

HUMBOLDT COUNTY GROWERS ALLIANCE

2026 Strategic Priorities: A Member's Guide

How the Board Reached Its Decisions at the June 28, 2026 Strategic Planning Retreat

Prepared for HCGA members by the Board of Directors

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Why This Document Exists

On June 28, 2026, your Board of Directors spent a full day working through HCGA's strategic direction, not behind closed doors, but built directly on what members and stakeholders told us in the weeks beforehand. This guide is for you. It walks through what the data showed, what options the board weighed, and why each decision landed where it did, so that every choice described here can be traced back to something you or your fellow members said.

This is a companion to the Board's formal Strategic Priorities Framework, written and organized around the same three priorities: Brand & Market Development, Organizational Capacity & Modernization, and Accountability. Where the board considered more than one path forward, this guide includes the alternatives it didn't choose, and why.

How We Listened Before We Decided

Two sources of member and stakeholder input anchored the retreat: a membership survey of 26 respondents answering 51 questions on a 1–10 scale, conducted in May 2026, and six stakeholder interviews with farmers and industry voices, conducted over four weeks. Together, these represented a comprehensive picture of HCGA's membership and stakeholder community's thoughts, hopes, and criticisms going into a planning day.

Reading the Scores

The board used a consistent framework to interpret every number in this guide:

A note on how the board weighed these numbers: a high average score with a lot of disagreement among respondents (a high “standard deviation”) means the average looks good on paper, but people are scattered across the scale. A high average with tight agreement means real consensus. The two most decisive results in the entire dataset were maintaining an independent voice (9.46, with almost everyone clustered near that score) and regularly evaluating partnerships (9.38, the same tight agreement). Those two carried more weight in the day's decisions than any other numbers, because of how aligned members were, not just how high the scores ran.

Score	Signal	What it means
9.0+	Strong consensus	Members are aligned and feel strongly. The board treated these as real direction to build on, not debate.
8.0–8.9	Clear direction	Members lean firmly one way. Worth acting on, with attention to how tightly people agreed.
7.0–7.9	Moderate signal	There's agreement, but also room for discussion. The why behind the score matters as much as the number.

Score	Signal	What it means
Below 7	Divided or weak	Genuine division or a weak signal. These items got the most deliberation, not the least.

Before any votes were taken, the board held a listening session on this data alone. No decisions were made in that session; board members were asked only what surprised them and what confirmed what they already knew. That discussion set the foundation for everything that followed.

What Members and Stakeholders Told Us

The full survey and interview results are grouped below by theme. Scores reflect the 1–10 scale described above; “Read” reflects where each result falls on the consensus framework.

Organizational Health

Members trust HCGA as their primary information source, the highest score in the full dataset. Leadership confidence and mission clarity are the gaps this planning day was meant to close.

Statement	Score	Read
Trusted information source	9.3	High
Helps understand industry developments	8.9	High
Timely, useful communication	8.9	High
Communicates opportunities & challenges	8.5	High
Meaningful value to members	8.5	High
Focused on issues important to long-term success	8.5	High
Confidence in leadership & direction	8.0	High
Clarity on mission & current focus	7.9	Moderate
Represents diversity of perspectives	7.8	Moderate

Market Development

Appellations is the single most divided item in the full dataset (SD 2.73, mean 7.04). The board's working recommendation treated this as a sequencing question, not an investment question: pursue market access first, with appellations as a downstream opportunity. See Strategic Priority 1.

Statement	Score	Read
Protecting authenticity & reputation	8.8	High
Explore larger role in collective marketing	8.7	High

Statement	Score	Read
New approaches to visibility & story	8.7	High
Educate consumers, retailers & distributors	8.5	High
Stronger storytelling & unified voice	8.3	High
Help identify emerging market opportunities	8.2	High
Collaborative product development	8.1	High
Collective market channels & DTC	8.0	High
Appellations as a meaningful opportunity	7.0	Divided

Partnerships & Independence

The independence mandate (9.46, SD 0.99) and the partnership evaluation standard (9.38, SD 0.98) are the two tightest-consensus items in the entire dataset. Members expect ongoing accountability on every partnership HCGA holds.

Statement	Score	Read
Maintain independent voice	9.5	High
Regularly evaluate partnerships	9.4	High
Maintain relationships with key organizations	8.4	High
Collaborate when it advances members	8.2	High
Focus on unique value, don't duplicate	8.1	High
Collaboration between organizations is important	7.5	Moderate

Policy & Advocacy

Members value advocacy engagement, especially local (9.2) and state (8.9), but are clear that advocacy alone should not define HCGA's identity.

Statement	Score	Read
Local government engagement	9.2	High
State policy engagement	8.9	High
Federal updates more important than ever	8.5	High
Advocacy efforts provide value	8.2	High
Advocacy should be the primary focus	7.9	Moderate

Tourism, Community & Connection

Consensus here is unusually tight (SD 1.50), a real signal, not just a high average. Members value connection, but want a business hook, not just community time.

Statement	Score	Read
Cannabis-tourism collaboration: mutual benefit	8.6	High
Create idea-exchange spaces	8.1	High
Tourism shapes public awareness	8.1	High
Connection with members is valuable	8.0	High
Interest in attending HCGA events	7.7	Moderate
HCGA should drive more networking	7.5	Moderate
Industry has become less connected	7.1	Moderate

Market Conditions & Competition

The market threat is real and members see it clearly. Humboldt's identity, in the board's reading of this data, must be actively defended, not passively protected.

Statement	Score	Read
Competition from other regions intensifying	8.6	High
Risk of losing market distinction	8.5	High
Market conditions matter more than regulation as a challenge	8.4	High
Consumer understanding remains limited	8.0	High

Emerald Triangle & Regional Identity

Humboldt identity first, Emerald Triangle collaboration pursued opportunistically. "When aligned with member interests" is the operative phrase members used.

Statement	Score	Read
Actively participate in ET conversations	8.9	High
Pursue ET opportunities when aligned	8.6	High
Emerald Triangle remains a meaningful identity	8.4	High
Collaboration across ET creates opportunities	8.2	High
Balance Humboldt identity with regional collaboration	8.2	High
Stronger Mendocino/Trinity relationships	7.5	Moderate

Membership & Revenue

Members see a clear opportunity for collective action. The open question the board carried into the day was who leads it and what the vehicle is.

Statement	Score	Read
New approaches to market development	8.7	High
Membership businesses benefit from collaboration	8.1	High
Opportunities to connect are valuable	8.0	High

Where the Data and Interviews Agreed

Four findings showed up in both sources at once, the strongest kind of signal the board had all day: HCGA is a trusted information source; market development and collective marketing are the highest-priority opportunity; an independent voice is non-negotiable; and the next Executive Director needs to be marketing-forward. All six interviews raised that last point unprompted, and the survey data backed it up.

In Their Own Words

"Farmers don't know who they're paying. HCGA feels like a pass-through. That needs to change."

"People are burnt out on events that don't move product. Every gathering needs a business hook."

"Micro-businesses are a new opportunity. Farms are pivoting. HCGA needs fresh ideas now."

Our Refreshed Foundation: Mission, Vision & Values

Before the board looked at any proposed language, each board member privately answered three questions: If HCGA disappeared tomorrow, what would Humboldt cannabis lose that it couldn't get anywhere else? What does HCGA need to become in the next three years that it isn't today? And what is the one thing HCGA must never compromise, no matter what direction it takes? Only after that individual reflection, and a share-out around the room, did the board turn to proposed Mission, Vision, and Values language, built from the same survey and interview data described above, to check it against what board members had just said in their own words.

Mission

"To preserve, protect, and enhance Humboldt County's world-renowned cannabis industry, its farmers, its legacy, and its future."

The refreshed mission names who HCGA exists to serve and protect more directly than the prior language did. It's grounded in two data points members were emphatic about: protecting authenticity and reputation scored 8.8 with one of the tightest consensus bands in the survey, and interview after interview named farmers directly as the reason the organization exists, including the

concern that “farmers don't know who they're paying,” a transparency gap the mission update is intended to help close.

Vision

“To steward and amplify Humboldt cannabis as the world's most sought-after craft, building the consumer recognition necessary to empower farmers and our community to thrive.”

Values

Value	Adopted language	Why
Farmer First	Farms are the roots of the organization.	Interviews named farmers directly as the unit HCGA exists to serve; survey: meaningful value to members, 8.5.
Authentic	Humboldt's cannabis story is real. We protect it and tell it honestly.	Protecting authenticity & reputation, 8.8, one of the tightest-consensus results in the dataset.
Independent	We speak for our members. No one else.	Maintain independent voice, 9.46 (SD 0.99), the highest-consensus item in the full dataset.
Collective	What we can't do alone, we do together.	Collective marketing (8.7), collaborative product development (8.1), cannabis-tourism collaboration (8.6); interviews cited certification and shared marketing models.
Accountability	We evaluate, report what we find, and adjust.	Regularly evaluate partnerships, 9.38 (SD 0.98), second-highest consensus item. Neither Independent nor Accountable had a prior analog in guiding values; both name something that had been missing.

Strategic Priority 1: Brand & Market Development

This session carried unusual urgency. The Humboldt County Tourism Advisory Board (TAB) is forming right now with a designated cannabis industry seat, and the county's new Tourism Strategy passed by the Board of Supervisors has identified cannabis as a key part of the Humboldt story. These aren't future opportunities; they're active today. The incoming Executive Director is the natural candidate to hold the TAB cannabis seat and manage the future DSO relationship on HCGA's behalf, and that positioning is strongest if the ED arrives with a clear market development mandate. The board weighed three options with this closing window in mind.

The Three Options Considered

Option	What it is	Strongest case	Biggest concern
1. Unified Brand Development Program	Brand guidelines and narrative to tell the Humboldt cannabis story to tourists, built through the TAB/DSO relationship.	Tourism infrastructure is being built right now; the DSO gives cannabis a seat at the table; members have compelling stories never told at scale.	Depends on a DSO budget and partnership outside HCGA's control; results are long-cycle and hard to measure; the hiring window to capture the TAB seat is closing fast.
2. Humboldt County of Origin Certification	A standalone, 2-year member-driven process defining quality standards for Humboldt cannabis, distinct from Appellations of Origin.	Would be the first County of Origin certification in California cannabis; member-driven process builds real buy-in; directly addresses the market-distinction gap members named.	Expensive to fully execute over a 2-year timeline; the County may decline to hold the IP; requires sustained member participation to carry legitimacy. Required significant funding for a marketing campaign.
3. Product Placement & Revenue Development	Expands HCGA's existing 12Js model into new product categories on a revenue-share basis.	Fastest path to new organizational revenue; builds on a model with proven member appetite; could eventually help fund certification and storytelling work.	Brings a host of logistical considerations that need to be carefully vetted.

What the Board Decided

The board ranked Brand Development first, Product Placement second, and parked Certification Humboldt for a future planning period. That ranking wasn't decided in isolation; it's one of three retreat sessions that converged on the same conclusion. The Executive Director hiring profile named marketing and branding experience a non-negotiable, must-hire competency. The Organizational Development session separately ranked a new logo and 10-year rebrand as a co-equal top priority. Read together, the board is moving HCGA into marketing and branding as a core operational capability, not a single initiative: building HCGA's own identity inward, while developing Humboldt cannabis's brand and story outward, in step with the county's broader tourism push.

Member and stakeholder interest in certification was real and vocal:

"We need a Humboldt Sungrown Certification. Build the mark, tell the story, protect the brand."

"NVV model: certification, grading, consumer education, premium mark. We should be calling them."

Certification wasn't parked because members don't want it; the data and the interviews say clearly that they do. It was sequenced behind Brand Development because of timing and cost: a 2-year,

member-driven certification process can't capture the TAB and DSO window that's closing now, while a brand and narrative program can. The same logic applies to Appellations of Origin, the single most divided item in the survey (7.04, with members genuinely split). The board's working view treats both as sequencing questions, not investment questions: establish market access and brand presence first, with certification and appellations as the downstream opportunity.

Strategic Priority 2: Organizational Capacity & Modernization

The Executive Director Hire

Each board member spent eight minutes writing, in silence, the three non-negotiable competencies they believe the incoming ED must bring on day one, things the organization would hire for, not train into an existing team. The facilitator collected and read the responses anonymously, and the board built a shared profile live from where the room converged, before adopting it by vote.

Leadership emerged as the top non-negotiable, with marketing and branding experience named second. This wasn't a top-down preference; it's what six-for-six interviews said unprompted, and what the anonymous board notecards converged on independently:

"The next ED needs a 20-second elevator pitch farmers actually want to hear. Marketing-forward."

"HCGA needs HYPE. We need to become a market force, not just a policy voice."

Organizational Development: The Dot Vote

A separate session presented five internal, operational improvements, not flagship initiatives, but the housekeeping work needed to set a new ED up for success from day one. Each board member received five dots to place however they wanted: all on one item, or spread across several. The facilitator tallied the results live, the room confirmed the tally, and the resulting work plan was adopted by vote.

The rebrand marks HCGA's 10th year and is timed to align with the County of Humboldt's own simultaneous rebrand; aligning timing amplifies both efforts. The member-referral incentive program is a low-cost, self-funding way to grow membership using relationships that already exist. Website and bylaws keep HCGA's public face and governing documents current with everything decided this year, rather than reflecting an identity the board is actively updating.

Item considered	Outcome
New logo & 10-year rebrand	Adopted: co-equal Priority #1
Membership incentive / referral program	Adopted: co-equal Priority #1
Continued website update	Adopted: Priority #2

Item considered	Outcome
Bylaws update	Carried forward as ongoing governance work (see committees, below)
Membership dues consolidated to a single annual date	Discussed and parked for a future planning period

Finance & Internal Housekeeping Committees

The board directed that a Finance Committee and an Internal Housekeeping Committee be evaluated at its next meeting; both have since been adopted. Together, they will address internal governance items including a policy manual and employee handbook, separation of duties, organizing shared files, and organizational SOPs.

Strategic Priority 3: Accountability

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HCGA holds a lot of relationships on your behalf: with partner organizations, with its own committees, with staff, and with the people you trust to lead the organization day to day. As HCGA grows, a new Executive Director, new committees, a broader marketing footprint, those relationships will only multiply. Looking forward, the discussion turned to how to set up HCGA for future success in managing relationships, externally as well as internally. The goal became building a consistent, organization-wide habit of checking in on all of them, the same way, on a regular basis.

What the Board Built

We elected to build accountability into HCGA's structure permanently, rather than revisit it relationship by relationship as questions come up. This puts HCGA in a position of addressing concerns in a structured manner vs a reactionary one. Four mechanisms now carry that work, each on its own cadence, each reporting back to the Board:

- **Partnership Accountability.** Every significant external partnership HCGA holds, including its relationship with Origins Council, gets a regular check-in using a standardized evaluation tool, so the board has a clear, current picture of how each relationship is serving members.
- **Committee Accountability.** The Executive Director reports to the Board quarterly on all four standing committees, what's moving forward, what needs more support, and what could use the Board's input.
- **Executive Director Accountability.** The Board and the ED sit down annually against criteria set at time of hire, a chance to recognize what's working and align on what's next.
- **Staff Accountability.** The ED reviews all other staff annually and shares that with the Board as part of the same rhythm.

What This Means for You

This is a first-year framework, and the board expects to refine it as it learns what's most useful to track. However, the underlying commitment will remain: HCGA pays attention, shares what it finds, adjusts, and keeps improving. If you want to see how any of these accountable metrics are performing, ask your board representative or raise it on IAC.

Open Items & What's Next

This guide reflects where things stood immediately after the retreat, but it's really just the starting point. With the strategic plan being implemented, HCGA is stepping into a new chapter, one built on the direction you helped shape through your survey answers, your interviews, and your trust in this process. Serving on this Board through that shift has been one of the genuine honors of our work here, and we don't take lightly the responsibility of carrying it forward on your behalf.

The board intends to keep members informed every step of the way, through IAC and through your board representatives, and questions about anything in this guide are always welcome there. And if you've read this far and found yourself with opinions about where HCGA should go next, we'd love for you to bring that energy to the table directly: consider running for a board seat in the next election cycle. This organization is only as strong as the members willing to help lead it.

With respect,

HCGA Board of Directors