

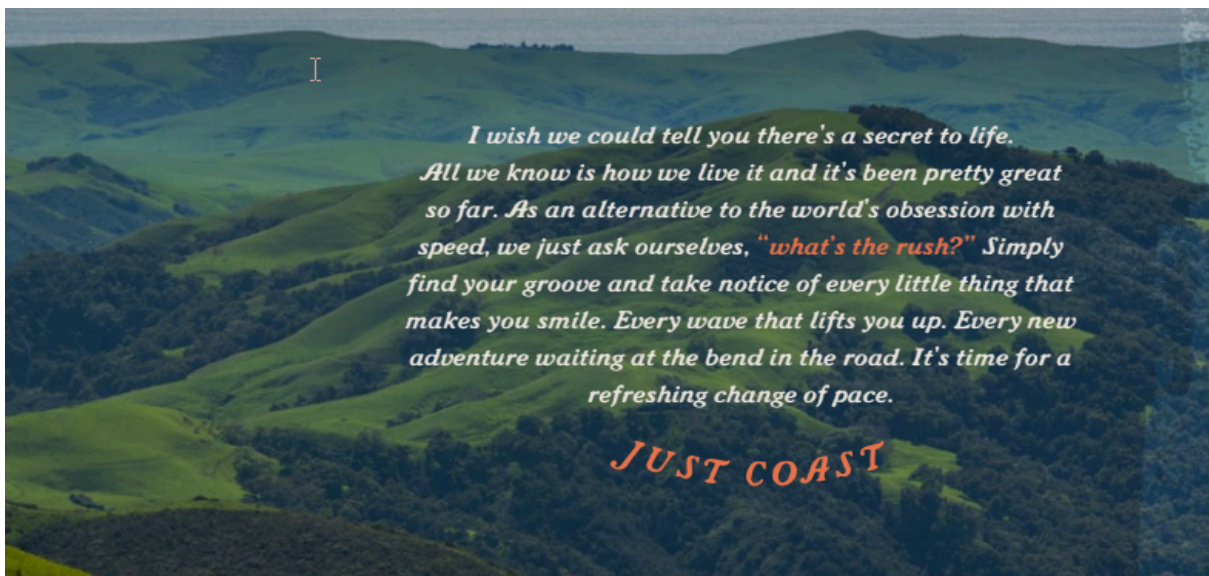


2026 | 2027 Marketing Plan



Executive Summary

The newly formed Highway 1 Tourism Alliance, known by its consumer-facing brand Highway 1 Road Trip, continues to successfully navigate the rapidly changing travel landscape. With a combination of good news – the opening of Highway 1, and the uptick of TOT in the last 6 months of the current fiscal year, the region continues to flex to the myriad of changes that affect travel in our region. However, the team is forging ahead, building awareness, and offering travel planning resources driving high levels of intent to visit. We anticipate another successful year of continuous improvement along with several new initiatives designed to take us to the next level in promoting memorable visitor experiences while being stewards for thriving, welcoming, and cohesive communities.



Year End Synopsis

Highway 1 Road Trip delivered results that demonstrate both the value of sustained, strategic marketing investment and the resilience of a region that has a story worth telling. The organization crossed a significant milestone...for the third consecutive year, it surpassed 1 million in performance metrics across every major marketing discipline. The nearly 800-page website attracted more than 1.4 million potential visitors, with engagement metrics climbing year-over-year. The email database exceeded 149,000 subscribers, and strong, consistent SEO has kept up with the everchanging Generative AI space. Plus, paid media performance reached its most efficient level in six years, delivering more reach, more high-intent actions, and stronger full-funnel results on a slightly smaller budget.

Perhaps most significantly, fiscal year 2024–2025 marked the successful completion of a major organizational evolution. The formation of the Highway 1 Tourism Alliance (H1TA) as a 501(c)(6)

nonprofit corporation represents a structural transformation designed to position the organization to carry out its mission with greater agility for years to come.

In June 2025, the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors initiated a comprehensive survey to better understand member priorities and perceptions of value. Conducted from August to November 2025 by an independent firm, the survey gathered responses from a representative mix of lodging businesses, with particularly strong participation from hotels and motels. Results showed high engagement and interest, with 75% of respondents open to greater involvement in the Highway 1 Tourism Alliance (H1TA).

The survey confirmed that **tourism marketing is the top priority**, consistently ranked highest for both current focus and future funding. Members generally perceive marketing efforts as effective, especially those who are more engaged, though understanding of how funds are used varies across respondents.

In response, H1TA is implementing improved communication and transparency initiatives, including enhanced reporting, stakeholder engagement opportunities, and onboarding resources, with a focus on clearly demonstrating value and impact to constituents.

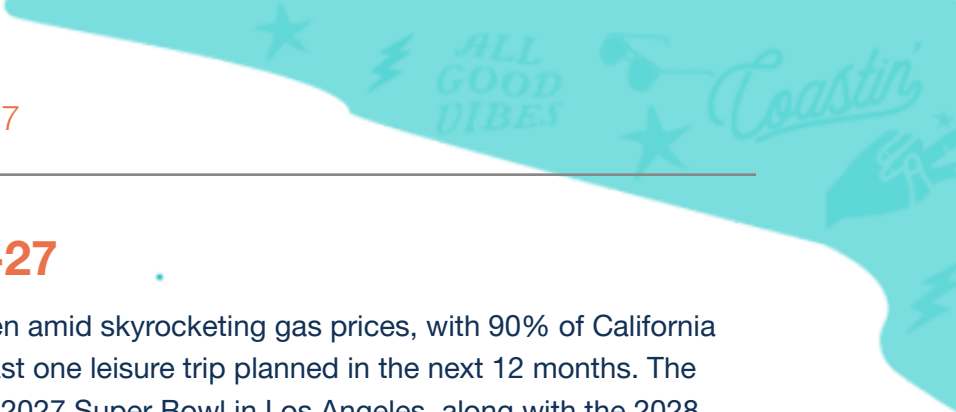
The year also brought renewed energy around the reopening of Highway 1. The organization created collaborative campaigns with Visit SLO CAL, Visit Monterey, and Visit California, deploying unified messaging the moment the road reopened.

The result of these efforts is significant TOT (Transient Occupancy Tax) growth of 183 percent since the inception of the organization - leading any other jurisdiction in the county.

Marketing Milestones

<p>1.39M</p> <p>Website Sessions</p> <p>+31% YoY</p>	<p>149K+</p> <p>Email Subscribers</p> <p>Largest DMO database in county</p>	<p>15.2M</p> <p>SEO Organic Impressions</p> <p>+9.6% YoY</p>	<p>64M</p> <p>Paid Media Impressions</p> <p>1.3M clicks</p>
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<p>31M</p> <p>Social Media Impressions</p> <p>Instagram + Facebook</p>	<p>65</p> <p>PR Articles Published</p> <p>Total UVM: 1.22B</p>	<p>92%</p> <p>Map Downloads</p> <p>Intent to visit</p>	<p>\$0.88</p> <p>Cost Per Conversion</p> <p>Lowest in 6 years</p>
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Looking Ahead to 26-27

Traveler optimism remains strong even amid skyrocketing gas prices, with 90% of California consumers reporting they have at least one leisure trip planned in the next 12 months. The upcoming 2026 FIFA World Cup and 2027 Super Bowl in Los Angeles, along with the 2028 Olympics each create strategic opportunities to position Highway 1 as an essential detour for travelers already heading north or south in California. The organization is actively pursuing partnerships with Visit California's Playful Journeys campaign and regional DMOs to capitalize on these moments.

Key Travel Trends

Data from leading hotel groups, travel companies, and trend forecasters indicates that 2026 and 2027 will be defined by more intentional, personalized, and experience-driven travel creating strong opportunities for Highway 1 communities.

Planning & Technology

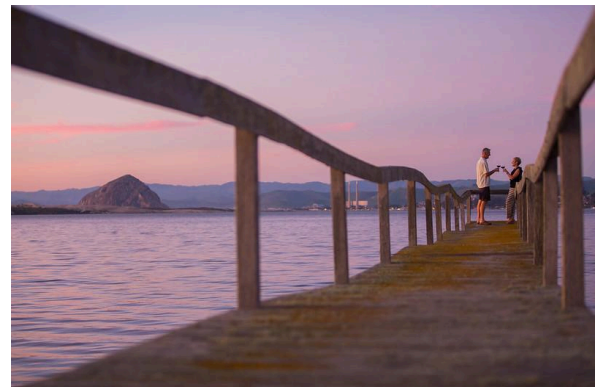
- **AI-Integrated Travel:** About half of travelers use AI for planning, with growing demand for personalized itineraries, AI concierges, and seamless tools. AI enhances, not replaces, human expertise.
- **Flexible Booking:** Travelers maximize time off through “holiday stacking.”

Travel Behavior

- **Shorter, More Frequent Trips:** Micro-escapes and off-peak travel are rising.
- **Road Trips:** Preferred for flexibility as 71% plan to drive; 76% value spontaneity.
- **Blended Travel:** Longer stays combining work, wellness, and leisure with strong connectivity.

Experience-Driven Travel

- **Authentic Experiences:** Focus on local culture, storytelling, and community-led activities.
- **Experience-Led Planning:** Trips centered around events, food, and outdoor adventures.
- **Culinary Tourism:** Food and wine experiences remain major motivators.



Wellness & Purpose

- **Wellness Travel:** Now a primary driver (e.g., digital detox, nature, sleep retreats).
- **Transformational Travel:** Growth in purpose-driven, restorative, and milestone trips.

Destinations & Preferences

- Cooler & Alternative Destinations: Demand rising due to climate and overtourism.
- Nature-Based Travel: Strong interest in beaches, parks, and outdoor activities.

Sustainability & Values

- Regenerative Travel: Focus on positive impact and eco-conscious choices.
- Value-Driven Decisions: Travelers prioritize meaningful experiences over lowest price.

Luxury & Group Travel

- Redefined Luxury: Privacy, space, and exclusivity over opulence.
- Group Travel: Continued growth in multi-generational and shared experiences.

Traveler Sentiment

- Travel demand and spending remain strong.
- Key concerns: cost and disruptions.
- Emotional connection and immersion increasingly drive destination choice.

Key Objectives & Strategies

Highway 1 Road Trip has outlined three organizational objectives in the 2023 - 2027 strategic plan, including key indicators and strategies:

OBJECTIVE 1 – ACCELERATE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

Strategies

- Foster a deeper integration with Visit SLO CAL planning and programs to ensure Highway 1 voice and visibility
- Develop deeper connections with DMOs and attractions in all Highway 1 communities to collaboratively grow awareness of Highway 1 in SLO CAL
- Bolster H1TA/LFA strategic connections through expansion of LFA imperatives and increasing opportunities to connect and collaborate
- Explore strategic partnerships with external businesses and organizations to increase awareness of our stretch of Highway 1

OBJECTIVE 2 – EXPAND EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY CONNECTION

Strategies

- Identify and elevate best practices and LFA community engagement and share to all LFAs
- Engage H1TA Board members in attending LFA Board meetings and institute regular connection between board chairs
- Support integration of Visit SLO CAL programs into our communities

- Multiply opportunities for LFA communities to work together and cross-promote
- Engage Highway 1's broad constituency to educate, inform, gather feedback, and demonstrate value

OBJECTIVE 3 – DRIVE MEASURABLE RESULTS

Strategies

- Leverage new brand to maximize awareness and to improve shoulder and off-season visitation
- Partner with Visit SLO CAL programs to drive visitation within our communities
- Continue to invest in development and sharing of high-value digital assets
- Investigate opportunities to leverage the Highway 1 asset as a sustainable and inclusive road trip experience

Destination Partners

Highway 1 Road Trip partners with organizations via Visit SLO CAL to impact programs, like Visit California, to showcase the coastal communities to a larger audience. Key to Highway 1 Road Trip's main focus is the specific partnership with Visit SLO CAL, other area destinations like Morro Bay (along H1) and Paso Robles (connect 46 West wine region to our North Coast), and specifically with the local fund areas of Ragged Point, San Simeon, Cambria, Cayucos, Los Osos|Baywood, Avila Beach, Edna Valley|AG Valley, and Oceano|Nipomo.



Initiatives for 2026 | 2027 Fiscal Year

Marketing Approach: Build on What's Working and Continue to Test New Ideas

As we look to the future, we will continue to support successful programs, test new ideas and technologies, to grow awareness of the Highway 1 Road Trip brand. With our current strategies performing well, the focus is on optimization and refinement rather than major shifts. Key efforts that will continue and evolve include:

- **SEO & Content Strategy**

Ongoing content development designed for both search visibility and AI-driven discovery, with a focus on high-quality, intent-driven content that inspires and engages visitors.

- **Website Experience Enhancements**

Continuous improvements to site structure, navigation, and user experience to make content easier to find and encourage deeper trip planning.

- **Paid Media**

Sustained focus on California drive markets, adding Sacramento to the mix this year and targeting audiences 35+ using layered behavioral, lifestyle, and travel intent signals. Continued optimization toward high-value actions (engagement, itinerary views, map downloads), as well as utilizing retargeting website visitors with tailored messaging that aligns with where they are in the trip planning journey.

- **Email Marketing**

Campaigns aligned with top-performing content, seasonal messaging, and events while shifting measurement toward engagement and conversions rather than traditional open rates.

- **Public Relations**

Proactive outreach to top-tier travel writers, cross-visitation FAMS, and travel | lifestyle media who align with our unique story, with an emphasis on earned coverage that drives awareness and credibility.

- **Social Media**

Authentic, story-driven content that reflects our destination's character, with a focus video to drive engagement, community building, and shareable moments.

- **Short-Form Video & Visual Storytelling**

Expand use of video to capture attention early and drive inspiration.



- **User-Generated Content (UGC)**

Encourage and amplify visitor content to build authenticity and trust.

- **Partnership & Co-Op Marketing**

Collaborate with local fund areas, Visit SLO CAL, and Visit California extend reach and share storytelling.

- **First-Party Data Growth**

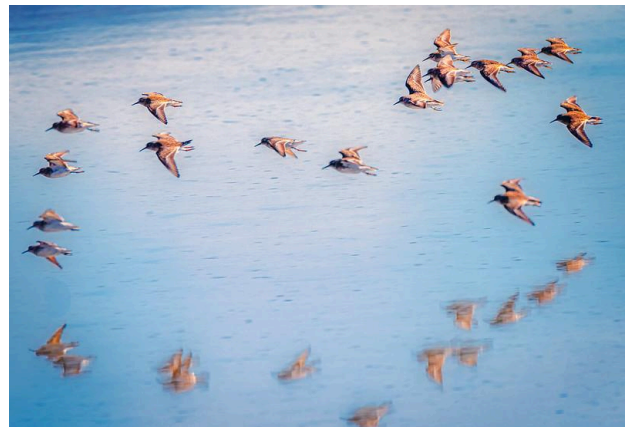
Continue our first-party data strategy of growing the email database which offers valuable look alike audience targeting as third-party targeting becomes more limited.

The New Initiatives

The 2026–27 key initiatives focus on refining and strengthening what is already working while evolving the Highway 1 brand to be more emotionally driven, data-informed, and collaborative. Central to this effort is the concept of “flourishing,” shifting messaging from what visitors can do to how the destination makes them feel, supported by a move toward a “365 Coast” approach. At the same time, enhancements to LFA collaborative programs will introduce new engagement tools, improve alignment and reporting, and amplify partner content, while expanded local public relations efforts will better communicate community investments and their impact. Marketing performance will be further optimized through more sophisticated email measurement and personalization, refined paid media targeting, and practical applications of AI across channels. Additional initiatives include improving how lodging options are presented, evaluating the timing of a strategic plan refresh, and modernizing YouTube content to better blend storytelling with trip-planning utility to ensure both stronger emotional connection and measurable results.

FLOURISHING: Explore and embrace the concept of “flourishing” within our brand. Rather than focusing on what there is to see and do, this approach emphasizes how Highway 1 makes people feel. Like Visit SLO CAL’s “Life’s too beautiful to rush” and H1RT’s “Just Coast,” our messaging should continue to center on emotion and mindset.

As part of this evolution, shift from the three long-standing campaign themes (hidden secrets, wildlife, and beaches) toward a “365 Coast” platform that positions Highway 1 as a year-round destination.



LFA PROGRAM UPDATES: In the coming year, expand engagement opportunities through enhanced retargeting, more frequent database touchpoints, and an enhanced local outreach process as funding support is granted to local businesses and non-profit organizations.

As part of this effort, introduce Partner Content Amplification, a framework that enables LFAs and partners to contribute content that can be promoted across H1RT platforms, helping ensure smaller communities gain visibility within broader campaigns. And a deeper reliance on LFAs to provide more video and photo assets up to H1 BID Bunchers so we can continue to create impactful posts, reels, emails and web content for each of our 10 communities.

We have also identified the need for stronger alignment across LFAs, particularly in budget and financial formatting, reporting standards, and review processes for both administrators and marketing partners.

Constituent Communication—highlighted as a key need in our recent survey—will be a priority area of support. H1TA will help LFAs better communicate results and funding impacts to constituents, guided by recommendations from the newly developed Post-Survey Communications Plan. LFA funding applications will also evolve to include letters of support from organizations that receive funding, along with their support in letting the community know that their project and program was funded in part by LFA monies.

LOCAL PUBLIC RELATIONS: As the need to better communicate local efforts grows, there is an opportunity to dedicate resources to telling these stories more effectively at the community level—especially highlighting infrastructure investments as enhancements to both the visitor experience and overall quality of life. To support this, LFAs will be provided with a Local PR toolkit, including a press release template and a list of targeted media outlets. This will enable them to work with marketing partners and local nonprofits to generate greater local visibility when LFA-funded projects are implemented.



LODGING PRESENTATION: In response to interest from constituents and LFAs, we will explore updating the website's lodging pages to better showcase available accommodations. It is too early to determine whether this will lead to broader marketing shifts.

EMAIL MARKETING & TECHNOLOGY: Shift email reporting to focus on meaningful engagement rather than outdated metrics like open and click-through rates. Convene a tech summit to explore how data can drive more personalized outreach, including the potential for data-driven traveler journey mapping to better understand and influence how visitors discover, plan, and experience Highway 1.

PAID MEDIA REFINEMENTS: Evaluate visitation reporting tools to improve targeting and efficiency. Explore emotion-based media opportunities to strengthen brand storytelling, and continue LFA discussions to expand cooperative, engagement-driven campaigns.

AI INTEGRATION: As AI continues to impact all areas of marketing, prioritize practical applications that enhance performance in search, media targeting, reporting, and daily operations.

EVOLVING YOUTUBE STRATEGY: Modernize our YouTube approach by shifting from traditional promotional videos to content that blends storytelling with practical value. Focus on helping travelers understand how to experience Highway 1, driving both organic growth and paid performance.

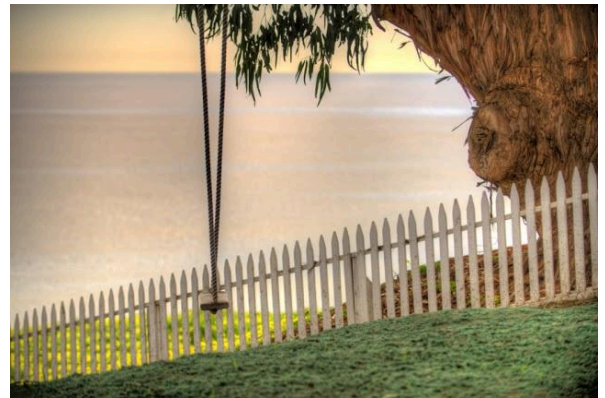
BID Bunch Tactical Project Focus

Our BID Bunch, with 23 professional contractors, has allowed our marketing organization to drive measurable results that support top-notch TOT performance when compared to our DMO counterparts.

Strategic Marketing – Lori Keller

Leads development and execution of the overall marketing plan aligned with organizational goals.

- **Research & Insights:** Track industry trends, consumer behavior, and campaign performance to guide strategy and continuous improvement. Manage brand studies and measurement tools.
- **Team Leadership:** Coordinate team efforts, oversee contractors, and support partnerships (including Visit SLO CAL).
- **Brand & Campaign Execution:** Guide creative development, oversee paid media strategy, and ensure KPI growth through testing and optimization. Provide reporting and board updates.
- **Partnerships:** Identify and build strategic collaborations with regional partners and DMOs.



Content Marketing – Lori Ritchey (+ team)

Manages integrated content strategy across all channels.

- **Content Planning:** Develop and manage annual content calendar.
- **Content Creation:** Oversee writers and adapt content as needed.
- **Channels:** Manage website, blog, email, social, PR, and paid content integration.
- **Email & Social:** Refine strategy, improve engagement, and analyze audience behavior.
- **Distribution:** Ensure consistent messaging and scheduling across platforms.

- **Blog Strategy:** Improve rankings, develop topics, and guide content creation.
 - **Collaboration & Reporting:** Coordinate monthly with partners and deliver consolidated performance reports.
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Creative Campaign Development – Sunshine & Bourbon

Leads creative execution aligned with the “Just Coast” brand.

- Explore the idea of “Flourishing” through the development of new campaign direction.
 - Develop and maintain brand standards across campaigns.
 - Produce video and visual assets for web, social, and paid media.
-

Email Marketing – Kempler Group

Drives email engagement and personalization.

- Deliver regular, content-rich campaigns.
 - Use audience segmentation and dynamic content to improve relevance.
 - Track performance and optimize based on engagement data.
-

Social Media – Claudia Jensen (TJA)

Manages organic social strategy and engagement.

- Maintain consistent posting across platforms.
 - Create and repurpose content (Instagram, Facebook, Pinterest, TikTok).
 - Encourage user-generated content and community interaction.
 - Monitor engagement and respond to audience activity.
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Search Engine Optimization (SEO) – Brad Rubin & Vingage

Focus on growing organic search traffic through a structured annual plan.

- Identify new content opportunities to capture additional search demand.
 - Update and optimize existing content.
 - Expand video and YouTube search optimization.
 - Collaborate on prioritizing high-impact content and ensuring we are noted as an authoritative source in generative AI content
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Website – Jeff Pedigo

Enhance user experience and site functionality.

- Refresh homepage design, including video header.
 - Integrate neighboring communities into a cohesive content hub.
 - Enhance presentation of lodging partners.
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Stewardship / Travel for Good – Katie Sturtevant

Continue building a strong, media-friendly sustainability platform.

- Integrate stewardship messaging across all marketing efforts.
- Highlight sustainable experiences in media visits.
- Align with local and regional sustainability initiatives.

Public Relations – Kirstin Koszorus & Katie Sturtevant

Drive targeted media coverage and visibility.

- At least 40% of online articles secured include a direct link to Highway1RoadTrip.com
- At least 45% of all coverage secured appear in a target outlet
- At least 8 articles will include Stewardship Travel for Good meaningful tips for travelers in the story
- Secure 50 placements throughout FY27 (July 1, 2026-June 30, 2027), and up to 100 placement when syndicated articles are included.
- Ensure strong backlinking to the website and efforts for social collabs with select outlets.

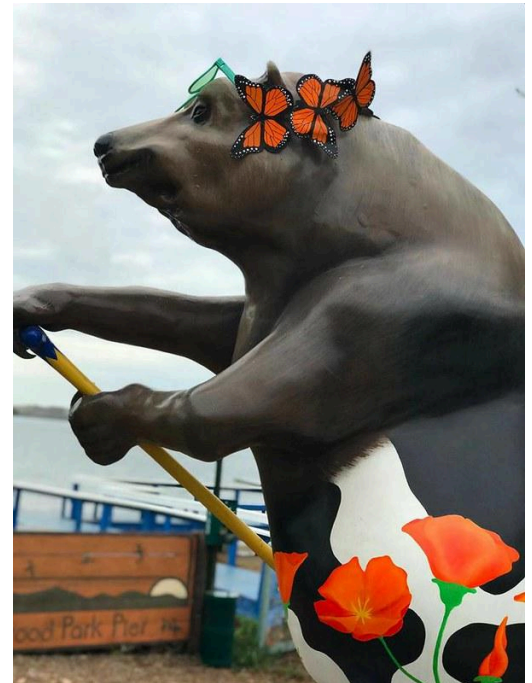
Paid Media Strategy – Ann Balboa (+team)

Scale storytelling and drive planning behavior through negotiated paid media.

- Maintain an always-on, full-funnel strategy.
- Prioritize video-first, content-led media.
- Measure performance over time, not just last-click.
- Expand retargeting and mindset-based targeting.
- Align content with search and AI discovery.

Execution Focus

- Audience Strategy: Use first-party data to build look alike audiences.
- Platforms:
 - Google: capture demand
 - Meta: conversions + testing
 - Programmatic: awareness + reinforcement
 - YouTube/Spotify: upper-funnel reach



Measuring Our Success

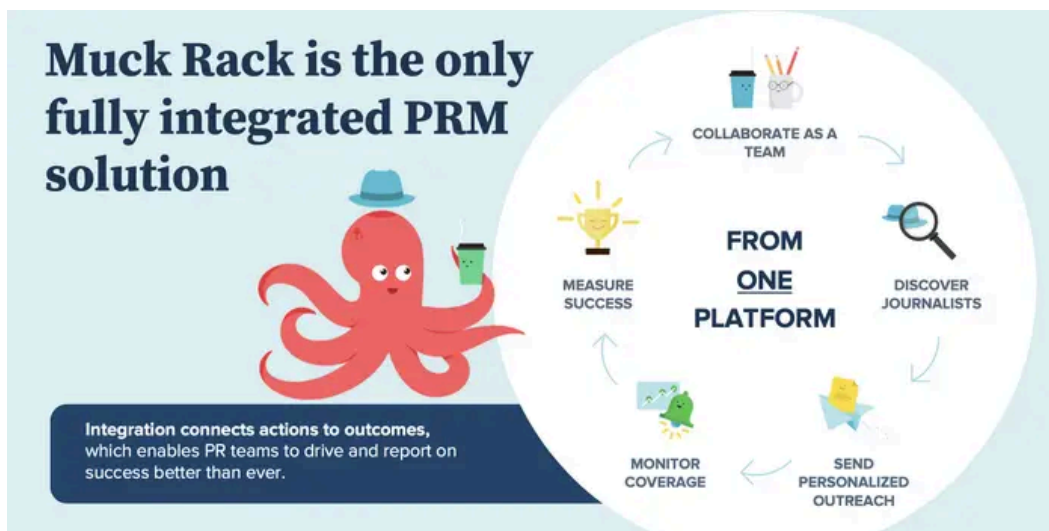
When considering our key performance indicators, we focus on organic traffic in the age of AI, overall engagement/time on site and map downloads. Through past surveys and research, we know that our brand is resonating with the audience and the travelers who downloaded a map are highly motivated to take a road trip on Highway 1. In addition, we continually look for new data insights and technology to assist in making informed decisions. Monthly reporting provided by our BID Bunchers allows for ongoing, in-depth analysis to ensure our strategies are on target.

Brand Lift Study

We conducted an initial brand lift study in April 2024 to establish a baseline, followed by a second study in April 2025 to evaluate the impact of our new “Just Coast” creative. The 2025 campaign delivered our first statistically valid brand lift.

Muck Rack Public Relations

Muck Rack creates robust reports for our PR accomplishments. Not only does the service track coverage of the region on an ongoing basis, it also provides details on the coverage such as unique monthly visitors, sentiment of the article, social coverage of the article, clicks to Highway1RoadTrip.com and more. MuckRack is also now connecting to our Google Analytics and provides direct traffic from stories so we can better connect upticks on our website with published stories.



Stakeholder Survey

The San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors held a hearing in June 2025 to consider the renewal of the 1989 district of the San Luis Obispo County Tourism Business Improvement District (CBID) assessment for fiscal year 2025-2026.

The hearing reviewed public testimony, protest levels, and the 2024 year-end report alongside the 2025-2026 draft budget, with a focus on the CBID's marketing efforts, financial status, and future strategic initiatives. The protests represented 8.148% of the assessed entities (based on weighted contribution), and came from 4 hotel/motels, 1 bed & breakfast, and 15 vacation rentals. Although it was found that a majority protest did not exist, and thus the district would be renewed, the Board of Supervisors initiated the survey process and outcomes which are summarized below.

Member Priorities and Perceived Value

From August through November 2025, Highway 1 Tourism Alliance conducted a comprehensive survey of all lodging businesses within the CBID boundaries. This was the first professionally administered, independent survey of its kind for the district. The survey was directed by the San Luis Obispo County Board of Supervisors as part of the FY 2025–2026 1989 tourism law renewal process, with the explicit goals of identifying current member priorities, evaluating the perceived value of the CBID, and gathering input on how funds should be allocated going forward.

Strong Engagement Across All Property Types

Response rates were notably high, particularly among hotels and motels. Active vacation rental responses represented approximately 24% of the active VR pool, consistent with target response rates in tourism industry surveys. Engagement was distributed across all seven local fund areas, providing a regionally representative picture of member sentiment.

Perhaps most encouraging: 75% of all respondents expressed interest in learning more about H1TA and potentially becoming more involved. Of those, 38% said yes outright, and another 37% said maybe.

What Members Told Us

Tourism marketing is the top priority. Across all property types and all local fund areas, respondents were consistent: tourism marketing and promotion is the primary function they want the organization to perform. At the regional CBID level, marketing scored 3.62 out of 4.00 as a priority, which was the clear leader. When asked about future allocation of funds, marketing and promotion again led decisively at 3.41 out of 4.00, followed by events and festivals (2.59), beautification (2.20), and stewardship (1.81).

Members recognize positive impact, especially those who are most engaged. Impact ratings for regional marketing and promotion averaged 3.93 out of 5.00, with beautification at 3.85 and stewardship at 3.41. At the local fund area level, tourism marketing scored 4.01 out of 5.00 — the highest of any category measured. Notably, among respondents who rated themselves as highly involved with the organization, impact scores averaged an exceptional 4.61 out of 5.00, suggesting that familiarity with the work directly drives recognition of its value.

Understanding of the organization varies. 55% of active properties indicated strong understanding of how regional CBID funds are used, while 32% expressed low understanding. For local fund area funds, 51% expressed strong understanding versus 30% with low understanding. Open-ended responses revealed that some members conflate the BID assessment with other taxes, or hold expectations about services that fall outside the organization's purview. This finding is informing a proactive communications strategy for the year ahead.

Protesters' views are not as divergent as might be expected. Among respondents who had submitted protests or letters regarding the BID renewal, impact scores averaged 3.50, virtually identical to the respondent average of 3.51. This alignment suggests that concerns about the assessment are not primarily driven by a belief that the programs lack value.

What Comes Next

Survey findings are directly shaping H1TA's communications strategy for FY 2025–2026 and beyond. Key initiatives include a bi-annual Impact Dashboard for constituents, a stakeholder forum, enhanced LFA-level reporting, a "Welcome to H1TA" onboarding resource for new members, and a postcard program designed to grow the member email database and improve ongoing engagement. The overarching communication commitment: clearer language, greater financial transparency, and more consistent reporting of results in terms that connect directly to the businesses the assessment serves.

A Living Document

This overall plan provides the BID Bunch with a working direction for the coming year. It is a living document, meaning that as things change, pieces of the plan may change to best adapt to new conditions. That has shown to be particularly important over the past few years. Each of the BID Bunch members have specific tactics outlined in their agreements that are measured and adjusted regularly to adapt to new challenges as well as new opportunities.

Additionally, the [2025 Year End report](#) can be found on the members site.

Note: The media plan details will be included in the plan once finalized at the June BoD meeting.

2026 | 2027 Projected Budget (as of April 2026)

The FY 2026–2027 projected budget reflects the organization's transition to the Highway 1 Tourism Alliance structure while maintaining the same commitment to investing the majority of assessment funds directly into marketing programs that benefit lodging businesses and communities across the district. As in prior years, approximately 90% of assessment funds are directed to marketing, with administration held to approximately 9% of total expenditures.

Projected Expenses — FY 2026 2027	Budget
LFA Imperative and Strategic Partnerships	\$59,000
Strategy, Planning, BID Bunch Management, Reporting	\$56,000
Media	\$614,800
Content Curation and Management	\$73,560
Earned Media	\$138,700
Owned Media	\$227,340
Other - CMO, Stewardship Travel, Creative	170,672
Total Projected Marketing Expenses	\$1,340,072
Administration Expenses	\$132,130
Grand Total Projected Expenses for H1TA / CBID	\$1,472,202
Projected Income	
Projected Assessment	\$1,438,625
Additional Carryforward Needed to Cover Expenses	\$(33,577)
Grand Total Projected Income (with portion of carryforward)	\$1,472,202
25 26 Collection Projections	\$1,438,625
Anticipated Carryforward into new FY 26 27	\$507,300
Total Marketing + Carryforward + Contingency + Reserves	\$1,945,925