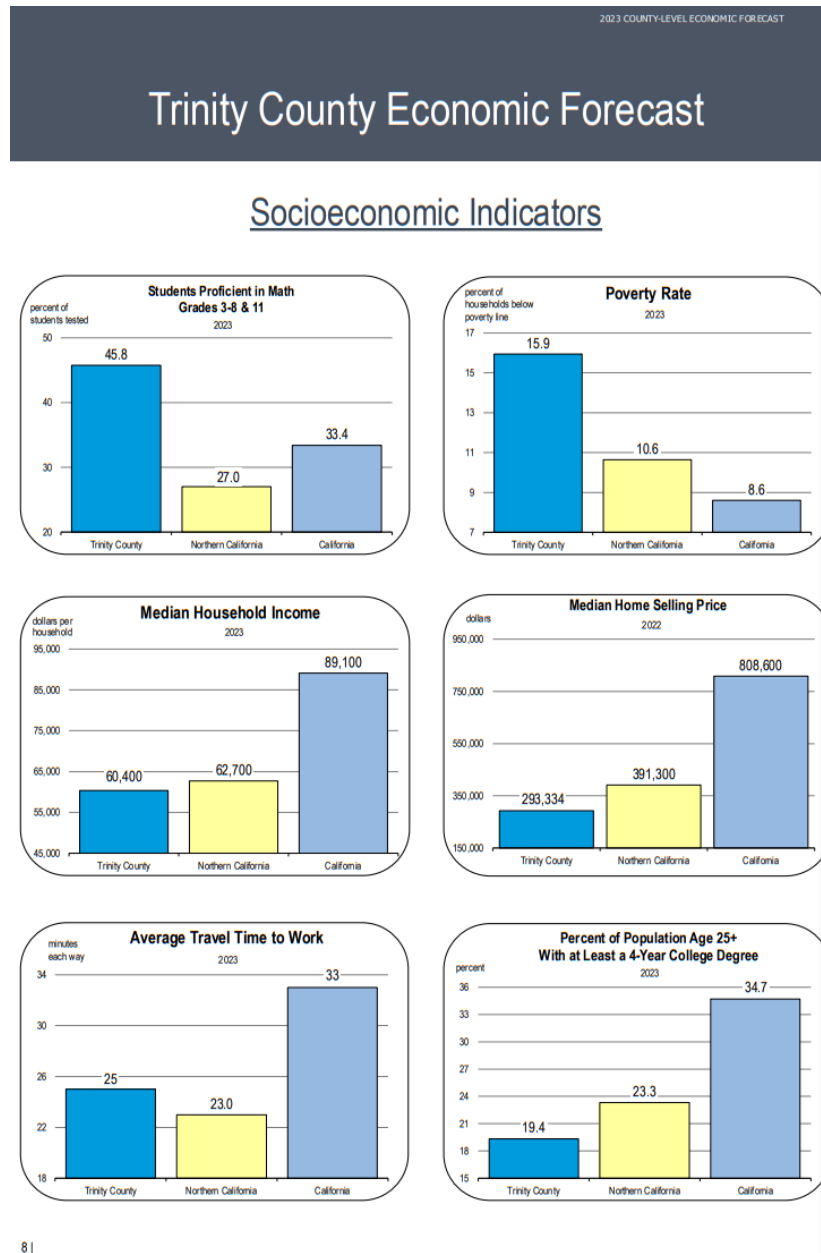
Political capital

There are no incorporated cities in Trinity County, and the County government is the main government organization. The Trinity PUD has an elected board and is an essential organization in the county.

Works Cited

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Appendix 1



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Boilerplate Questionnaire

1. How does your organization address economic development?
2. What economic development programs do your organization run that you think are most impactful, innovative, or in a space no one else is serving?
3. What are the biggest growth opportunities you see for Humboldt, and what are the key intervention points to get the most out of these opportunities?
4. What groups are forming, formed, or functioning for economic development planning and coordination? Are there industry groups meeting for sector planning?

5. Does your organization offer training related to the workforce, small businesses, or the economy? Where are the gaps and strengths in these programs?
6. What kind of funding mechanisms do you use most often, and are there any you would like to break into? (Grants, special districts, local taxes, state funding vehicles, private investment, CDFIs, public-private loan mechanisms, tax rebates, etc)
7. Do you use research and data for your planning? How? What data would help your organization and partners that you do not currently have?
8. What are the biggest sticking points for development in Humboldt? Places, sectors, policies, where “if that changed it would be a game changer for how we deal with _____.”
9. What other people and groups should I be talking to to learn about the critical needs in our communities and economy?