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Organization Name

Humboldt-Del Norte Film Commission

Contact Person

Cassandra Hesseltine

Phone

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Email

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Website

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235 F Street
Eureka, CA 95501
[Map It](#)

Project Overview

Project/Event Title

Forest Moon Festival 2026

Dates or Duration

May 28th-May 31st, 2026

Amount of Funding Requested

\$30,000.00

Entry

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Entry Id: 2251

Submitted on: 2025/12/23 at 1:03 am

User IP: 47.208.150.82

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What is the Return on Investment?

Forest Moon Festival is a destination film-tourism event that attracts visitors traveling from outside Humboldt County who stay overnight to attend multi-day programming and visit nearby filming locations, redwood parks, and local businesses. The Festival takes place the first weekend after Memorial Day, a shoulder-season period that benefits from incremental visitor demand.

Overnight bookings are supported through promotion of local lodging options on the Festival website, social media, email marketing, and visitor information materials, encouraging attendees to plan extended stays rather than day trips. The event's unique connection to the Endor filming sites motivates travel-based attendance and repeat visitation.

Tourist participation and ROI will be measured through attendee surveys capturing length of stay and lodging type, and post-event estimates of room nights generated during the Festival weekend. Website analytics and referral traffic to lodging information pages will also be used to evaluate engagement and lodging interest tied to the event. App download with Scavenger Hunt as well as the Passport will also give us additional information of where the participants reside.

Seasonal Impact

Forest Moon Festival is held the first weekend after Memorial Day, a shoulder-season period that sits between spring travel and peak summer tourism. During this time, Humboldt County typically has available lodging capacity and fewer large-scale destination events drawing overnight visitors.

By anchoring the Festival in this window, the project helps fill a gap in the local tourism calendar and generates incremental visitation before the high summer season begins. The event attracts film tourists and fans traveling specifically for the Festival and associated filming locations, encouraging overnight stays at a time when lodging providers benefit from additional demand.

The Festival also supports early-season momentum for regional tourism by encouraging visitors to extend their stay to explore redwood parks, cultural attractions, and local businesses, contributing to economic activity during a traditionally slower period.

Feasibility & Track Record

Forest Moon Festival is produced by Redwood Region Entertainment & Education Liaisons, Inc. (RREEL), DBA the Humboldt-Del Norte Film Commission, an established nonprofit with more than a decade of experience producing film-related events, festivals, and tourism initiatives in Humboldt County.

The project is led by experienced professional staff with deep relationships across local government, tourism, film industry partners, and cultural

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institutions. The Festival is supported by a combination of staff leadership, long-standing community partners, and a dedicated volunteer base that assists with event operations, guest services, and programming support.

Forest Moon Festival has been successfully produced annually for multiple years, demonstrating the organization’s ability to plan, permit, market, and deliver a multi-day destination event. Past successes include consistent attendance growth, strong regional and out-of-area visitor participation, ongoing support from Lucasfilm, and sustained collaboration with local venues, businesses, and public agencies.

This established infrastructure, combined with proven event management experience and community trust, ensures the Festival is feasible, well-executed, and positioned for continued success.

Innovation & Uniqueness

Forest Moon Festival is uniquely positioned as the only official public celebration of the Endor filming locations, set within the original redwood landscapes where Return of the Jedi was filmed. With permission from Lucasfilm, the Festival connects a globally recognized film legacy to a real-world destination, creating a compelling reason for visitors to travel to Humboldt County.

The proposal builds on a proven event by expanding its focus on immersive, place-based experiences that highlight the redwoods as both a cinematic and natural destination. Rather than a traditional fan convention, Forest Moon Festival emphasizes authenticity, outdoor settings, community participation, and direct connection to the filming sites, differentiating it from similar pop-culture events held in urban or indoor venues.

This combination of film history, natural landscape, and community-led programming creates a distinctive tourism experience that cannot be replicated elsewhere, strengthening Humboldt County’s position as a destination for film tourism and cultural travel.

How will you define success with your project and ensure sustainability?

Success for Forest Moon Festival will be defined through measurable tourism, engagement, and financial indicators that demonstrate both short-term impact and long-term viability.

Last year's successes include: 1. Rancho Obi-Wan reaching out to us this year asking to have an exhibit within our musuem. Rancho Obi-Wan is widely considered the most famous and definitive Star Wars museum because it holds the Guinness World Record for the largest Star Wars memorabilia collection, featuring hundreds of thousands of items, making it a unique, fan-run institution for dedicated enthusiasts, unlike official studio exhibits. 2. Kyle Newman (Hollywood Director, Star Wars ambassador) has shared the event with Star Wars actors (i.e. Mark Hamill, Seth Green) and will be helping us secure bigger named talent for 2026 in

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addition to showing his unique Star Wars documentary. 3. Rebel Force Radio (#1 Star Wars Podcast) has played festival podcasts episodes or mentioned the festival in numerous unrelated episodes for the past 7 months. And plan on continuing to enform their audience about the festival. They have called it on and off camera, "A bucketlist event." They would like to make our event an annual experience for their listeners.

- Key performance indicators (KPIs) include:
- Number of total attendees and percentage of out-of-area visitors, measured through ticket sales, zip code data, and event attendance estimates
 - Estimated room nights generated during the Festival weekend
 - Attendance across multi-day programming, indicating extended stays
 - Website and digital engagement related to travel planning and lodging information
 - Earned revenue from ticket sales, merchandise, and on-site activities
 - Sponsorship participation and partner retention year over year

Sustainability is supported through a diversified revenue model that includes earned income, sponsorships, and long-term partnerships tied to film tourism and regional branding. As the Festival continues to grow its audience and sponsor base, the goal is to reduce reliance on grant funding and increase self-generated revenue.

The project is expected to become increasingly self-supporting over the next two to three years through recurring sponsorships, stable attendance, and expanded earned revenue opportunities, while maintaining its role as a cultural and tourism asset for Humboldt County.

Room Night Strategy

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The Forest Moon Festival's night room strategy focuses on converting out-of-area interest into overnight stays by positioning the event as a multi-day, destination experience rather than a single-day activity.

Target markets include Star Wars fans, film tourists, and cultural travelers from outside Humboldt County, particularly from other parts of California and the Pacific Northwest. These audiences are reached through a mix of digital marketing channels, including social media, email campaigns, earned media coverage, and partnerships with film- and tourism-related organizations.

Overnight stays are encouraged by promoting local lodging options and visitor information on the Festival website and ticketing platforms, alongside messaging that highlights multi-day programming, filming locations, and nearby attractions. Ticketing and registration data will capture attendee origin information to help identify travel-based participation and inform future lodging outreach.

Digital campaigns emphasize trip planning and extended stays by pairing Festival attendance with redwood experiences, museums, dining, and outdoor recreation, reinforcing the value of staying multiple nights. Collectively, these tactics are designed to convert interest into overnight visitation during the Festival weekend.

Has this project or idea been successfully tried elsewhere?

Yes. Film- and fandom-based destination events have been successfully used in other regions to drive tourism and overnight stays. Examples include the Twilight Festival in Forks, Washington, which attracts thousands of visitors annually and has become a long-standing economic driver for the local lodging and tourism economy, and Star Wars Celebration, an internationally recognized event that draws large-scale travel-based attendance and significant hotel demand in host cities.

Forest Moon Festival applies this proven model at an appropriate regional scale, using a globally recognized film property tied directly to authentic filming locations. By adapting successful film tourism strategies to Humboldt County's unique landscape and community context, the Festival demonstrates both feasibility and relevance as a destination-driven event.

Projected Room Nights

Forest Moon Festival attendance in Humboldt County is estimated at approximately 4,500+ attendees based on prior-year participation (6000+ both counties).

Projected room nights are calculated using conservative assumptions, recognizing that the majority of attendees are local while a portion travel from outside the region specifically for the Festival.

Based on:
An estimated 8–12% out-of-area visitor rate

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An average stay of two nights
An average of two attendees per hotel room

The Festival is projected to generate approximately 350–550 room nights in Humboldt County during the Festival weekend.

Most overnight stays are expected on Friday and Saturday nights, with additional Thursday and Sunday stays associated with early arrivals and extended travel itineraries. While these projections are intentionally conservative, the Festival is experiencing increased interest and early indications suggest the potential for higher out-of-area attendance in the upcoming year. Fingers crossed.

Proposed Budget

The proposed Forest Moon Festival budget totals \$95,000, representing a \$6,000 reduction from the prior year's budget, while increasing earned revenue through ticketed events and merchandise sales. The budget reflects a disciplined approach focused on cost control, increased self-generated income, and directing public investment toward activities that drive overnight visitation.

The project is supported by a mix of funding in addition to the requested Humboldt Lodging Alliance \$30,000 (\$10k less than last year):
Measure J (FY25 and FY26): \$42,000
DN grant funding: \$5,000
Sponsorships: \$5,000
Ticketed events: \$8,000
Merchandise and museum sales: \$5,000

Use of Funds by Category:
Marketing & Visitor Acquisition (\$38,500)
Marketing remains the largest expense category and the primary driver of room nights. Funds support out-of-area digital advertising, website and app infrastructure, visitor-facing collateral, QR code and data capture tools, photography, and promotional materials focused on trip planning and multi-day attendance.

Event Programming & Production (\$40,500)
Programming costs include out-of-town talent, screenings, production crews, staging, audio support, and on-site logistics required to deliver a multi-day event that functions as a destination draw. These investments ensure the Festival offers enough depth and duration to motivate travel and overnight stays.

Management & Operations (\$7,000)
Operational costs include insurance, legal compliance, temporary staffing, transportation, and essential supplies necessary for safe and effective event delivery.

Team & Media Support (\$2,000)
Limited funding supports social media management and video documentation, providing real-time promotion, earned media, and post-event marketing assets that extend the Festival's tourism impact.

Contingency (\$7,000)
A contingency is included to ensure responsible financial management and protect against unforeseen costs.

Staffing by the Film Commission Team (in kind)

Role of Humboldt Lodging Alliance Funding:
Humboldt Lodging Alliance and North District funding will be applied directly to out-of-area marketing (\$25,000) and partial support for out-of-town talent (\$5,000) that functions as a destination draw. These investments are designed to increase non-local attendance and generate overnight stays during the Festival weekend.

Budget Strategy Summary
This budget demonstrates measurable progress toward sustainability by lowering total costs, increasing earned revenue, and aligning public investment with tourism outcomes. The Festival continues to evolve toward a more self-supported model while delivering clear room-night benefits for local lodging providers. This year's Red Carpet Gala profit as well as the new program Walls of Stars (mini Hollywood stars) at the Musuem will also support the Forest Moon Funding.

Certification

- Yes, I certify

Print entry

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Notes

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