

The San Diego County Film Initiative

A New Vision for Jobs, Growth, and Local Creative Power

The San Diego County Film Initiative is a bold, countywide plan to turn San Diego County into a top-tier destination for film, television, and digital media production. It's built to create jobs, support local businesses, attract outside investment, and bring long-overdue coordination to an industry with untapped potential.

This initiative isn't just about filming movies—it's about building a sustainable creative economy that puts San Diego County on the map and puts our local communities to work.

What's Included in the Initiative?

The plan is built on **three core pillars** that work together to make San Diego County a film-friendly region with lasting public benefits:

1. The San Diego County Film Commission

A regional leadership body made up of local film professionals, labor unions, civic leaders, and community partners. The Commission provides strategic oversight, advises the County, and ensures that growth is guided by clear values: accountability, equity, and long-term opportunity.

2. The San Diego County Film Office

A centralized team that coordinates permits, supports productions, connects local workers to jobs, and ensures film shoots are respectful, efficient, and beneficial to the communities they impact. It's a one-stop shop that makes filming across the county easy and consistent.

3. The SDVibe Rebate Program

A performance-based rebate program that returns up to 35% of eligible spending to productions that invest locally, hire San Diego County residents and apprentices, promote equity, and use regional branding. SDVibe keeps production dollars circulating in the local economy and helps level the playing field with other states and regions.

How SDVibe Works

The SDVibe rebate starts at **20% base** for qualified in-county spend and scales up to **35% maximum** based on bonus tiers.

Bonus Tiers:

- **+5% — Local Hire Tier:** Hire San Diego County residents, including registered apprentices and U.S. military veterans.
- **+5% — Equity Tier:** Meet diversity goals in hiring, contracting, or storytelling.
- **+3% — Founding City Tier:** Film in a participating Founding City jurisdiction.
- **+2% — Branding Tier:** Use the official "Filmed in San Diego County" logo in final content or promotional materials.

Tiered Rebate Caps:

- **Tier A — Large Productions:** Rebate capped at **\$300,000**
- **Tier B — Mid-Size Productions:** Rebate capped at **\$150,000**
- **Tier C — Small Productions:** Rebate capped at **\$50,000**

This structure ensures a range of projects can benefit—while protecting the public investment with smart, performance-based controls.

Why It Matters

It Creates Jobs

From grips and gaffers to caterers, drivers, and hotel workers—productions support a wide range of professions. This initiative builds a pipeline to employment for San Diego County residents across all backgrounds, including apprentices and veterans.

It Supports Small Businesses

Filmmaking touches everything: hardware stores, restaurants, costume shops, rental companies, gas stations, and more. Every production becomes a short-term economic engine for the communities where it films.

It Attracts Outside Investment

Other regions have proven that film incentives work. San Diego County's climate, scenery, and talent pool already make it attractive—this initiative gives producers a real reason to choose us over our competitors.

It Builds a Creative Future

This initiative creates new opportunities for students, artists, and entrepreneurs to stay and grow in San Diego County, rather than leaving for LA or out-of-state hubs. It helps retain talent and inspire the next generation of creatives.

What Does It Cost?

The Film Initiative is designed as a two-year pilot program, with a total projected investment of approximately **\$5.3 million**. This includes:

Year One:

- **Film Commission:** \$50,000 (stipends, reporting, administrative support)
- **Film Office:** \$858,500 (\$708,500 staffing + \$150,000 overhead, infrastructure, and permitting system setup)
- **SDVibe Rebate Pool:** \$2,500,000 (performance-based, paid post-verification)

Year Two:

- **Film Commission:** \$50,000 (ongoing oversight and review)
- **Film Office (scale-up):** ~\$950,000 (expanded staffing, local program integration, public reporting)
- **SDVibe Rebate Pool:** \$1,000,000 (maintained incentive structure based on Year One results)

Total 2-Year Pilot Cost: ≈ \$5.3 million

In Year One alone, SDVibe is projected to support **up to 20 qualifying productions** across large, mid-size, and small-scale tiers—each bringing jobs, spending, and visibility to the region. The results will be carefully tracked to guide future expansion.

This cost is **modest compared to industry norms** and is fully justified by the measurable economic return. Each dollar invested is projected to generate \$5–\$7 in regional economic activity through jobs, business contracts, and local tax revenue.

Who Supports the Initiative?

The Film Initiative is backed by:

- Local labor unions (IATSE, SAG-AFTRA, Musicians, Building Trades)
 - The San Diego County Film Commission Foundation
 - Small businesses and production companies
 - Educators and training programs
 - Civic and economic leaders across the region
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What's the Ask?

We're asking the San Diego County Board of Supervisors to formally adopt the Film Initiative, seat the Commission, fund the Film Office, and launch SDVibe as a two-year pilot program—with built-in reporting, accountability, and economic return.

This is a smart investment—not a blank check. The structure is lean, the goals are clear, and the benefits are measurable.

What Happens Next?

With County approval, the first phase of the initiative can be launched within months:

- The Film Commission can be seated in 60–90 days.
- The Film Office can open its doors and begin permitting by mid-year.
- The SDVibe rebate program can begin accepting applications before year's end.

Pilot productions will help test, improve, and grow the program, laying the foundation for a lasting creative economy.

Now is the time to act.

San Diego County has the talent, the locations, and the energy. With the Film Initiative, we'll finally have the infrastructure—and a plan that puts the public first.

Let's bring production home.