



PALOMA AGUIRRE
CHAIR PRO TEM
SUPERVISOR, FIRST DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AGENDA ITEM

DATE: April 21, 2026

20

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

LAUNCHING THE SAN DIEGO COUNTY FILM INITIATIVE TO DRIVE REGIONAL ECONOMIC GROWTH AND JOB CREATION (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

Film and media production represent a powerful economic engine capable of generating immediate local spending and long-term workforce opportunity for San Diego County residents. Productions inject revenue directly into hotels, restaurants, construction trades, transportation services, small businesses, and technical professions, while supporting high-quality careers in skilled trades, creative industries, and emerging digital media fields. As competition for production activity intensifies and state-level incentives expand, jurisdictions with coordinated infrastructure, streamlined operations, and performance-based local incentives are best positioned to capture sustained economic benefits.

San Diego County possesses the natural assets, experienced workforce, and diverse locations necessary to compete as a premier production destination. In recent years, the Office of Economic Development and Government Affairs (EDGA) has advanced film-related coordination efforts, supported permitting across County departments, facilitated production inquiries, and strengthened relationships with industry partners. These efforts have demonstrated both the demand for filming in the region and the measurable economic impact that production activity can generate when properly supported. Notably, EDGA's coordination helped facilitate the production of *One Battle After Another*, which filmed extensively across San Diego County and injected nearly \$6.8 million in direct spending into the local economy, supporting local workers, vendors, and hospitality businesses. The foundational work completed by EDGA has positioned the County to take a more comprehensive and strategic next step.

This Board item represents the first step toward launching the San Diego County Film Initiative. Today's action directs the design and development of a centralized Film Office within EDGA to deliver dedicated operational support, a Film Commission within EDGA to serve as an advisory body advancing regional vision and strategy, and a performance-based Rebate Program designed to attract and retain production activity. Together, these components build upon existing

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coordination efforts and establish a structured, coordinated framework for long-term economic growth and job creation.

The San Diego County Film Initiative will revitalize San Diego's position as a competitive production destination and translate that competitiveness into measurable job creation and economic growth. Film production is a high-multiplier industry capable of generating millions of dollars in local spending within weeks while supporting union and non-union labor, local vendors, hospitality providers, transportation services, and regional workforce pipelines. By linking incentives to verified local expenditures, local hiring, and measurable return on investment, the County ensures that public action is directly tied to job growth and economic benefit for San Diego residents. This item revitalizes and strengthens the County's film strategy, elevating prior efforts into a comprehensive, accountable, and competitive framework designed to deliver sustained economic impact.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHAIR PRO TEM PALOMA AGUIRRE

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to develop a comprehensive San Diego County Film Initiative centered on the proposed creation of a San Diego County Film Office (Film Office), San Diego County Film Commission (Film Commission), and San Diego County Film and Media Production Rebate Program (Rebate Program), and to return to the Board of Supervisors (Board) on September 15, 2026, with a detailed San Diego County Film Initiative Implementation Plan for Economic Growth and Job Creation (Implementation Plan) establishing a coordinated operational framework necessary to develop and align these components.
 - a. The Implementation Plan shall include:
 - i. An organizational and staffing framework, including Film Commission formation, bylaws, staffing structure within EDGA, and interdepartmental coordination mechanisms;
 - ii. A fiscal framework detailing start-up and ongoing operational costs, proposed funding sources, recommended Rebate Program caps, and required future appropriations and revenue;
 - iii. An implementation timeline identifying key milestones, including the development and adoption of a countywide film ordinance to establish the regulatory and programmatic framework, followed by the launch of the Film Office to administer permitting, coordination, and program functions, and the subsequent convening of the Film Commission in an advisory capacity, as well as the phased rollout of the Rebate Program; and
 - iv. Performance measurement benchmarks and evaluation intervals to assess economic impact, job creation, and program effectiveness.
 - b. The development of the Implementation Plan shall include stakeholder engagement conducted prior to submission to the Board, including the creation of an advisory work group established by the Implementation Plan consultant in collaboration with EDGA. This work group will be composed of representatives from local jurisdictions, industry stakeholders, labor partners, educational institutions, workforce entities, arts and cultural organizations, and community groups, and will provide input and technical

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- guidance to the CAO during the design and development of the Implementation Plan, ensuring it reflects regional needs, workforce capacity, and industry best practices.
2. As part of the Implementation Plan described in Recommendation 1, the CAO shall include the development of a San Diego County Film Office (Film Office) housed within EDGA, including a formal reporting structure to ensure transparency, accountability, and alignment with Board priorities.
 - a. The purpose of the Film Office shall be to serve as the centralized operational entity responsible for supporting film production, media initiatives, and coordinated industry growth within San Diego County.
 - b. The Film Office shall:
 - i. Establish long-term industry development priorities;
 - ii. Align film-related initiatives with County economic development objectives;
 - iii. Manage countywide permitting for productions in unincorporated areas and coordinate with participating jurisdictions;
 - iv. Administer programs that support film and media productions, including the Rebate Program;
 - v. Facilitate connections between productions and local workforce pipelines, including apprenticeship programs, labor organizations, veterans programs, and small businesses; and
 - vi. Provide location promotion and coordinated marketing and branding initiatives, including the development and promotion of a countywide “Filmed in San Diego” identity to highlight qualifying productions, enhance regional visibility, and support industry attraction.
 - c. The Film Office shall provide updates to the Film Commission and the Board on program performance, including:
 - i. Production activity and permitting volume;
 - ii. Incentive awards and program utilization;
 - iii. Job creation and workforce participation metrics; and
 - iv. Program expenditures and projected economic return.
 3. As part of the Implementation Plan described in Recommendation 1, the CAO shall include the development of a San Diego County Film Commission (Film Commission) housed within EDGA.
 - a. The Film Commission shall serve as the County’s advisory body for setting regional vision, standards, and strategic direction for film, television, commercial, and digital media production within San Diego County. The Film Commission shall:
 - i. Advise on long-term industry development priorities;
 - ii. Advise on aligning film-related initiatives with County economic development objectives;
 - iii. Advise on program standards and performance goals;
 - iv. Strengthen the County’s creative economy and regional competitiveness;
 - v. Promote economic growth, job creation, and workforce development; and
 - vi. Advise on expanding opportunities for local business participation in film and media production.
 - b. The Film Commission shall also support the Film Office’s regional coordination by engaging local jurisdictions, industry stakeholders, labor partners, educational

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- institutions, workforce entities, and community groups to promote alignment and collaboration.
- c. The Film Commission shall advise on ways to advance the cultural and artistic significance of filmmaking within San Diego County, including to:
 - i. Explore and promote long-term goals for filmmaking as a major emphasis of the region's economic and cultural base;
 - ii. Support collaboration with regional arts and cultural organizations, film festivals, community groups, and educational institutions to strengthen the County's creative identity; and
 - iii. Promote cross-border artistic and cultural collaboration within the broader San Diego–Baja California region, recognizing the transnational creative economy as a unique asset.
 - d. In its role as an advisory body to the Board, the Film Commission shall:
 - i. Advise on the Film Office's annual written report to the Board including but not limited to local film and media production activity, incentive utilization, economic impact, and workforce participation; and
 - ii. Identify policy or fiscal matters for potential future Board consideration.
 - e. In its role as an advisory body to the Film Office, the Film Commission shall:
 - i. Provide input on program design and implementation to support alignment with County economic development objectives and industry best practices; and
 - ii. Identify programmatic considerations to support effective administration and continuous improvement of film-related initiatives.
4. As part of the Implementation Plan described in Recommendation 1, the CAO shall include the development of a Film and Media Production Rebate Program (Rebate Program), administered by the Film Office, and shall include a proposed ordinance, administrative framework, and fiscal analysis.
- a. The proposed Rebate Program shall incentivize qualified productions that generate measurable economic benefit within San Diego County and shall include:
 - i. Clear definitions of qualified productions and qualified production costs;
 - ii. Minimum local expenditure and principal photography requirements;
 - iii. Eligibility and ineligibility criteria; and
 - iv. Timeframes for project certification and commencement of principal photography.
 - b. The Rebate Program shall include fiscal and structural safeguards, including:
 - i. Percentage-based reimbursement of verified local qualified expenditures;
 - ii. Tiered rebate levels based on budget size, local hire utilization, and duration of production;
 - iii. Per-project caps and annual aggregate program limits;
 - iv. Proof-of-funding and expenditure verification requirements; and
 - v. Audit, compliance, and clawback provisions.
 - c. The Rebate Program shall incorporate workforce and equity considerations, including:
 - i. Local hiring commitments or good-faith hiring efforts;
 - ii. Reporting on wages, residency, and workforce participation; and
 - iii. Incentive enhancements for expenditures benefiting local small businesses, veteran-owned, women-owned, and BIPOC-owned businesses.

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- d. The Rebate Program shall include annual reporting and a recommended sunset or evaluation provision for Board consideration.
5. Transfer \$100,000 from the Community Enhancement Grant budget (Org 12900), Other Charges, to the Chief Administrative Office, Office of Economic Development and Government Affairs (Org 11810), Services and Supplies, for a consultant contract to complete the work outlined in Recommendations 1-4 above, including assembling a work group comprised of regional representatives, conducting stakeholder engagement, and preparing an Implementation Plan for the Board's consideration, which would include a Film Office, Film Commission, and Rebate Program.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Data on workforce participation and small business access within the film and media industry demonstrate that entry into production-related careers and contracting opportunities has not been evenly distributed across communities. Barriers to industry access, including limited professional networks, capital requirements, and uneven access to training pipelines, have historically limited participation for underrepresented workers and locally owned small businesses. Without intentional design, public incentive programs may inadvertently reinforce these disparities by disproportionately benefiting established production entities and vendors.

This item advances equity by embedding workforce participation, local hiring considerations, and small business engagement into the design of the County's film initiatives. By requiring structured reporting on job creation, local workforce utilization, and economic impact through the Film Office, and by establishing advisory guidance and strategic input from the Film Commission alongside Board reporting requirements, the County strengthens its ability to monitor outcomes and identify where gaps in access may persist.

Importantly, this item establishes the conditions necessary for equitable economic development by ensuring that public investments in the film and media sector are accompanied by transparency, accountability, and measurable performance standards. In doing so, the County reinforces its commitment to inclusive economic opportunity, fair access to high-quality careers, and regionally distributed economic benefit.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This item supports long-term economic, environmental, social, and governance sustainability by developing a coordinated framework for film and media production within San Diego County. The development of a Film Commission, Film Office, and performance-based Rebate Program aligns with the County of San Diego Sustainability Goals to engage the community, provide just and equitable access to opportunity, transition toward a resilient and inclusive economy, and reduce pollution and resource consumption.

By embedding structured oversight, fiscal safeguards, and performance standards, the County strengthens its ability to promote industry growth in a manner that advances economic vitality while supporting responsible environmental stewardship. Absent coordinated policy, production activity may occur without consistent workforce engagement, environmental standards, or long-term planning; this action addresses those gaps through formal governance, measurable reporting,

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and incentives that encourage sustainable production practices and compliance with local environmental regulations.

Importantly, this item advances the conditions necessary for durable and inclusive economic development by aligning industry expansion with workforce pipelines, local business participation, and measurable return on investment, while encouraging environmentally responsible production operations. Through structured implementation planning and ongoing evaluation, the County positions itself to support sustained job creation, economic diversification, reduced resource strain, and long-term regional resilience, reinforcing its broader commitment to sustainable, community-centered growth across San Diego County.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds for this request are not included in the Fiscal Year 2025-26 Operational Plan in the Office of Economic Development and Government Affairs. If approved, this request will result in estimated one-time costs and revenues of approximately \$100,000 funded through a Community Enhancement Grant based on existing General Purpose Revenue, for a consultant contract to assemble the work group comprised of regional representatives, conduct stakeholder engagement, and develop an Implementation Plan, which includes a Film Office, Film Commission, and Rebate Program. There is no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years. There will be fiscal impacts associated with future related recommendations that will be outlined in an Implementation Plan, which staff would return to the Board for consideration and approval.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

The development and eventually implementation of the San Diego County Film Initiative is expected to generate positive business impacts by increasing production-related spending across hospitality, construction, transportation, catering, equipment rental, and other local service sectors. A performance-based Rebate Program tied to verified local expenditures will incentivize productions to hire locally and contract with San Diego County businesses, expanding economic opportunity for both small and established enterprises. By strengthening one-stop-shop permitting coordination and industry support, this initiative positions the region to attract sustained production activity that supports job growth and long-term business development.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

San Diego County has long possessed the assets necessary to compete as a premier film and media production destination. From its coastline, deserts, naval installations, and urban backdrops to its proximity to Los Angeles and Baja California, the region offers extraordinary geographic and logistical advantages. Historically, the San Diego Film Commission, which operated from the mid-1970s until 2013, was recognized as one of the most effective regional film offices in California, supporting decades of production activity and generating substantial local economic benefit.

Beyond locations, San Diego is home to a deep and under-recognized creative workforce pipeline. Alumni from San Diego State University have gone on to shape major global productions. SDSU film school graduate Destin Daniel Cretton directed Marvel's *Shang-Chi and the Legend of the*

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Ten Rings, and SDSU alumni Lalo Alcaraz and Darla K. Anderson were key contributors to Disney and Pixar's Academy Award-winning film *Coco*. These success stories reflect the region's creative potential and technical capacity. San Diego produces talented writers, directors, editors, production designers, cinematographers, and post-production professionals who are contributing to the global entertainment economy.

The San Diego region hosts major cultural anchors such as the San Diego Latino Film Festival, now in its third decade, which celebrates diverse storytelling and attracts national attention. Film festivals, Comic-Con, and cross-border cinema collaborations with Baja California demonstrate that San Diego is a creative ecosystem. Despite this talent and cultural infrastructure, the County has not fully capitalized on its economic potential in film and television production.

Prior Board Direction and EDGA's Ongoing Film Efforts

On November 2, 2021 (12), the Board of Supervisors recognized the economic value of film production and directed the Chief Administrative Officer to explore the creation of a regional structure. Since July 2022, the County's Office of Economic Development and Government Affairs (EDGA) has continued advancing film-related efforts across the County. EDGA has coordinated permitting across County departments, facilitated industry inquiries, hosted location tours for production scouts, developed standardized permitting processes, and led ongoing regional film coordination meetings.

These efforts have been highly effective. EDGA's leadership helped secure large-scale production activity for the feature film *One Battle After Another*, which filmed across multiple locations throughout San Diego County and injected nearly \$6.8 million into the local economy.¹ The production brought together hundreds of cast and crew over several months and utilized a wide range of regional sites, including the Westgate Hotel, the Gaslamp Quarter, East Village, Otay Mesa, Borrego Springs, Lower Otay Reservoir, Otay Open Space Preserve, Agua Caliente, and Imperial Beach. Filming included complex action sequences on County roads and staging operations near the California Highway Patrol Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Facility.

In addition to broader economic impacts, Warner Bros. alone reported approximately \$3.4 million in local production spending on lodging, fuel, supplies, and other goods and services across the region.² This work has proven that San Diego County can attract production when supported through coordinated effort. What remains is the structural infrastructure necessary to scale that success.

Economic Impact: What Film Production Delivers When Structured Correctly

Film and television production are high-multiplier industries. A single feature production can generate millions of dollars in local spending within weeks. Location shoots require lodging, food services, transportation fleets, construction crews, electricians, security personnel, equipment

¹ County of San Diego, Communications Office, "New Blockbuster Already a Big Hit in San Diego County," County News Center, September 22, 2025.

² The San Diego Union-Tribune, "One Battle After Another San Diego Filming Locations," September 26, 2025.

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rentals, wardrobe, and technical specialists. These expenditures are immediate and locally embedded.

Other jurisdictions provide clear evidence of what structured film incentives and governance can deliver:

- Los Angeles County: According to the Los Angeles County report *Advancing the Resilience of the Film and Television Industry in Los Angeles*, the film and television sector supports approximately 681,000 jobs, generates an estimated \$115 billion in annual economic output, produces about \$43 billion in annual labor income, and contributes roughly \$24 billion annually in state and local tax revenue, underscoring its role as a foundational economic engine for the region.³
- San Francisco: Data from the San Francisco Film Commission, including the “Scene in San Francisco” incentive program and the City’s Fiscal Year 2024–2025 Annual Report, indicate that the program has generated approximately \$68 million in spending at local businesses and \$26 million in wages to local workers since 2006, returns roughly \$12.68 in local spending for every \$1 of incentive funding, and produced more than \$17.5 million in direct economic activity in FY 2024–2025 alone, supporting a wide range of local vendors, hospitality providers, and service industries.⁴
- St. Louis County, Minnesota: A February 2023 economic impact study by the University of Minnesota Duluth found that film and content production already supported 106 jobs and generated approximately \$6.9 million in total economic output in St. Louis County in 2022, even under the County’s existing rebate structure. The study further found that as local investment and rebate capacity increase, the industry’s impact could grow substantially with modeled scenarios showing support for 485 jobs and \$28.7 million in output under a modest growth scenario, and up to 2,198 jobs and more than \$100 million in output under a larger-scale growth scenario.⁵ This demonstrates how targeted local incentives can drive significant regional job creation and economic expansion.
- New Jersey: According to the New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission’s 2023 Annual Report and 2024 reporting on production spending from the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA), the State’s film and digital media tax credit program has driven record-breaking in-state production spending of approximately \$833 million across more than 550 productions, supporting over 30,000 crew hires, attracting major studio investment, and accelerating the expansion of soundstages and related infrastructure.⁶ New Jersey’s competitive incentives, available space for new studio

³ Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC), *Advancing the Resilience of the Film and Television Industry in Los Angeles* (2023).

⁴ City and County of San Francisco, Film SF / San Francisco Film Commission, *Film SF Impact Report, Fiscal Year 2024–2025*.

⁵ University of Minnesota Duluth, Labovitz School of Business and Economics, Bureau of Business and Economic Research, *Economic Impacts of the Content Industry in Northern Minnesota* (Duluth, MN: University of Minnesota Duluth, February 2023).

⁶ New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission, *2023 Annual Report* (Trenton, NJ: New Jersey Motion Picture and Television Commission, 2024); New Jersey Economic Development Authority, “2024 Film Industry Spending Breaks Yet Another Record in NJ,” press release, October 21, 2025.

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development, and proximity to New York City's talent pool have enabled productions that might otherwise film in New York to relocate across state lines, effectively shifting production activity and associated economic benefits into various counties in New Jersey.

These examples demonstrate a consistent principle that jurisdictions that pair operational support with performance-based rebate programs see measurable economic return. San Diego County has already demonstrated localized success through EDGA's efforts. With a formal Film Commission, a dedicated Film Office, and a structured Rebate Program tied to verified local expenditures and local hiring, the County can convert episodic production wins into sustained economic strategy.

Regional Momentum and Infrastructure Opportunities

San Diego County's film ecosystem is expanding. The Chula Vista Entertainment Complex has announced phased development plans for sound stages and studio infrastructure designed to position the region as a competitive alternative to Los Angeles. Regional workforce entities, labor partners such as IATSE Local 122, and local universities and community colleges are prepared to support expanded production demand.

The County also sits within a unique transnational creative corridor with Baja California, a region experiencing significant growth in film and digital production capacity. Cross-border collaboration presents opportunities for innovation, shared workforce development, and expanded creative exchange.

The Revitalized San Diego County Film Initiative

This Board action represents a deliberate revitalization and expansion of the County's film efforts. Rather than continuing incremental coordination, the San Diego County Film Initiative formalizes the County's commitment through:

- Development of a centralized Film Office within EDGA to provide key operational supports for film production;
- Development of a Film Commission within EDGA to serve as an advisory body providing strategic guidance and recommendations; and
- Development of a performance-based Rebate Program to attract production and ensure public investment translates into measurable local job creation and economic return.

This initiative builds upon EDGA's foundational work and prior Board interest while moving decisively to the next phase inclusive of enhanced County infrastructure, local job creation, workforce expansion, small business growth, and sustained economic competitiveness. When structured properly, film production supports creative professionals, union trades, hospitality workers, transportation providers, and local vendors simultaneously. It strengthens tourism visibility, reinforces cultural identity, and firmly positions the County within a global creative economy.

San Diego County has the talent, locations, cultural institutions, and demonstrated success to compete in the film industry. This initiative provides the potential governance structure,

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operational capacity, and incentive programs necessary to ensure that future productions choose San Diego County and that economic benefits are maximized for County residents and businesses.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed action aligns with the Economic Prosperity and Operational Excellence Strategic Initiatives in the County of San Diego's 2026–2031 Strategic Plan by developing coordinated governance, operational infrastructure, and performance-based incentives designed to strengthen the region's creative economy, expand job creation, and enhance regional competitiveness.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paloma Aguirre', with a stylized flourish at the end.

PALOMA AGUIRRE
Supervisor, First District

ATTACHMENT(S)

N/A