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Project Overview

Project/Event Title

Choose Humboldt: Countywide Tourism Marketing Campaign & Digital Passport

Dates or Duration

November 2025 – April 2027

The Choose Humboldt campaign will run over an 18-month period, with three digital gamified passport activations designed to drive visitation and increase heads in beds across Humboldt County, with a focused emphasis

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on Eureka as the region’s lodging and cultural hub.

Shop Humboldt (November–December 2025 and 2026) will highlight local retailers, Old Town Eureka attractions, and holiday shopping experiences. Dine & Stay Humboldt (January–March 2026 and 2027) extends through the shoulder season, pairing local dining and brewery experiences with featured hotels, inns, and bed & breakfasts. This phase is intentionally timed to boost “heads in beds” during the months when Eureka’s lodging sector experiences the greatest dip in occupancy.

Experience Humboldt (May–October 2026) will inspire visitors to explore Eureka and surrounding communities through themed itineraries that combine events, food, and outdoor adventure. Kicking off with a May influencer campaign in partnership with the City of Eureka and Visit Eureka, Come for Friday Night Market, Stay for the Weekend will bring travel and food influencers to Humboldt during the Kinetic Grand Championship + opening weekend of Eureka Friday Night Market to showcase our creative culture and vibrant downtown events. Throughout the summer, the Friday Night Market series (May–September) will continue to serve as an anchor attraction, reinforcing the campaign’s key message: Come for Friday Night Market. Stay for the Weekend.

Amount of Funding Requested

\$50,000.00

What is the Return on Investment?

The Choose Humboldt campaign is designed to generate meaningful and measurable return on investment by increasing overnight stays, extending weekend visits, and elevating Eureka as a premier regional destination.

With international travel to California still well below historical levels due to a variety of global economic and travel-related factors, the state’s tourism recovery is being driven primarily by regional, drive-market visitors. These travelers—coming from within a few hours of Humboldt—are increasingly seeking authentic cultural experiences, food-focused weekends, and arts-based itineraries. This campaign is built specifically to capture that demand and convert it into overnight stays in Eureka.

The expanded Dine & Stay Humboldt activation (January–March) intentionally targets Eureka’s lowest-occupancy months with a coordinated push highlighting winter lodging packages, dining-focused getaways, and bundled experiences promoted through the passport app, social advertising, and Visit Eureka channels. Because winter is historically a high-interest period for drive-market getaways, especially among Northern California residents seeking slower-paced coastal retreats, this phase is expected to produce measurable “heads in beds” at a time of genuine need for Eureka’s lodging sector.

As spring and summer begin, the Experience Humboldt passport and Summer Weekend Extension Strategy will shift focus toward multi-night itineraries centered around Old Town, coastal recreation, and Eureka’s

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thriving arts and culture scene. The campaign’s signature message —“Come for Friday Night Market, Stay for the Weekend”—is designed to convert the thousands of weekly Friday Night Market attendees into two- and three-night visitors. Regional travelers who drive in for the market or for events like the Kinetic Grand Championship will be encouraged through curated itineraries, lodging spotlights, and Saturday/Sunday activity bundles to make their stay longer and more immersive.

The Influencer Travel Program, produced in partnership with the City of Eureka, further amplifies this effort. By hosting food, culture, and travel influencers in Eureka lodging, the campaign leverages authentic storytelling to inspire future bookings from broader regional audiences who follow their content.

Measurement will be comprehensive and aligned with HLA’s expectations. VibeMap analytics will track verified lodging-adjacent check-ins, passport participation, and engagement with Eureka-focused itineraries. Participating hotels will have access to simple referral tools—such as promo codes, booking links, or reservation notes—to help identify bookings influenced by campaign promotions.

In addition, the City of Eureka’s Placer.ai data provides an independent source of visitor analysis. This tool captured detailed visitation patterns for the Eureka Friday Night Market, including visitor origin, dwell time, and regional draw. Similar data can be used to evaluate increases in out-of-area visitation during campaign activations and to help estimate how many visitors stayed overnight versus made day trips.

Incentivized post-passport surveys will further capture visitor origin, length of stay, motivation for travel, and local spending. Finally, hotel partner feedback and seasonal comparisons will supplement all digital data sources to create a clear, well-rounded picture of the campaign’s lodging impact.

Seasonal Impact

The Choose Humboldt campaign is intentionally designed to increase tourism during Eureka’s shoulder and off-season months by creating new reasons for regional travelers to visit and stay overnight from September through June. Holiday shopping and Old Town activations bolster November–December visitation, while the expanded Dine & Stay Humboldt Program directly targets January–March—Eureka’s lowest lodging period—with winter getaway promotions and stay packages. Curated spring itineraries continue this momentum through early June by encouraging multi-day cultural and dining experiences. Even in summer, the campaign fills a key gap by converting Friday Night Market attendance into full weekend stays. Together, these coordinated efforts create sustained, year-round demand and drive “heads in beds” during the months when Eureka’s lodging sector most needs support.

Feasibility & Track Record

Humboldt Made is uniquely positioned to deliver this project due to its proven track record, organizational strength, and deep alignment with

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Eureka's tourism and economic development goals. As the producer of the Eureka Friday Night Market—one of the region's highest-impact cultural events drawing thousands of visitors weekly—Humboldt Made has demonstrated its ability to execute complex, multi-partner initiatives that drive regional visitation, support local business districts, and generate measurable economic activity. The success of the Friday Night Market now serves as the foundation for a strategic tourism engine designed to increase overnight stays and extend visitation.

The Choose Humboldt campaign is led by a highly capable core staff:

Rosa Dixon, Executive Director: 18 years of business leadership and national marketing experience, including building a nationwide CPG brand sold in 5,000+ stores. Leads all strategy, partnerships, and campaign oversight with strong ties to Eureka's business and tourism ecosystem.

Charlene Cook, Marketing Director: provides 15 years of expertise in strategic marketing, brand development, and tourism-focused storytelling. She leads creative direction, digital strategy, and all VibeMap passport operations, as well as itinerary development and influencer programming.

Gina Venturino, Events & Admin. Coordinator: Manages event logistics, vendor relations, lodging-partner coordination, influencer hosting, and communications. Ensures smooth execution of all Eureka-based activations.

Our work is strengthened by deep partnerships with Eureka Main Street, Visit Eureka, the City of Eureka, regional chambers of commerce, NCGA, RREDC, the SBDC, and local media organizations—all of whom extend the campaign's reach and provide additional volunteer and promotional capacity.

Humboldt Made is also guided by an active and highly experienced Board of Directors (bios sent separately) representing regional leaders in small business, tourism, finance, economic development, agriculture, planning, and event production. Newly appointed board members—including representatives from Visit Eureka, the County of Humboldt, Redwood Capital Bank, and Planwest Partners—further expand our expertise in destination development, data-informed planning, and lodging-sector alignment.

This combination of skilled staff, strong governance (BOD bios emails), and deep regional partnership ensures Humboldt Made has the operational capacity, experience, and community trust necessary to deliver a successful, data-driven campaign that increases room nights, extends visitor stays, and delivers sustained tourism benefits for Eureka.

Innovation & Uniqueness

The Choose Humboldt campaign represents Eureka's first fully integrated tourism initiative—uniting digital gamification, seasonal lodging incentives, curated itineraries, and event-driven visitation into one cohesive visitor experience. While traditional tourism efforts often rely on advertising alone, this campaign actively guides traveler behavior through a digital passport that rewards exploration, check-ins, and overnight stays.

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Gamified tourism programs are widely recognized as one of the fastest-growing tools for increasing visitor engagement; research across destinations shows that incentive-based, location-aware experiences drive higher participation, encourage repeat visitation, and increase the likelihood of extended stays.

What makes this proposal uniquely compelling is its ability to connect Eureka’s strongest assets—Old Town, the arts and food scene, waterfront recreation, and Friday Night Market—into a unified, year-round visitor journey. No other local initiative has combined these elements with real-time digital engagement, influencer storytelling, and seasonal booking campaigns tailored to Eureka’s slowest months. By turning cultural events and local businesses into interactive, discoverable “passport stops,” the campaign shifts Eureka from being a pass-through destination to an immersive, multi-day experience.

This is more than a marketing effort—it is a modern, data-driven destination strategy designed to reshape how travelers explore Eureka and to bring measurable lodging impact through innovation that has never before been deployed at this scale in Humboldt County.

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

Success for the Choose Humboldt campaign will be measured by its ability to increase overnight stays, extend weekend visitation, and establish a repeatable tourism engine centered on Eureka. Key performance indicators include verified hotel check-ins within the passport, increases in winter and shoulder-season occupancy, book-direct referral traffic to Eureka lodging partners, passport participation and itinerary usage, and visitor origin and dwell-time insights drawn from Placer.ai. Incentivized surveys and partner feedback will further quantify visitor spending, travel motivations, and weekend-extension behavior.

The project is designed to become self-supporting by building a scalable revenue model that grows as participation and visibility increase. Lodging partners will have opportunities to join tiered sponsorship and cost-share models tied to premium placement in itineraries and booking promotions. Corporate and business sponsors can integrate into the digital passport through branded challenges, prizes, and seasonal activations. Long-term alignment with Visit Eureka, Eureka Main Street, and recurring event-driven campaigns—such as Friday Night Market weekend packages—creates additional, predictable revenue streams.

With this combination of measurable results, strong partner alignment, and expanding sponsorship value, the Choose Humboldt campaign is expected to become substantially self-supported within 2–3 years, providing a durable, year-round mechanism for driving heads in beds and strengthening Eureka’s tourism economy.

Room Night Strategy

The Choose Humboldt campaign converts interest into overnight stays by pairing targeted regional marketing with clear booking pathways and

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lodging-focused incentives. Our strategy concentrates on high-opportunity drive markets—including the Bay Area, Sacramento, Southern Oregon, and new air-service corridors from Seattle and Burbank—using coordinated digital advertising, Visit Eureka promotions, and partner amplification to reach travelers already predisposed to weekend coastal trips.

Once engaged, the digital passport guides visitors toward booking behavior through bonus rewards for Eureka hotel check-ins, seasonal lodging promotions, and curated itineraries that make a multi-day stay the natural choice. Winter Stay-and-Dine offers support during the shoulder months, while summer messaging such as “Come for Friday Night Market, Stay for the Weekend” drives weekend-extension during peak visitation.

Influencer content, book-direct referral tools, and targeted landing pages help convert high-intent audiences, while seasonal lodging guides and reciprocal marketing with airline and regional partners keep Eureka top-of-mind as an easy, compelling getaway. Through this integrated funnel—awareness, engagement, incentive, and conversion—the campaign creates a direct pipeline of visitors choosing to stay overnight in Eureka.

Has this project or idea been successfully tried elsewhere?

Yes. Digital passport programs and gamified visitor engagement campaigns have been successfully implemented in a wide range of destinations across the country. Cities such as Portland, Oakland, San Antonio, and Washington, D.C. have used VibeMap’s platform to guide visitors toward local businesses, cultural districts, and signature events through location-based check-ins, challenges, and digital rewards. These campaigns consistently demonstrate that when travelers are invited to explore a place through curated, interactive experiences, they visit more locations, stay longer, and contribute more to the local economy.

The Choose Humboldt campaign adapts these proven models to the unique character of Eureka—pairing VibeMap’s technology with our region’s strong sense of place, walkable downtown, vibrant arts and food scene, and established draw of Friday Night Market. While the technology and engagement structure have been validated elsewhere, the integration with Eureka’s cultural assets, seasonal lodging strategy, and regional partnerships represents a new application tailored specifically to our visitor behavior and community strengths.

By leveraging a platform already tested in major markets and adapting it to a rural coastal destination, this project combines national best practices with local insight—positioning Eureka to benefit from a modern, data-driven approach to tourism that has a strong precedent of success.

Projected Room Nights

Based on current Shop Humboldt participation, expected increases during the food-focused Dine & Stay passport, regional travel patterns, and

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Placer.ai insights from Eureka’s Friday Night Market, we conservatively project 300–500 incremental room nights in Eureka over the 18-month campaign.

This estimate is calculated using three primary drivers:

Winter & Early Spring (January–March):

This is Eureka’s lowest-occupancy window and the period with the greatest opportunity for growth. The Dine & Stay Humboldt passport, paired with winter lodging packages and dining-focused getaways, is expected to produce 60–100 room nights. While this is the smallest seasonal segment by volume, it represents the strongest proportional lift relative to existing occupancy and directly supports HLA’s goal of increasing overnight stays in the off-season.

Spring Itineraries (March–June):

As visitation increases and travel conditions improve, curated cultural and dining itineraries encourage short regional getaways. These experiences are projected to generate 100–150 room nights, extending stays into the late shoulder season and early summer.

Weekend Extension Strategy (May–October):

Although summer has higher baseline demand, this period still offers meaningful capacity for incremental stays—particularly through the “Come for Friday Night Market, Stay for the Weekend” strategy. Placer.ai data confirms out-of-area attendance at Friday Night Market, and converting even a small percentage of regional visitors into two-night stays yields 150–250 room nights.

Overall, this estimate is intentionally conservative and grounded in real visitor behavior patterns. Each phase of the campaign is designed to put more heads in beds during Eureka’s September–June shoulder season, while strategically extending summer visitation into full-weekend stays that bolster the city’s year-round lodging economy.

Proposed Budget

Total Estimated Project Budget: approximately \$190,000 (full budget sheet emailed)

Secured Funding

City of Eureka – \$5,000

City of Arcata – \$5,000

Headwaters Fund – \$5,000

Coast Central Credit Union – \$3,000

Redwood Region Economic Development Commission (RREDC) – \$2,500

North Edge – \$2,500

Secured In-Kind Contributions

Humboldt Made staff time – \$65,500

Additional in-kind prize sponsorships and media support (radio/print) – \$5000

The remaining funding gap will be addressed through targeted sponsorship development, phased implementation, and expanded in-kind

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support. We anticipate securing an additional \$40-60k in sponsorship revenue through lodging-sector partnerships, local and regional business sponsors, and cross-promotional marketing agreements. Campaign components such as expanded video assets or a second influencer trip can be sequenced across the project window based on confirmed sponsorships, without compromising core deliverables. In addition, we expect further in-kind lodging partnerships for influencer hosting, as well as prize and media sponsorships, which will reduce cash costs while maintaining the full impact of the campaign.

Certification

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