

PERKINS V COMPREHENSIVE REGIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges

January 2026



COMMUNITY COLLEGES
SAN DIEGO & IMPERIAL COUNTIES
CAREER EDUCATION



POWERED BY



Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Chancellor’s Office CLNA Reporting Framework.....	5
1.1. Stakeholders Engaged for Needs Assessment.....	5
1.2. Other Stakeholder Groups Consulted.....	10
1.3. Summary of Stakeholder Feedback.....	11
Special Populations’ Needs.....	12
Appendix A: Methodology	24
Appendix B: Meeting Notes.....	30
Acknowledgments.....	58



Executive Summary

The reauthorization of the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act—the Perkins V legislation—provides more than \$1.2 billion in federal funds to support Career Technical Education or Career Education (CTE/CE) programs across the nation.¹ To apply for Perkins V funds, institutions must conduct a Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA), which examines the needs of the following special populations:

- » Individuals with disabilities
- » Individuals from economically disadvantaged families
- » Individuals preparing for nontraditional fields
- » Single parents, including single pregnant women
- » Out-of-workforce individuals
- » Homeless individuals
- » Youth who are in, or have aged out of, the foster care system
- » Youth with a parent who is a member of the armed forces and is on active duty
- » Individuals with other barriers to educational achievement

The purpose of this study is to provide the community colleges with a comprehensive, regional-level needs assessment. This Comprehensive Regional Needs Assessment (CRNA) is an update of prior CRNAs^{2,3,4}; it summarizes the needs of special populations using data from student surveys and community forums across the San Diego & Imperial region between 2024 and 2025. According to the information gathered, students from special populations need...

Awareness of—and access to—caregiving and wraparound services

Accommodating course scheduling and academic support

Varied learning modalities with high-quality instruction and digital support

Work-based learning opportunities and access to programs that lead to priority jobs

A caring campus with high-touch guidance and culturally inclusive, trauma-informed practices

The colleges can use this report to complete their CNAs. This report aligns with Vision 2030⁵ and the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office [Perkins V CLNA Reporting Framework](#).

¹ "Legislation and Regulations: Perkins V," U.S. Department of Education, accessed November 1, 2023, cte.ed.gov/legislation/perkins-v.

² "Perkins V Local Comprehensive Needs Assessment," San Diego & Imperial COE, April 2020, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2026/01/perkins-v-local-comprehensive-needs-assessment.

³ "Perkins V Comprehensive Regional Needs Assessment (CRNA)," San Diego & Imperial COE, February 2022, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2022/11/perkins-v-comprehensive-regional-needs-assessment.

⁴ "Perkins V Comprehensive Regional Needs Assessment (CRNA)," San Diego & Imperial COE, November 2023 (2024), coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2026/01/perkins-v-comprehensive-regional-needs-assessment-3.

⁵ "Vision 2030," California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, cocco.edu/About-Us/Vision-2030.

Introduction

Recipients of the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) must complete a Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA) and document consultations with a broad set of stakeholders as a condition of receiving Perkins V funding.

● Perkins V specifies stakeholder groups that must be consulted, including representatives of:

- > Career Technical Education / Career Education (CTE/CE) programs
- > CTE / CE programs at postsecondary institutions
- > Local workforce development boards
- > Local agencies serving special populations
- > Parents and students
- > Special populations, such as:

Individuals with disabilities

Individuals from economically disadvantaged families

Individuals preparing for nontraditional fields

Single parents, including single pregnant women

Out-of-workforce individuals

Homeless individuals

Youth who are in, or have aged out of, the foster care system

Youth with a parent who is a member of the armed forces and is on active duty

Individuals with other barriers to educational achievement



To help colleges meet the Perkins V's consultation requirement, the San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) produced this Comprehensive Regional Needs Assessment (CRNA). The CRNA follows a two-year production cycle: the COE collects data across the two years leading up to each update and synthesizes those findings into a revised assessment. For this 2026 update, the COE consolidated qualitative input from 30 community forums held in 2024–2025 and incorporated primary survey data from 538 students from special populations.^{6,7} For a complete description of the methods used in this study and documentation of stakeholder engagement, refer to the Appendix.

The San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges can use the sections below to complete their CLNAs, drawing on this CRNA to document stakeholder consultation and populate the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office [Perkins V CLNA Reporting Framework](#).

⁶ "San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges' Adult Learner Study," San Diego & Imperial COE, November 2025, bit.ly/adultlearnerstudy.

⁷ "Student Support Services Experiences Study," San Diego & Imperial COE, May 2024, coeccc.net/san-diego-imperial/2024/05/student-support-services-experiences-study.

Chancellor's Office CLNA Reporting Framework

Per the Reporting Framework, CLNAs must include the following:



- 1.1. Indicate the key stakeholders (individuals and groups) involved in the completion of this needs assessment;
- 1.2. Provide a list of other stakeholder groups consulted (but not directly involved) in completing the needs assessment; and
- 1.3. Summarize the key stakeholder feedback.

The sections that follow are organized to match these prompts, making it straightforward for colleges to transfer CRNA evidence into their CLNA submissions.

1.1. Stakeholders Engaged for Needs Assessment

Section 1.1 of the CLNA Reporting Framework requires colleges to indicate the key stakeholders (individuals and groups) involved in the completion of their needs assessments. To satisfy this requirement, the San Diego & Imperial COE convened 30 community forums in 2024-2025 to solicit feedback on the needs of special populations. In 2024, the COE leveraged the California Jobs First grant—which had similar consultation requirements as Perkins V—to conduct 23 community forums, maximizing reach and reducing burden on regional partners. In 2025, the COE held seven in-person, community forums across the region's six community college districts (CCDs) to solicit further input. Below includes a list of dates of the community forums and their respective CCDs. For more information about this process, see Appendix A: Methodology.

- » July 30, 2025: MiraCosta CCD
- » August 27, 2025: San Diego CCD
- » August 28, 2025: Imperial CCD
- » September 11, 2025: Palomar CCD
- » September 24, 2025: Southwestern CCD
- » November 7, 2025: Grossmont-Cuyamaca CCD (at Cuyamaca College)
- » November 13, 2025: Grossmont-Cuyamaca CCD (at Grossmont College)

The table below lists the **122 organizations** that participated in one or more forums in 2024–2025. For meeting notes and supporting documentation of stakeholder consultations, see Appendix B: Meeting Notes.

Exhibit 1. List of 122 Participating Organizations by Community Forum Year

Organization	2024	2025
A Reason to Survive	✓	
Able-Disabled Advocacy		✓
Ace Parking, Inc.		✓
Adalem Consulting	✓	
Advanced Manufacturing Institute San Diego		✓
Best S.T.E.P. Forward	✓	
Black Lives Matter Imperial Valley	✓	
Border Region Talent Pipeline K-16 Collaborative		✓
Building and Construction Trades Council	✓	
Calexico Teachers Association	✓	
California State University San Marcos	✓	✓
Care Service Workforce Apprenticeships Program		✓
CAREERworks at A-DA		✓
Catalyst of San Diego & Imperial Counties	✓	
ChildCare Careers		✓
Children of the Rainbow		✓
Children's Paradise		✓
City Heights Community Development Corporation	✓	
City of Brawley		✓
City of Carlsbad		✓
City of Chula Vista	✓	
City of Escondido	✓	
City of San Marcos		✓
Climate Action Campaign	✓	
Comité Cívico del Valle	✓	
Community Resource Center		✓
Controlled Thermal Resources Holdings, Inc.		✓
County of Imperial	✓	
County of San Diego	✓	✓
Cuyamaca College		✓
Education to Career Network		✓
Educational Enrichment Systems		✓
El Centro Fire Department		✓
Empowerment One RISE One		✓

Organization	2024	2025
Federal Reserve Bank		✓
Five Crowns Marketing		✓
Foundation for Grossmont and Cuyamaca Colleges		✓
Gaylord Pacific		✓
Goodwill Industries of San Diego and Imperial Counties		✓
Grossmont Adult Education		✓
Grossmont College		✓
Grossmont Union High School District		✓
Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District		✓
Helix Charter High School		✓
Imperial County Office of Education		✓
Imperial Irrigation District		✓
Imperial Regional Alliance	✓	
Imperial Valley College		✓
Imperial Valley Community Foundation	✓	
Imperial Valley Economic Development Corporation	✓	
Imperial Valley Equity & Justice Coalition	✓	
Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program		✓
Imperial Valley Wellness Foundation	✓	
Indian Voices Newspaper	✓	
Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior		✓
Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation	✓	
Joint Tactics and Technologies, Inc.		✓
Leaf It To Us Tree Service, LLC		✓
Mano A Mano Foundation		✓
Metropolitan Area Advisory Committee		✓
MiraCosta College		✓
Mirka Investments, LLC		✓
Mundo Gardens	✓	
Neighborhood House of Calexico, Inc.	✓	
Ocean Discovery Institute		✓
Open Paths		✓
Otay Ranch High School		✓
Palomar College		✓
Policy & Innovation Center	✓	
Porpoise Robotics		✓
Poway Adult School		✓
Poway Chamber of Commerce		✓
Poway Unified School District		✓
Progressive Labor Alliance	✓	

Organization	2024	2025
Quechan Tribe (Fort Yuma–Quechan Indian Tribe)	✓	
R&R Career Educational Services		✓
Restoration Abbey	✓	
San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence	✓	✓
San Diego & Imperial Counties Labor Council	✓	
San Diego & Imperial Regional Consortium		✓
San Diego 350	✓	
San Diego Black Worker Center	✓	
San Diego City College		✓
San Diego College of Continuing Education		✓
San Diego Community College District		✓
San Diego County Office of Education		✓
San Diego County Public Authority		✓
San Diego Food System Alliance	✓	
San Diego Green New Deal Alliance	✓	
San Diego Mesa College		✓
San Diego Miramar College		✓
San Diego Police Department		✓
San Diego Regional East County Chamber of Commerce		✓
San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation		✓
San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center	✓	
San Diego State University	✓	✓
San Diego State University – Imperial Valley		✓
San Diego Workforce Partnership	✓	✓
San Pasqual Band of Kumeyaay Indians	✓	
SB Consulting		✓
Scripps Health		✓
South Bay Community Services	✓	
South County Economic Development Council		✓
Southern Border Coalition Community Economic Resilience Fund	✓	
Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association	✓	
Southwestern College		✓
Steele Canyon High School		✓
Sure Helpline Center	✓	
TerraLithium LLC		✓
The Water Conservation Garden		✓
Tony Washington Art		✓
Tribal Energy and Climate Collaborative	✓	

Organization	2024	2025
UDW Resource Center		✓
United Auto Workers	✓	
United Food and Commercial Workers Local 135	✓	
United Way of Imperial County	✓	
Universidad Popular	✓	
University of California, San Diego, Center for Research and Evaluation		✓
Viejas Casino & Resort		✓
Vista Chamber of Commerce		✓
Vista Community Clinic		✓

1.2. Other Stakeholder Groups Consulted

Section 1.2 of the CLNA Reporting Framework requires colleges to list other stakeholder groups consulted (but not directly involved) in completing their CLNAs. To meet this requirement, the San Diego & Imperial COE supplemented forum discussions (2024–2025) with primary survey data from two COE studies—*Student Support Services Experiences Study*⁸ (2024) and *San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges Adult Learner Study*⁹ (2025). Together, these studies yielded 943 survey responses, and 538 respondents self-identified as members of one or more Perkins-defined special populations. For this CRNA, we disaggregated and reanalyzed responses to better understand the needs of special populations and to inform the CRNA recommendations. Exhibit 2 below summarizes these “other consulted stakeholder groups” with descriptive statistics.

Exhibit 2. Self-Identified as Special Populations by Study

	Student Support Services Experiences Study	Adult Learner Study	Total
	N=112	N=426	N=538
First-generation college student	49%	52%	51%
Parent to child(ren) under 18 years old	15%	38%	33%
Low-income resident	8%	24%	21%
Person with physical or mental disability	9%	21%	19%
Single parent	15%	20%	19%
English language learner	9%	13%	12%
Caregiver for adult(s) 18 years old or older	12%	12%	12%
U.S. Veteran or active duty	10%	9%	9%
Dependent on third-party / public transportation	6%	6%	6%
Homeless individual	4%	4%	4%
Formerly incarcerated, on probation/parole, or impacted by the justice system	0%	4%	3%
Currently or previously in the foster care system	1%	2%	1%
Refugee or asylee	1%	1%	1%

Note. Multiple options could be selected

⁸ “Student Support Services Experiences Study,” San Diego & Imperial COE, May 2024, accessed October 1, 2025, coeccc.net/san-diego-imperial/2024/05/student-support-services-experiences-study.

⁹ “San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges' Adult Learner Study: Insights to Strengthen Practices and Policies,” San Diego & Imperial COE, November 2025, accessed December 1, 2025, coeccc.net/san-diego-imperial/2025/11/san-diego-imperial-community-colleges-adult-learner-study-insights-to-strengthen-practices-and-policies.

1.3. Summary of Stakeholder Feedback

Section 1.3 of the CLNA Reporting Framework requires colleges to summarize key stakeholder feedback. Drawing on the qualitative and quantitative data collected for this CRNA, the following needs for special populations emerged:

- **Special populations need...**
 - 1 Awareness of—and access to—caregiving and wraparound services
 - 2 Accommodating course scheduling and academic support
 - 3 Varied learning modalities with high-quality instruction and digital support
 - 4 Work-based learning opportunities and access to programs that lead to priority jobs
 - 5 A caring campus with high-touch guidance and culturally inclusive, trauma-informed practices



For more detail, see the next section, **Special Populations' Needs**, which summarizes the overarching themes from the data, highlights areas of continuity with prior CRNAs, and embeds reflection questions for regional colleges to consider as they use this CRNA to complete their CLNAs.

Special Populations' Needs

This section summarizes the needs of special populations using data from student surveys and community forums conducted across the San Diego & Imperial region between 2024 and 2025.

1) Awareness of—and access to—caregiving and wraparound services

Across all community forums, attendees emphasized persistent caregiving shortages affecting many families, particularly single parents pursuing their education, and stressed the need for childcare or senior-care support that is accessible and affordable.

“ I would like to start going again. I wish there was a way to swing full-time parenting, full-time work, and schooling. - Single Parent, Non-Completer ”

Consistent with prior regional research, adult learners¹⁰ who did not complete their educational goals reported more weekly caregiving hours than those who did complete—27 vs. 20 hours per week.¹¹ This gap is significantly larger among students from special populations: non-completers averaged 32 hours per week compared with 20 hours for completers (Exhibit 3). These results indicate caregiving responsibilities are associated with lower completion rates, particularly for students from special populations.

Exhibit 3. Average Weekly Hours Spent on Activities by Adult Learners from Special Populations

	Special Populations: Completers (n=211)	Special Populations: Non-Completers (n=193)
Providing care for dependents	20 hours	32* hours
Working for pay	27 hours	28 hours
Preparing for and attending class	17 hours	17 hours
Commuting to work	7 hours	7 hours
Commuting to school	5 hours	6 hours
Participating in college activities	1 hour	2 hours

Note. Sample sizes may vary slightly across items due to missing data.
*Average Hours = Mean; $t(402) = 4.22, p < .05$

¹⁰ Students aged 25 or older who balance school, work, caregiving, and other responsibilities.

¹¹ “San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges' Adult Learner Study: Insights to Strengthen Practices and Policies,” San Diego & Imperial COE, November 2025, accessed December 1, 2025, coeccc.net/san-diego-imperial/2025/11/san-diego-imperial-community-colleges-adult-learner-study-insights-to-strengthen-practices-and-policies.

Beyond childcare, forum participants emphasized multiple barriers that make college attendance difficult for students from special populations: the high cost of living that forces many to prioritize paid work, limited transportation, long commutes, expensive gas, and unreliable internet or device access—challenges often magnified in rural areas. Participants called for comprehensive wraparound supports, including financial assistance, mental-health services, technology access, emergency housing, transportation assistance, and basic-needs resources (e.g., food, clothing).

Community-based organizations (CBOs) and college staff reported that many wraparound services exist, but many students either do not know about them or cannot access them. Survey data showed that fewer than 20% of students from special populations use basic-needs assistance, health services, services for specialized groups, community-building activities, and English-language support (Exhibit 4). Use of the child development center is especially low—only about 2%–5% of students from special populations reported using it. For health services and community-building activities, completers were more likely to use them than non-completers (Exhibit 4). Additionally, approximately only one in 10 students from special populations used personal or mental health counseling services, which are key services that can impact students' academic performance and success.¹²

2% to 5% of students from special populations used the child development center

Exhibit 4. Student Support Services Least Used by Adult Learners from Special Populations

	Special Populations: Completers (<i>n</i> =210)	Special Populations: Non-Completers (<i>n</i> =190)
Basic needs assistance	18%	16%
Health services	16%*	6%
Services for specialized groups	15%	13%
Community-building activities	14%*	7%
Personal or mental health counseling services	11%	7%
English language support services	8%	5%
Child development center	5%	2%
<i>None of the above</i>	18%	22%

Note. Multiple options could be selected

**p* < .05

¹² Scherer, Layne A., and Alan I. Leshner, eds. *Mental Health, Substance Use, and Wellbeing In Higher Education: Supporting the Whole Student*. National Academies Press, 2021.

In addition to a lack of awareness, forum participants also noted a structural problem: partnerships between colleges and community providers are frequently project- or grant-funded and lapse when funding ends, leaving few formal, sustained agreements. This fragmentation creates redundant programs, wastes resources, and disrupts continuity of support for special populations. Attendees therefore recommended developing institutionalized processes to improve coordination, communication and delivery among wraparound providers; the colleges should create systems that intentionally integrate institutional efforts with trusted community partners. These findings align with prior San Diego & Imperial CRNAs.^{13,14,15}

These insights can guide focused conversations about why students do—or do not—use available supports. Below are reflection questions colleges can use to assess capacity, access, outreach, and partnership opportunities.

Reflection Questions

- Do capacity, eligibility, cost, or scheduling prevent students from using wraparound services? How can colleges and CBOs coordinate delivery (e.g., rolling hours, co-enroll, co-promote) to increase continuous access?
- Are childcare services (e.g., child development centers) open at times students need them (evenings, weekends)? What changes or partnerships would make childcare usable for working/caretaking students and faculty?
- What supports do colleges currently offer students who care for adult dependents, and what partnerships should colleges explore?
- How can colleges co-design messaging with students or CBOs to reach special-population students more effectively and inform them about wraparound services?
- How should colleges measure whether extended hours, co-enrollment, or outreach increases usage and reduces unmet need? What simple metrics and short-term indicators should colleges track?

¹³ "Perkins V Local Comprehensive Needs Assessment," San Diego & Imperial COE, April 2020, coeccc.net/san-diego-imperial/2026/01/perkins-v-local-comprehensive-needs-assessment.

¹⁵ "Perkins V Comprehensive Regional Needs Assessment (CRNA)," San Diego & Imperial COE, February 2022, coeccc.net/san-diego-imperial/2022/11/perkins-v-comprehensive-regional-needs-assessment.

¹⁵ "Perkins V Comprehensive Regional Needs Assessment," San Diego & Imperial COE, November 2023 (2024), coeccc.net/san-diego-imperial/2026/01/perkins-v-comprehensive-regional-needs-assessment-3.

2) Accommodating course scheduling and academic support

As previously shown in Exhibit 3, students from special populations reported substantial weekly work hours (on average, 27–28 hours), creating a clear need for course offerings that fit complex schedules. Across community forums, participants identified flexible course scheduling as a critical strategy to support these students. A few highlights from those discussions are listed below:

- » **Imperial and Grossmont-Cuyamaca CCDs:** Stakeholders recommended expanding offerings to Friday evenings and Saturday classes to accommodate full-time workers.
- » **Southwestern and San Diego CCDs:** Participants proposed evening courses, short-term class formats, and manageable course loads.
- » **MiraCosta and Palomar CCDs:** Attendees suggested pairing flexible scheduling with asynchronous, hybrid or fully online course formats.

Survey results reinforced these qualitative findings, with the majority (57%) of students from special populations identifying more flexible class schedules (evening, weekend, online) as the most helpful strategy for completing their education (Exhibit 5).

Exhibit 5. Most Helpful Supports for Completion Among Adult Learners from Special Populations

	Special Populations: Adult Learners (n=399)
More flexible class schedules (evenings, weekends, online)	57%
More financial aid opportunities	46%
Short-term, accelerated courses (e.g., 4-6 weeks)	42%
Programs offered fully online	40%
Internship opportunities	21%
Transportation assistance	15%
Student help desk access	13%
Childcare services during class hours	10%
Other	9%
More community-building activities (clubs, events, etc.)	8%

Note. Multiple options could be selected



Actually give me hope of doing something to help working adults be able to continue their education without having to either sacrifice their finances or sanity. Because I am at this point just depressed and feel like I won't even be able to get my degree... I feel that I'm just being ignored when I ask for more options for [students] who work full-time to have evening or online classes.

– Caregiver, First-Generation

In addition to offering courses that accommodate students' schedules, forum participants stressed that academic supports must be available at the same times and in the same formats for students to succeed. Survey data also show that academic support matters: students who used academic counseling or tutoring were nearly twice as likely to complete their education as those who did not.¹⁶ Survey results for special-population students mirror this pattern: 49% of completers used academic support services versus 31% of non-completers.

Forum participants recommended offering academic supports outside traditional business hours; supporting that recommendation, 74% of special-population respondents said they would use the library if hours were extended (Exhibit 6).

Exhibit 6. Likelihood of Special-Population Students Using Services Outside of Business Hours

	% Likely / Very Likely Would Use Service
Library access (book rental, computer lab, study space)	74%
Academic support (e.g., academic counseling, tutoring)	71%
Financial aid services	71%
Admission & records	67%
Career center services (career counseling, internships, job search help)	65%
Health services (physical or mental health support)	54%
Community-building activities (e.g., student clubs, athletics)	43%
Services specialized for certain groups (e.g., LGBTQIA+, veterans, individuals with disabilities)	34%

¹⁶ "San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges' Adult Learner Study," San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence, November 2025, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2025/11/san-diego-imperial-community-colleges-adult-learner-study-insights-to-strengthen-practices-and-policies.



I work full-time so I usually couldn't attend the community [college] events that were held on weekdays. I appreciated that there were some early morning and some evening classes, but I think there could have been more.

– Person with a Physical or Mental Disability, Non-Completer



In summary, similar to prior studies,¹⁷ forum participants suggested that the colleges offer a mix of expanded evening/weekend offerings, short-term and asynchronous options, and integrated support services to improve success for special populations.



[The college] allowed me to complete credits on my own time, even with full time employment and children...Thanks to the flexibility of the schedule, availability of classes, and support from staff, I was able to steadily complete my transfer courses so I could go on to complete a four-year program...



– English-Language Learner

Reflection Questions

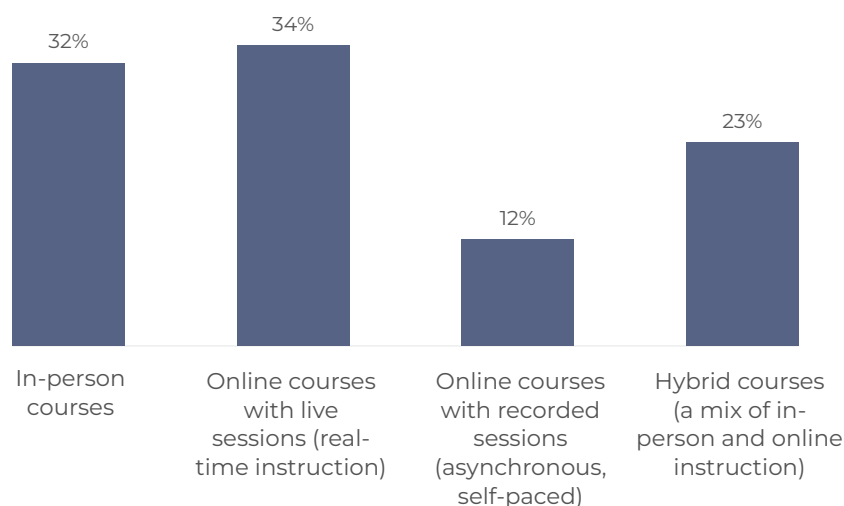
- How can the colleges expand flexible scheduling (evening, weekend, rolling enrollment) to meet students' needs without compromising academic integrity or overburdening faculty?
- Which key courses (introductory, gateway, and transfer-required) are currently not offered outside regular business hours? How often are colleges reviewing when these courses are offered?
- When key courses are offered during regular business hours, who tends to enroll and complete them? Do enrollment and completion patterns show representation gaps?
- Are tutoring, advising, and library services scheduled to match when evening/weekend students attend classes and study? If so, how aware are students of these services?

¹⁷ "Black Student Equity: Overcoming Barriers and Providing Support," San Diego & Imperial COE, May 2023, accessed December 1, 2025, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2023/05/black-student-equity.

3) Varied learning modalities with high-quality instruction and digital support

In addition to flexible scheduling and expanded course offerings, community-forum participants urged colleges to offer a range of course modalities with quality instruction. Survey results showed preferences split across in-person, recorded-online, live-online, and hybrid formats—no single option captured a majority—underscoring that instruction must be flexible and that no single modality fits all students (Exhibit 7).¹⁸

Exhibit 7. Preferred Course Format by Students from Special Populations, n=405



Forum participants emphasized that institutions should be intentional about which courses are offered online, acknowledging that not every course is well-suited for online delivery. They also recognized the need to address students' access to devices, campus technology, and reliable internet. For example, at Palomar CCD, a forum attendee described a partnership with the San Diego Futures Foundation that provides grants and low-cost computer equipment to students—an effective model for improving technology access.¹⁹ Participants also highlighted the library as a critical technology access point and recommended expanding hours and promoting library resources.

“ I was able to complete a certificate program through the Yellowbrick/ Parsons partnership while attending online courses at Mesa College. It just reaffirms that I am better off doing solo online course programs... ”

– Person with Disability, Formerly Incarcerated

¹⁸ “San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges' Adult Learner Study,” San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence, November 2025, coeccc.net/san-diego-imperial/2025/11/san-diego-imperial-community-colleges-adult-learner-study-insights-to-strengthen-practices-and-policies.

¹⁹ San Diego Futures Foundation (SDFF), accessed December 1, 2025, sdfutures.org.

“ *The classes I need/want were not being offered in person (the colleges only offered them online). After taking one of these classes online, I realized this is not a good way to learn this material...* ”

- *First-Generation, Single Parent*

Artificial intelligence (AI) repeatedly surfaced in forum discussions as a force reshaping both instruction and the labor market. Participants called AI literacy an essential competency for students and educators across fields and recommended targeted professional development to support responsible AI use in teaching and learning. These recommendations align with statewide initiatives such as the Chancellor's Office's *AI Professional Development and Learning Opportunities*²⁰ and its guidance report, *Generative AI and the Future of Teaching and Learning*²¹. Forum participants also emphasized that strong instructional practice matters regardless of modality: well-designed courses and engaging instructors make the difference in online and hybrid settings. As one first-generation student put it, “*The person providing the online course was not very good at presenting. All they did was talk about the material. I got sick of just listening, where I could have just read the material in my own time.*”

In summary, colleges should match delivery mode to course purpose (not all courses are suited for online delivery), invest in instructional design and faculty development, and provide technology access and basic digital/AI literacy as preconditions for equitable participation in varied modalities.

Reflection Questions

- What professional-development or instructional-design supports do faculty need to deliver high-quality online, hybrid, and asynchronous formats?
- How can data on course modality preferences, success outcomes, and service utilization be used more intentionally to guide scheduling and program design?
- What barriers related to technology access (devices, internet, digital literacy) limit students' ability to succeed in online courses, and how are these being addressed?
- How are colleges leveraging partnerships with CBOs, or other partners, to expand access to digital resources?
- How are colleges preparing faculty and staff to use AI responsibly and effectively in teaching, learning, and student support? How are AI-related skills being embedded into coursework to ensure students are prepared for workforce expectations, regardless of modality?

²⁰ “AI Professional Development and Learning Opportunities,” California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, accessed December 26, 2025, cocco.edu/About-Us/GenAI-and-the-future-of-learning/AIPD.

²¹ “Generative AI and the Future of Teaching and Learning,” California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, July 2024, accessed December 26, 2025, cocco.edu/-/media/CCCO-Website/docs/report/generative-ai-and-the-future-of-teaching-and-learning-7-17-24-2-ally.pdf.

4) Work-based learning opportunities and access to programs that lead to priority jobs

Forum participants and survey respondents emphasized three strategies to strengthen employment outcomes for students from special populations: 1) increase students' awareness of high-wage, high-demand careers and their programs; 2) strengthen job readiness with career services support; and 3) formalize employer partnerships and expand work-based learning (WBL) opportunities. These priorities align with prior CRNAs^{22,23,24} and regional student surveys.^{25,26,27}

Increase visibility and access of priority jobs and programs: Students from special populations and community forum participants reported limited awareness of high-demand, high-wage careers and the CTE/CE programs that lead to them; as a result, some students may self-select out of promising pathways. The San Diego & Imperial COE's *Priority Jobs & Programs* analyses^{28,29} identify approximately 50 priority occupations each year and their related community-college programs, giving colleges a clear starting point to target outreach, career exploration, and program alignment. These lists can also help colleges prioritize programs with the greatest potential for upward mobility and identify where scheduling and modality flexibility may be needed to increase access.

Forum participants found the priority lists useful, but noted important gaps and local nuances. For example, Grossmont CCD stakeholders reported high demand and waitlists for health programs; Palomar CCD attendees flagged similar bottlenecks in construction/trades and education pathways. Participants recommended strategies such as expanded dual enrollment, targeted outreach to underrepresented students, and increased capacity for waitlisted programs to reduce barriers to entry.

Support job readiness with career services support: Quantitative results show a positive relationship between using career services and employment outcomes: students who used career services were significantly more likely than those who did not to secure jobs closely related to their field of study (57% vs. 39%).³⁰ Yet, only 29% of students from special populations reported using career services.³¹ To close that gap, colleges should expand career services in ways that meet adult learners' schedules and needs (virtual advising, evening hours, embedded career modules in courses), and ensure they are actively promoting services to special populations.

22 "Perkins V Local Comprehensive Needs Assessment," San Diego & Imperial COE, April 2020, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2026/01/perkins-v-local-comprehensive-needs-assessment.

23 "Perkins V Comprehensive Regional Needs Assessment (CRNA)," San Diego & Imperial COE, February 2022, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2022/11/perkins-v-comprehensive-regional-needs-assessment.

24 "Perkins V Comprehensive Regional Needs Assessment (CRNA)," San Diego & Imperial COE, November 2023 (2024), coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2026/01/perkins-v-comprehensive-regional-needs-assessment-3.

25 "Student Support Services Experiences Study," San Diego & Imperial COE, May 2024, accessed October 1, 2025, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2024/05/student-support-services-experiences-study.

26 "Black Student Equity: Overcoming Barriers and Providing Support," San Diego & Imperial COE, May 2023, accessed December 1, 2025, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2023/05/black-student-equity.

27 "San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges' Adult Learner Study," San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence, November 2025, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2025/11/san-diego-imperial-community-colleges-adult-learner-study-insights-to-strengthen-practices-and-policies.

28 "Priority Jobs and Programs: Addressing Equity Gaps for a Diverse Workforce (San Diego County)," San Diego & Imperial COE, January 2025, accessed October 1, 2025, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2024/12/priority-jobs-and-programs-addressing-equity-gaps-for-a-diverse-workforce.

29 "Priority Jobs and Programs: Addressing Equity Gaps for a Diverse Workforce (Imperial County)," San Diego & Imperial COE, January 2025, accessed October 1, 2025, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2025/03/priority-jobs-and-programs-addressing-equity-gaps-for-a-diverse-workforce-imperial-county.

30 Statistically significant ($p < .05$), *Student Support Experiences Study*

31 Data extracted from students who identified as a "special population" from the *Student Support Experiences Study*.



[It was helpful that the college's] career services had unconventional hours for even part-time workers.

– Person with Physical or Mental Disability



Formalize employer partnerships and expand work-based learning: Employers highlighted gaps between classroom instruction and workplace skills. Participants recommended creating sustained feedback loops and formal agreements (e.g., MOUs) to keep curriculum aligned with rapidly changing labor-market demands—particularly technology-driven shifts such as AI. They also urged consistent, scalable WBL opportunities—apprenticeships,³² internships, and paid placements—since WBL is associated with higher course success rates.³³ Regional initiatives such as Advancing San Diego^{34,35} offer models for promising educator-employer partnerships; colleges should adopt similar long-term arrangements so relationships endure beyond individual grants.

Reflection Questions

- How are students from special populations currently learning about high-demand, high-wage careers and priority programs? Where are gaps in awareness most evident?
- How do colleges ensure that programs leading to priority jobs are accessible to students from special populations? Are these students equitably represented across priority programs, or are they concentrated in only a few fields that accommodate their schedules?
- At what points in the student journey do colleges check in with students from special populations about careers (orientation, mid-term, exit)? How might these touchpoints be expanded or better coordinated?
- How are employer partnerships structured and sustained? Which partnerships are formalized (MOUs, paid internships, apprenticeship agreements), and where are stronger feedback loops needed to keep curriculum aligned to employer needs?
- Where can WBL (internships, apprenticeships, paid placements) be scaled to support entry into high-wage occupations? What regional intermediaries or initiatives can the college leverage to build and sustain those placements?

³² "Building Apprenticeship Capacity in San Diego & Imperial Counties," San Diego & Imperial COE, January 2025. coeccc.net/san-diego-imperial/2025/02/building-apprenticeship-capacity.

³³ "Success rate" indicates the percentage of students who complete a course with a passing grade. "Work-Based Learning Highlights." San Diego Community College District. July 2025. sdccd.edu/docs/ISPT/workforce/docs/SDCCD2024%E2%80%9325WBLHighlights.pdf.

³⁴ careered.org/industrypartners/advancing-san-diego-connected-communities-driving-student-and-employer-success.

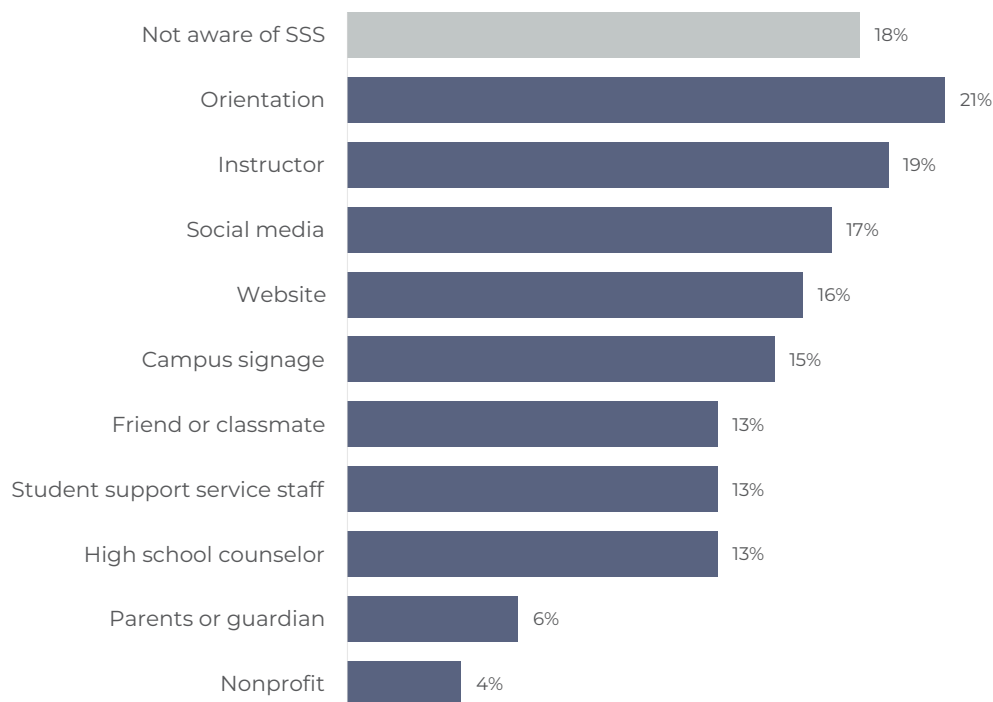
³⁵ sandiegobusiness.org/about-edc/our-initiatives/advancing-san-diego.

5) A caring campus with high-touch guidance and culturally inclusive, trauma-informed practices

Community forum participants and partners urged colleges to continually develop a “caring campus” that pairs proactive, high-touch guidance (e.g., success coaches, case managers, centralized points of contact) with institution-wide practices that are culturally responsive and trauma-informed.^{36,37}

Quantitative findings showed that students most often learned about support services through orientation, instructors, and social media, with one in five identifying orientation as their primary source (Exhibit 8).³⁸ While these channels play an important role, institutions should adopt active, ongoing communication strategies to ensure support services are visible throughout students' academic journeys, rather than relying on singular touchpoints.^{39,40}

Exhibit 8. How Special Populations Learned About Student Support Services, n=112



Across community forums, attendees stressed that colleges cannot expect students facing life challenges or crises to remember what supports exist or how to access them when they need help. Housing instability, food insecurity, caregiving, immigration status, violence, substance use, and similar disruptions frequently interrupt academic persistence. Trauma-informed practice means recognizing

³⁶ “Institutional Change for Adult Learner Success,” American Institutes for Research, June 2025, accessed January 1, 2026, air.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/AIR-Adult-Learner-Institutional-Change-Report-June-2025.pdf.

³⁷ “Student Support Services Experiences Study,” San Diego & Imperial COE, May 2024, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2024/05/student-support-services-experiences-study.

³⁸ “Student Support Services Experiences Study,” San Diego & Imperial COE, May 2024, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2024/05/student-support-services-experiences-study.

³⁹ “Perkins V Comprehensive Regional Needs Assessment,” San Diego & Imperial COE, November 2023, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2026/01/perkins-v-comprehensive-regional-needs-assessment-3.

⁴⁰ “San Diego & Imperial Community Colleges' Adult Learner Study,” San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence, November 2025, coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2025/11/san-diego-imperial-community-colleges-adult-learner-study-insights-to-strengthen-practices-and-policies.

trauma, integrating that knowledge into policy and pedagogy, and avoiding re-traumatization.

Forum participants recommended three concrete actions: 1) provide professional development for faculty and staff to recognize and respond to trauma; 2) create short, mandatory orientation modules on how to navigate college and its support systems for all incoming students (not only those who self-identify as special populations); and 3) strengthen cross-unit coordination so counselors and instructors share information and agreed accommodations.

Reflection Questions

- Which professional-development programs are currently available to faculty, staff, and administrators on trauma-informed and culturally responsive practice? How many employees complete them each year, and how is participation tracked?
- Do colleges include a required “introduction to college life and support services” module for new students? If not, how can colleges develop one that is brief and universally required?
- How do counselors and instructors communicate regarding shared students? Is there a standard process for documenting agreed accommodations and following up?
- What centralized, high-touch navigation roles (e.g., success coaches, case managers) exist, and do their caseloads and scope allow them to resolve complex, non-academic barriers? If gaps exist, where should capacity be added?
- Which community-based partners provide trauma-informed services and supports? Are formal MOUs in place to ensure continuity when funding cycles end? If not, how can colleges remove barriers to formalizing those partnerships?

Closing Note

The findings above summarize persistent challenges and recommendations shared by students, community partners, and employers across the San Diego & Imperial region. This CRNA is intended as a diagnostic and discussion tool: use the reflection questions embedded throughout the report to structure cross-functional conversations and co-design locally appropriate responses with community partners. The CRNA does not prescribe solutions; it provides insights to help colleges identify where system changes may be needed. Colleges should document those discussions in their CLNAs, pilot solutions to address these needs, and track short-term indicators (e.g., service usage during extended hours, enrollment in priority programs) to monitor whether changes reduce barriers for special populations.

Appendix A: Methodology

The Perkins V Comprehensive Regional Needs Assessment (CRNA) is an iterative, mixed-methods process built on input from regional partners and community members. The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) developed the CRNA to help the region's community colleges complete their Comprehensive Local Needs Assessments (CLNAs), a required step to receive Perkins V funding. Perkins V requires expanded stakeholder consultations (SEC. 134(c)),⁴¹ a process that—when done independently by each college—demands substantial staff time, coordination, and resources. Although institutions have flexibility on how and when to consult (SEC. 134(e)(1)), colleges submit CLNAs on a two-year cycle. To meet that timeline efficiently, the COE collects community data across the two-year cycle, maximizing resources and avoiding duplicated effort.

Leveraging Other Grants with Overlapping Stakeholders

Where possible, the COE aligns CRNA data collection with other grants' requirements to maximize reach and minimize burden on partners. In 2024, the COE's California Jobs First (CJF) grant included community forums to gather information about the needs of specific stakeholder groups; the COE used those CJF forums to collect qualitative data relevant to the CRNA. In 2025, the COE held community forums across the San Diego & Imperial region to assess the needs of the Perkins V stakeholder groups. Exhibit A-1 lists the stakeholder groups the COE targeted for community forums for each grant. Overlapping stakeholders for both grants include workforce development boards, economic development agencies, and community-based organizations, to name a few.

Exhibit A-1. Required Stakeholders to Consult by Grant

California Jobs First (2024)	Perkins (2025)
Youth	CTE programs at the secondary and postsecondary levels
Farmworkers	State or local workforce development boards
LGBTQIA+	A range of local businesses and industries
Labor organizations	Parents and students
Worker centers	Agencies serving at-risk, homeless and out-of-school youth
Philanthropic organizations	Indian Tribes or Tribal organizations, where applicable
Native American tribes	
Education and training providers	
Workforce development boards	

⁴¹ Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act, Pub. L. No. 115-224, § 134(e)(1) (2018) (codified at 20 U.S.C. § 2354(e)(1)), [congress.gov/115/plaws/publ224/PLAW-115publ224.pdf](https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ224/PLAW-115publ224.pdf).

California Jobs First (2024)	Perkins (2025)
Environmental justice organizations	Special populations ⁴²
Employers, businesses and industry associations	
Economic development agencies	
Government agencies	
Disinvested communities	

2024 Community Forums

Between April and June 2024, the COE held 15 planning meetings with CJF stakeholder representatives and then presented research at 23 community forums (Exhibit A-2). Forum facilitators used a standardized set of reflection questions to elicit reactions and capture the lived experiences that lagged public data do not show. Exhibits A-3 and A-4 list the meeting dates and sectors. Notes from planning meetings and stakeholder consultations are available in Appendix B: Meeting Notes.

California Jobs First Regional Meetings, 2024

Exhibit A-2. Summary of California Jobs First Meetings, 2024

Total Planning Meetings	Total Presentations/Meetings with Sectors
15	23

Exhibit A-3. List of Meeting Dates for Planning Meetings

Sector	Meeting Date
Youth	April 3, 2024
Farmworkers	April 4, 2024
Grassroots, CBOs, Community Organizers, Community Members	April 11, 2024
LGBTQIA+	April 11, 2024
Labor Organizations	April 15, 2024
Worker Centers	April 23, 2024
Philanthropic Organizations	April 23, 2024
CA Native American Tribes Tables	April 23, 2024

⁴² Individuals who are living with disabilities; from economically disadvantaged families; preparing for nontraditional career fields; single parents (including pregnant women); out-of-workforce individuals; experiencing homelessness; current or former foster youth; children of active-duty military parents; facing other barriers to educational achievement (e.g., language barriers).

Sector	Meeting Date
Education & Training Providers	April 25, 2024
Workforce Entities	April 25, 2024
Environmental Justice	April 29, 2024
Employers, Businesses, Business Associations	May 2, 2024
Economic Development Agencies & Workforce Entities	May 10, 2024
Disinvested Communities	May 21, 2024
Government Agencies	May 29, 2024

Exhibit A-4. List of Meeting Dates for Presentations/Meetings

Sector	Meeting Date
Farmworkers - Imperial County	April 17, 2024
LGBTQIA+ - Imperial County	April 27, 2024
Government Agencies - San Diego County	April 29, 2024
Labor Organizations - Imperial County	May 2, 2024
Native American Tribes - San Diego County	May 7, 2024
Labor Organizations - San Diego County	May 10, 2024
Workforce & Economic Development Agencies - Imperial County	May 14, 2024
Education & Training - San Diego County	May 14, 2024
Youth Sector - Imperial County	May 18, 2024
Grassroots, Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Community Organizers and Members - San Diego County	May 20, 2024
Philanthropic Organizations - Imperial County	May 21, 2024
Workforce Development - San Diego County	May 22, 2024
Environmental Justice Organizations - San Diego County	May 22, 2024
CBOs, Community Organizers and Members - Imperial County	May 24, 2024
Workforce Entities, Economic Development, & Employers - Imperial County	May 28, 2024
Farmworkers - San Diego County	May 28, 2024
Disinvested Communities - San Diego County	May 28, 2024

Sector	Meeting Date
Disinvested Communities - Imperial County	May 28, 2024
Environmental Justice Organizations - Imperial County	May 30, 2024
Worker Centers - San Diego County	May 30, 2024
Government Agencies - Imperial County	May 31, 2024
Education & Training Providers - Imperial County	May 31, 2024
Philanthropic Organizations - San Diego County	June 10, 2024

2025 Community Forums

In 2025, the COE completed community college district profiles⁴³ and conducted seven community forums across the San Diego & Imperial region between July and November (Exhibit A-5 and A-6). These forums had more than 240 participants who provided feedback on the data and discussed the needs of special populations, which the COE team compiled into qualitative data for the CRNA.

At each forum, the COE presented public data sources (for example, U.S. Census Bureau and California Employment Development Department figures), explained the limitations of lagged data, and asked participants to compare the data against current local realities. Exhibit A-7 shows a general agenda used across forum discussions. Breakout discussions used consistent prompts, including:

- » What is your reaction to the data? Did anything surprise you or confirm expectations?
- » How might colleges use this data to better support special populations and adult learners?
- » Do you agree with the top jobs identified for the region, and which occupations are difficult to fill?
- » Where do you see alignment or gaps between college programs and local workforce demand?
- » What emerging changes should colleges anticipate to keep students work-ready?

⁴³ "San Diego & Imperial Region District Profiles: Reports & Dashboards," San Diego & Imperial COE, September 2025, coecc.net/collection/san-diego-imperial-region-district-profiles-reports-dashboards.

San Diego & Imperial Community Forums, 2025

Exhibit A-5. Summary of San Diego & Imperial Region Community Forums, 2025

Total Presentations/Meetings
7

Exhibit A-6. List of Meeting Dates for San Diego & Imperial Region Community Forums

Community College District (CCD)	Meeting Date
MiraCosta CCD - San Diego County	July 30, 2025
San Diego CCD - San Diego County	August 27, 2025
Imperial CCD - Imperial County	August 28, 2025
Palomar CCD - San Diego County	September 11, 2025
Southwestern CCD - San Diego County	September 24, 2025
Grossmont-Cuyamaca CCD - San Diego County	November 7, 2025
Grossmont-Cuyamaca CCD - San Diego County	November 13, 2025

Exhibit A-7. Agenda for Community Forums

Activities	Estimated Time
Check-In, Breakfast, Networking	30 minutes
Introduction and Welcome	10 minutes
Overview of Perkins V and District Profile Presentation / (Q&A Session)	25 minutes
Discussion and Recommendations	40 minutes
Large Group Report Out and Closing	10 minutes

Exhibit A-8. Community Forum Flyers

YOUR VOICE MATTERS: JOIN THE GROSSMONT COLLEGE CAREER EDUCATION COMMUNITY FORUM
 Help shape a stronger future for our region through shared insight and open conversation.
 The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) in partnership with Grossmont College invites community partners to a special forum—a guided conversation to explore labor market and demographic trends, challenges, and opportunities in our region.
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2025
8:30-10:00 AM
GRIFFIN GATE BUILDING 60
 Grossmont College
 8800 Grossmont College Drive
 El Cerrito, CA 92525

Why Attend?
 • Share your insight
 • Influence regional education and funding strategies
 • Connect with other community leaders

Make your voice count. Be part of the conversation.

RSVP BY NOVEMBER 7, 2025

YOUR VOICE MATTERS: JOIN THE CUYAMACA COLLEGE CAREER EDUCATION COMMUNITY FORUM
 Help shape a stronger future for our region through shared insight and open conversation.
 The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) in partnership with Cuyamaca College invites community partners to a special forum—a guided conversation to explore labor market and demographic trends, challenges, and opportunities in our region.
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7, 2025
8:30-10:00 AM
BUILDING: STUDENT CENTER, I-209
 Cuyamaca College
 900 Avenida San Diego Highway
 El Cerrito, California 92525

Why Attend?
 • Share your insight
 • Influence regional education and funding strategies
 • Connect with other community leaders

Make your voice count. Be part of the conversation.

RSVP BY OCTOBER 31, 2025

YOUR VOICE MATTERS: JOIN THE IMPERIAL VALLEY COLLEGE DISTRICT CAREER EDUCATION COMMUNITY FORUM
 Help shape a stronger future for our region through shared insight and open conversation.
 The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) in partnership with Imperial Valley College invites community partners to a special forum—a guided conversation to explore labor market and demographic trends, challenges, and opportunities in our region.
THURSDAY, AUGUST 28, 2025
8:00-10:30 AM
ROOM #2734
 Imperial Valley College
 390 E. Aten Rd.
 Imperial, CA 92251

Why Attend?
 • Share your insight
 • Influence regional education and funding strategies
 • Connect with other community leaders

Make your voice count. Be part of the conversation.

RSVP BY AUGUST 23, 2025

YOUR VOICE MATTERS: JOIN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT CAREER EDUCATION COMMUNITY FORUM
 Help shape a stronger future for our region through shared insight and open conversation.
 The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) in partnership with the San Diego Community College District invites community partners to a special forum—a guided conversation to explore labor market and demographic trends, challenges, and opportunities in our region.
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 27, 2025
9:00-10:30 AM
NORTH CITY CAMPUS
MULTIPURPOSE ROOM 101-102
 San Diego College of Continuing Education
 8316 Ave. Date
 San Diego, CA 92123

Why Attend?
 • Share your insight
 • Influence regional education and funding strategies
 • Connect with other community leaders

Make your voice count. Be part of the conversation.

RSVP BY AUGUST 20, 2025

YOUR VOICE MATTERS: JOIN THE SOUTHWESTERN COLLEGE CAREER EDUCATION COMMUNITY FORUM
 Help shape a stronger future for our region through shared insight and open conversation.
 The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) in partnership with Southwestern College invites community partners to a special forum—a guided conversation to explore labor market and demographic trends, challenges, and opportunities in our region.
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2025
8:00-9:30 AM
BOTANICAL GARDEN AUDITORIUM
BUILDING 42-101
 Southwestern College
 900 Chapin Valley Rd.
 Chula Vista, CA 91908

Why Attend?
 • Share your insight
 • Influence regional education and funding strategies
 • Connect with other community leaders

Make your voice count. Be part of the conversation.

RSVP BY SEPTEMBER 19, 2025

YOUR VOICE MATTERS: JOIN THE PALOMAR COLLEGE CAREER EDUCATION COMMUNITY FORUM
 Help shape a stronger future for our region through shared insight and open conversation.
 The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) in partnership with Palomar College invites community partners to a special forum—a guided conversation to explore labor market and demographic trends, challenges, and opportunities in our region.
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2025
8:00-8:30 A.M.
LIBRARY/LEARNING RESOURCES CENTER - LRC 438
 Palomar College
 1140 W. Mission Road
 San Marcos, CA 92069

Why Attend?
 • Share your insight
 • Influence regional education and funding strategies
 • Connect with other community leaders

Make your voice count. Be part of the conversation.

RSVP BY SEPTEMBER 5, 2025

YOUR VOICE MATTERS: JOIN THE MIRACOSTA COLLEGE CAREER EDUCATION COMMUNITY FORUM
 Help shape a stronger future for our region through shared insight and open conversation.
 The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) in partnership with Miracosta College invites community partners to a special forum—a guided conversation to explore labor market and demographic trends, challenges, and opportunities in our region.
WEDNESDAY, JULY 30, 2025
8:00 AM-9:30 AM
JOHN MACDONALD BOARD ROOM OC1068
 Miracosta College
 1 Bonar Rd.
 Oceanside, CA 92058

Why Attend?
 • Share your insight
 • Influence regional education and funding strategies
 • Connect with other community leaders

Make your voice count. Be part of the conversation.

RSVP BY JULY 16, 2025

Producing CLNA-Ready Evidence

The COE conducted these forums to fulfill the expanded consultation requirement under Perkins V while reducing duplication across the region. Rather than requiring each of the region’s colleges to convene identical stakeholder sessions, the COE coordinated a regional approach and shared consistent data briefs across forums. The qualitative input collected in 2024 and 2025 serves as the consultation evidence that colleges can use in their CLNAs.

Appendix B: Meeting Notes

California Jobs First Regional Meetings, 2024

Farmworkers

Organizations:

- » Comité Cívico del Valle
- » Policy & Innovation Center
- » San Diego & Imperial Counties Labor Council
- » San Diego State University
- » Sure Helpline Center
- » Universidad Popular

[Meeting/Presentation - Imperial County \(April 17, 2024\)](#)

Workplace discrimination and barriers

Farmworkers reported widespread discrimination based on sex, age, language proficiency, and immigration status, which directly affects hiring, job assignments, and daily treatment. Women are routinely restricted to lower-paid packing roles, while men are allowed access to all field jobs, and older workers are often denied employment or subjected to verbal abuse due to productivity expectations. Farmworkers with limited English proficiency experience fewer job opportunities, reinforcing inequities tied to language access.

Wages and working conditions are notable concerns

Participants highlighted stark disparities between local farmworkers and H-2A temporary agricultural workers, who receive employer-provided housing, meals, and mandated breaks—supports not extended to other workers. These differences contribute to unrealistic productivity expectations and verbal mistreatment of local farmworkers. Additional concerns included unpaid travel time to distant fields, requirements to provide personal tools as a condition of employment, lack of adequate sanitation facilities, insufficient meal and rest breaks, and wages that do not reflect work demands.

Limited access to healthcare and worker protections serve as barriers

Access to healthcare was identified as a major barrier, driven by the absence of employer-provided insurance and significant language, technology, and knowledge barriers to enrolling in programs such as Medi-Cal. Farmworkers described being denied permission to seek medical care after workplace injuries, absorbing ambulance and treatment costs, and not being reimbursed for medically documented leave. Some reported retaliation or termination after filing workers' compensation claims, underscoring the need for stronger worker protections and legal support.

Housing instability, lack of childcare, and others barriers constrain economic mobility

Housing instability, lack of childcare, and limited access to administrative support were identified as

interconnected barriers to employment, benefits, and long-term mobility. Without stable housing or a mailing address, many workers are unable to obtain identification required for jobs and services. Farmworkers emphasized the need for assistance completing health insurance and job applications, legal counseling for wrongful termination, recognition of prior experience—particularly for women—and access to job training, scholarships, and education pathways for themselves and their children.

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (May 28, 2024)

Transportation and physical access serve as barriers

Participants consistently described transportation as a fundamental barrier to daily life, education, healthcare, and employment, noting long wait times, limited routes, inaccessible services for people with disabilities, and unsafe conditions during emergencies such as fires. The lack of affordable, reliable public transit—especially for women, older adults, agricultural workers, and people with disabilities—was framed as the primary obstacle preventing residents from accessing opportunities, with participants emphasizing that mobility must come before education.

Rising living costs and the impact on low-income workers

Participants expressed deep concern about the widening gap between wages and the rising cost of living, particularly for agricultural and service workers whose pay has not kept pace with housing, food, transportation, and utilities. While wage increases were acknowledged, many noted that inflation quickly erodes their impact, leaving low-income workers more vulnerable, increasing homelessness, and forcing families to relocate or commute long distances. Agricultural producers also described structural pressures—including water costs, distribution practices, and market dynamics—that limit their ability to raise wages without increasing food prices.

Limited access to local, affordable education and training

Education was viewed as essential but increasingly inaccessible due to distance, transportation barriers, student debt, and limited local options beyond high school. Participants emphasized the need for nearby vocational and technical education, English and computer literacy classes, and pathways into skilled trades and emerging industries, noting that even entry-level jobs now require formal credentials. Concerns were also raised about automation and technology replacing agricultural jobs, underscoring the urgency of preparing youth and workers with adaptable skills to remain competitive in a changing labor market.

Limited access to childcare and flexible training

Women—particularly single mothers—highlighted cultural barriers, childcare shortages, and lack of flexible training options as constraints on economic independence, while also sharing examples of entrepreneurship and peer-led support that build confidence and self-sufficiency. Participants stressed the importance of accessible childcare, community workshops, and home-based business training as pathways to empowerment, noting that investing in women strengthens families, reduces dependence, and builds resilient local economies.

Gaps in essential services and infrastructure undermine community well-being

Access to healthcare, safe housing, food, technology, and clean infrastructure was described as

increasingly limited, with clinic closures, long travel distances, and environmental health concerns—such as pesticide exposure—placing additional strain on families. Housing shortages and regulatory barriers, particularly for agricultural workers and residents near tribal lands, were cited as critical challenges, alongside unreliable internet and phone service that further isolate the community. Participants emphasized that without addressing these basic needs, long-term workforce and education strategies will remain out of reach for many residents.

LGBTQIA+

Organizations:

- » Imperial Valley Equity & Justice Coalition
- » San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center
- » San Diego State University
- » South Bay Community Services

Meeting/Presentation - Imperial County (April 27, 2024)

Access to basic needs, transportation, healthcare is needed

Community members identified key needs for 2024 related to affordability, health, transportation, workforce development, and environmental conditions. Rising gas costs, lack of affordable housing, and barriers to accessing healthcare and Medi-Cal were major concerns, particularly in smaller north-end communities that experience high need despite lower population and should be considered proportionally in funding decisions. Transportation gaps were emphasized, including the loss of bus service between El Centro and San Diego and limited regional transit options.

Understanding local priorities are key to identify hazards

Workforce priorities included technical training in truck mechanics, veterinary technology, solar, water, and environmental or natural trades. Environmental hazards such as blowing sand and construction-related dust linked to Salton Sea and irrigation projects were cited as contributors to asthma, with air filtration and cooling assistance suggested as potential supports. Participants also raised concerns about low wages and poor conditions for farmworkers, shortages of consistent healthcare providers, and unequal access to care, as well as the importance of accounting for cross-border ties with Mexicali in regional planning.

Government Agencies

Organizations:

- » City of Chula Vista
- » County of Imperial
- » County of San Diego
- » San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center
- » San Diego State University
- » Universidad Popular

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (April 29, 2024)

Making the planning process more open, transparent, and inclusive

Participants emphasized keeping sector membership open so more voices can participate and called for clearer explanations of how feedback and qualitative data are collected, analyzed, and incorporated. They also asked for greater transparency around data sources, timeframes, and limitations, along with broader representation in charts and analyses so the regional picture reflects all communities more accurately. Providing additional ways for the public to share input was seen as essential to building trust and strengthening the plan.

Clarifying the scope of the plan while strengthening its analysis of real-world barriers

Discussion highlighted the importance of clearly distinguishing between Part 1 as a baseline assessment and Part 2 as the stage for funding decisions, while still improving Part 1's depth. Participants recommended expanding analyses related to housing affordability, climate and environmental risks, and net-zero strategies—such as carbon offsets, land use tools, wildfire risk, water access, and a retiring workforce—to better reflect the challenges communities face and to ensure the plan is practical, grounded, and useful for future investment decisions.

Meeting/Presentation - Imperial County (May 31, 2024)

Cost of living pressures are outpacing wages

Participants consistently pointed to rising food, gas, electricity, housing, and childcare costs while wages remain flat or insufficient. Many households cannot support a family on a single income but also cannot afford childcare to enable dual earners. Seniors on fixed incomes are especially impacted by inflation and rising property taxes. These pressures contribute to housing insecurity, homelessness, and reluctance to pursue further education due to fear of debt.

Gaps in healthcare, mental health, and veteran services

There is a shortage of healthcare providers, specialists, hospital equipment, and acute and behavioral health facilities, resulting in long wait times or out-of-county travel for care. Veterans face significant travel barriers to access VA services. Substance abuse, mental health challenges, and food-related illnesses were repeatedly linked to socioeconomic stress and limited local treatment capacity.

Infrastructure, transportation, and access barriers limit economic opportunity

Transportation challenges—including border traffic, limited transit between towns, and rising fuel costs—make it difficult to access jobs, healthcare, education, and services. Limited higher education options, lack of children's programs and indoor recreation, inadequate EV infrastructure, and air pollution further constrain opportunity. Participants also noted that small businesses face regulatory and permitting barriers, and that rural and border communities often receive insufficient state and federal funding despite serving large seasonal and cross-border populations.

Labor Organizations

Organizations:

- » Building and Construction Trades Council
- » Progressive Labor Alliance
- » San Diego & Imperial Counties Labor Council
- » United Auto Workers
- » United Food and Commercial Workers Local 135

Meeting/Presentation - Imperial County (May 2, 2024)

Digital infrastructure as a prerequisite for workforce access and equity

Participants emphasized that lack of high-speed internet remains a fundamental barrier to workforce participation and public benefit, particularly in Imperial County. While temporary solutions such as free devices, tents, and cellular access exist, these were viewed as inadequate substitutes for stable home internet. Participants suggested advocating for investments that convert short-term connectivity efforts into permanent solutions—such as household routers or hotspots—so residents can reliably access training, job opportunities, apprenticeships, and essential services tied to emerging industries.

Clean energy development and workforce pipelines

Participants highlighted strong opportunities to build a regional clean-energy economy that aligns with net-zero goals while creating high-quality local jobs. However, many skilled workers currently travel outside the region due to limited local project development and contractor structures. There was broad support for expanding apprenticeships for workers with lower educational attainment, establishing community workforce agreements and project labor agreements, and explicitly addressing environmental impacts such as pollution from the Salton Sea.

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (May 10, 2024)

Cost of living pressures and access to essential services

Participants emphasized that housing affordability for working-class households, rising food costs, and transportation expenses are the most immediate pressures facing residents, particularly in rural areas where proximity to food outlets and healthcare is limited. Border congestion and federal enforcement were also cited as compounding local economic and environmental burdens by disrupting commutes and increasing pollution from idling vehicles.

Education, workforce access, and supports for working adults

Access to education was framed as constrained by economic realities, with rent taking priority over tuition and scheduling barriers limiting participation. Participants called for expanded night classes, stronger access to vocational training in Imperial County, and targeted academic support for apprenticeship entry points such as electrical trades. Questions were also raised about how seasonal and farmworkers can access training during off-seasons and whether entry-level government jobs and care-sector roles provide living wages.

Demand for childcare and senior care present challenges

Childcare, senior care, and home healthcare were identified as critical but undervalued sectors, characterized by declining availability, low state reimbursement rates, and wages that do not reflect the difficulty of the work. Participants suggested income-based vouchers for child and senior care and raised concerns about the broader labor ecosystem, including gig work instability under Prop 22, lack of wage protections, and outsourcing of low-wage jobs within high-paying industries' supply chains.

Environmental justice, climate resilience, and long-term community impacts

Environmental justice emerged as a cross-cutting concern, encompassing climate resilience after recent storms, pollution impacts at the border, and the environmental and cultural consequences of large-scale projects such as Lithium Valley and renewable energy developments affecting tribal lands. Participants also raised the need to consider animal welfare, food systems, and privatization trends—such as expanding charter schools—as part of a broader conversation about sustainability, public goods, and long-term community well-being.

CA Native American Tribes Tables

Organizations:

- » Indian Voices Newspaper
- » Quechan Tribe (Fort Yuma–Quechan Indian Tribe)
- » San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center
- » San Diego State University
- » Southern Border Coalition Community Economic Resilience Fund
- » Southern California Tribal Chairmen's Association
- » Tribal Energy and Climate Collaborative

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (May 7, 2024)

Respectful tribal engagement and minimizing extractive data practices

Tribal representatives emphasized survey fatigue and raised questions about the tangible benefits of participating in CA Jobs First. There was a clear preference for avoiding additional surveys and instead relying on existing needs assessments and community-validated inputs to ensure tribal perspectives are included without placing further burden on Tribal governments and organizations.

Clarifying the purpose and scope of Regional Plan Part 1 versus Part 2

It was emphasized that Regional Plan Part 1 is intended to serve as a foundational quantitative and qualitative analysis focused on advancing a net-zero economy, high-wage and high-demand jobs, and benefits for disinvested communities, rather than presenting recommendations. Actionable strategies and recommendations will be developed in Part 2 through a separate research process, ensuring clear expectations about how Tribal input will be used at each stage.

Elevating tribal-led initiatives and appropriate points of contact

Participants highlighted the importance of documenting existing and in-progress projects—particularly those led by Tribes—that align with CA Jobs First goals, so the Regional Plan reflects

ongoing tribal innovation and investment. Guidance was also provided on using appropriate and trusted directories, such as federal and state Tribal leadership listings, rather than outdated or overly broad contact lists, to support accurate and respectful outreach.

Economic Development Agencies & Workforce Entities

Organizations:

- » City Heights Community Development Corporation
- » City of Escondido
- » Imperial Valley Economic Development Corporation
- » Imperial Valley Wellness Foundation
- » San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center
- » San Diego Workforce Partnership

Meeting/Presentation - Imperial County (May 14, 2024)

Equity-centered regional planning and baseline assessment

Participants emphasized the importance of applying an equity lens across projects, recognizing the entire county as a disinvested community under the state. The Regional Plan Part 1 was understood as a foundational analysis—documenting economic well-being, cost of living, labor market conditions, and disparities—to establish a shared baseline that will inform future recommendations.

Coordination, funding alignment, and data visibility

There was interest in consolidating information on existing grants, initiatives, and projects into a single, accessible inventory to identify gaps, reduce silos, and improve collaboration. Participants noted that aligning multiple funding sources could maximize limited resources, but also acknowledged challenges related to data suppression in small or emerging industries and the need for improved public awareness and outreach around funding opportunities.

Structural barriers to economic growth and quality of life

The discussion highlighted interconnected barriers—including limited public transportation, aging infrastructure, high business operating costs, housing affordability, broadband access, environmental pollution, and health coverage—that constrain economic development and workforce participation. Participants stressed that these challenges vary by location within the county, while also recognizing opportunities to expand industry clusters and address environmental and infrastructure issues in ways that support long-term resilience and inclusive growth.

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (May 22, 2024)

Environmental justice as the foundation for economic development

Participants discussed the need to rethink economic development goals so they are not just about growth or new technology, but about fairness and who truly benefits. They emphasized that environmental justice means addressing long-standing power imbalances, avoiding displacement and gentrification, and making sure investments improve daily life for local residents. There was concern that projects labeled as “green” or “innovative” can still cause harm—such as pollution or

resource extraction—if equity is not built in from the beginning, especially in communities that have historically borne the environmental burden.

Community voices, Indigenous knowledge, and cross-border realities

Participants highlighted that community voices—especially Indigenous perspectives and traditional ecological knowledge—are often missing from planning conversations, even though they hold critical insight into land, water, and environmental stewardship. They also stressed that economic and environmental challenges do not stop at political borders. Issues such as pollution, water systems, housing pressures, and transportation affect communities on both sides of the border, reinforcing the need to consider mobility, public transportation access, and safe, legal pathways to work as part of a more just regional approach.

Aligning industry priorities with community needs and lived experiences

There was strong interest in reexamining how industry sectors are defined and prioritized to better reflect what communities actually need. Participants questioned technology-heavy industry lists and called for greater focus on areas like food systems, agriculture, community healthcare, clean energy, and small businesses. They emphasized that addressing pollution sources—such as pesticides, ports, military waste, sewage, plastics, and mining—must go hand in hand with workforce development. Clearer attention to fair hiring practices, inclusion across race and gender, and accessible pathways into green and nontraditional careers was seen as essential to ensuring that “high-road jobs” lead to real opportunity and long-term community benefit.

Education and Training Providers

Organizations:

- » Calexico Teachers Association
- » California State University San Marcos
- » San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center
- » San Diego State University

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (May 14, 2024)

Improving clarity and inclusion of lived realities

Participants raised several considerations for strengthening the Regional Plan analysis. Clarifications were requested on labor force participation definitions, including age ranges, inclusion of college students, and how institutionalization is treated. Transportation barriers should account not only for commute time but also car ownership costs and access to transit. Childcare affordability and uneven geographic availability were emphasized as barriers, and the need to more fully address the needs of immigrants, refugees, undocumented individuals, and people with disabilities, including learning disabilities.

Aligning workforce strategy with evolving labor markets and structural conditions

Participants recommended elevating immigration more prominently in the narrative, noting labor shortages filled by H-1 and H-2A workers and challenges undocumented students face accessing

education and internships. Additional suggestions included addressing wildfire-related environmental and health impacts, recognizing the region’s military and veteran population as an asset, examining gender equity in high-road jobs, and clarifying whether occupations such as specialized welding and degree-based career pathways qualify as high-road jobs. Finally, members encouraged incorporating AI into discussions of automation, acknowledging sector differences between San Diego and Imperial agriculture, and more explicitly identifying high housing costs as the primary driver of the regional cost-of-living crisis.

Meeting/Presentation - Imperial County (May 31, 2024)

Educational access, mobility, and attrition

Participants raised concerns about declining high school enrollment, high attrition that is not captured in official dropout metrics, and weak tracking of students—particularly migrant and cross-border populations—who move between schools or systems. English language learners face ongoing barriers due to low reclassification thresholds that reduce access to sustained language support, while postsecondary policies (such as limits on remedial coursework) create additional challenges for students transitioning to college. Limited public transportation further constrains attendance.

Environmental, health, and basic needs constraints on learning and work

Severe environmental conditions were identified as major barriers to health, attendance, and educational persistence. These challenges disproportionately affect students with asthma, families without reliable transportation, and communities lacking affordable childcare, highlighting how unmet basic needs undermine educational and workforce outcomes.

Workforce inequities, cross-border dynamics, and misalignment with regional economic needs

Participants described persistent underrepresentation of people of color and women in leadership and high-wage roles across sectors such as agriculture, education, and governance. While Imperial benefits from cross-border labor, entrepreneurship, and informal economic activity, housing costs, and congestion create structural strains. At the same time, the region faces a mismatch between workforce supply and demand leading to reliance on out-of-region or international workers.

Youth

Organizations:

- » A Reason to Survive
- » Imperial Valley Equity & Justice Coalition
- » San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center
- » South Bay Community Services

Meeting/Presentation - Imperial County (May 18, 2024)

Strategic use of CA Jobs First investments

Participants emphasized that Imperial County’s designation as “disinvested” positions it well for CA Jobs First funding, particularly with the region’s intentional expansion to include Youth, LGBTQIA+, and Farmworkers as priority sectors. They stressed the importance of using this report as an inventory

of existing grants and funded projects—especially those serving minors—to align efforts, elevate youth voice, and braid the \$14 million Catalyst funding with other sources for greater collective impact.

Workforce development and high-demand jobs

While participants expressed interest in health careers, nursing, and engineering (including aquatic development), they cautioned that access to “quality jobs” does not automatically translate into improved quality of life due to high housing costs, limited transportation, and insufficient infrastructure. They emphasized prioritizing high-demand jobs that combine living wages with safe working conditions, benefits, retirement security, and access to reliable transit, walkable communities, and amenities that support daily life.

Investments in local services, civic engagement, and capacity-building

Participants highlighted the need for investments that help expand local services, such as public transportation, walkable community design, parks and recreation, aquatic facilities, and affordable housing, in addition to workforce strategies. Youth and organizations also underscored the importance of strengthening youth civic engagement, peer advocacy, and culturally grounded supports, alongside building local capacity through grant writing and technical assistance to help Imperial Valley organizations secure and sustain the funding needed to advance these priorities.

Grassroots, CBOs, Community Organizers and Members

Organizations:

- » Best S.T.E.P. Forward
- » Black Lives Matter Imperial Valley
- » Imperial Valley Wellness Foundation
- » Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation
- » Mundo Gardens
- » Neighborhood House of Calexico, Inc.
- » Restoration Abbey
- » San Diego Green New Deal Alliance
- » San Diego State University
- » South Bay Community Services
- » Universidad Popular

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (May 20, 2024)

Equity and representation of marginalized voices is essential

Participants emphasized that equity must be explicitly centered throughout the process, noting gaps in African American representation among sector leadership, the absence of youth voices, and the lack of acknowledgment of historical and ongoing harms tied to racism, sexism, incarceration, environmental exposure, and disinvestment. There was strong concern that communities most affected by inequitable systems—particularly Black, Brown, undocumented, disabled, and formerly incarcerated populations—are often underrepresented or aggregated in ways that dilute their voices. Many stressed that the report should clearly name root causes, power structures, and intentional

policy decisions that produced current inequities, rather than treating them as neutral outcomes, and should outline how investments will actively repair harm rather than reinforce extractive patterns.

Access to basic needs, health, and environmental justice as foundational

Feedback consistently highlighted severe gaps in access to healthcare (including hospital and OBGYN clinic closures, lack of urgent care, maternal and mental health services), public transportation, childcare, housing, food, and functioning infrastructure, even for residents with insurance or employment. Participants stressed that environmental justice—air pollution, flooding, military and industrial contamination, water access, and emerging concerns such as microplastics—is inseparable from health outcomes, life expectancy, and community well-being, particularly in South San Diego and District 4. These challenges were framed as compounded barriers that limit workforce participation, educational attainment, and quality of life, especially for women, families, seniors, and people with disabilities.

Community-driven data, education, and investment aligned to long-term outcomes

Participants called for data and research to be used as tools for action, funding alignment, and long-term planning—not simply documentation—emphasizing the need for disaggregated data, inclusion of undocumented populations, and measures that reflect lived experience. There was broad support for rethinking education and workforce pathways to prioritize apprenticeships, vocational training, critical thinking, and transferable skills over traditional degree-only models, while addressing early literacy and educational inequities. Many urged a shift from competition to collaboration, greater inclusion of CBO expertise and community voices in program design, and clearer continuity between research phases to ensure findings translate into sustained investment and tangible improvements for communities.

[Meeting/Presentation - Imperial County \(May 24, 2024\)](#)

Resource extraction, displacement, and uneven benefits

Participants raised concerns that Imperial County continues to be targeted for industries centered on extraction of resources—such as lithium, mining, prisons—without sufficient safeguards. While new training programs are expanding access, participants noted that jobs are often filled by workers from outside the region, contributing to rising housing costs, displacement, and limited economic mobility for current residents.

Housing instability, homelessness, and unmet health needs

A sharp increase in homelessness, mental illness, addiction, and the lack of affordable housing was identified as a growing crisis. Participants highlighted gaps in healthcare infrastructure, including limited access to maternity wards, mental health facilities, and addiction services, forcing residents to seek care outside the county.

Equity gaps and targeted education and workforce strategies

Participants emphasized that nonprofits—particularly those serving unhoused individuals, youth, and people experiencing addiction—are underrepresented in planning and under-resourced, relying on unstable grant funding while facing space constraints. Concerns were raised about the absence of

targeted education and workforce strategies for Black and African American residents, the growing requirement for Spanish proficiency in jobs, and low voter participation, all of which were seen as barriers.

Philanthropic Organizations

Organizations:

- » Catalyst of San Diego & Imperial Counties
- » Imperial Valley Community Foundation
- » Imperial Valley Wellness Foundation
- » South Bay Community Services
- » United Way of Imperial County

Meeting/Presentation - Imperial County (May 21, 2024)

Leveraging public investment to advance environmental and climate justice

Participants noted recent funding opportunities relevant to environmental and climate justice. In addition, the Imperial Irrigation District recently launched a local grant focused on reducing heat impacts and beautifying communities through tree planting. Grants.gov was identified as a key resource for tracking and accessing funding opportunities.

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (June 10, 2024)

Refining the definition and application of priority jobs

Participants emphasized the need to contextualize high-road jobs within the broader equity, climate, and justice frameworks of CA Jobs First. This includes adding nuance to occupations such as law enforcement and ensuring workforce priorities meaningfully reflect impacts on disinvested communities. There was also strong interest in incorporating clearer, standardized definitions of “disinvested communities.”

Building a robust project inventory to support collaboration and funding

The Stakeholder Map was viewed as a critical tool for cataloging organizations, initiatives, and projects across San Diego and Imperial Counties—not just for documentation, but to actively enable cross-sector collaboration. Participants stressed that the inventory should prioritize projects aligned with CA Jobs First goals (net-zero economy, high-road jobs, and benefits to disinvested communities) and be structured to support future state and federal grant applications, rather than serving as an overly broad or unfocused list.

Strengthening cross-sector pathways and capacity for implementation

Participants highlighted the importance of sustained collaboration across education, workforce, health, philanthropy, and community-based organizations to advance CA Jobs First priorities. Examples included upskilling community health workers, integrating STEM career pathways early in education, and leveraging philanthropy-led initiatives already operating at scale. Capacity-building organizations and landscape analyses—particularly in behavioral health and compliance—were

identified as valuable additions.

Meeting/Presentation - Imperial County (May 30, 2024)

Centering Tribal sovereignty in environmental justice efforts

Participants emphasized that environmental justice must explicitly center Native and Indigenous peoples, recognizing tribal sovereignty, jurisdiction, and lived knowledge as foundational—not supplementary—to defining environmental harm and pathways to repair. They noted that Indigenous people are present across all sectors and that environmental justice in Imperial Valley cannot be addressed without directly acknowledging historical and ongoing injustices tied to land use, extraction, governance, and cross-border impacts that transcend political boundaries.

Health inequities driven by environmental exposure and limited access to care

Severe health impacts linked to pesticides, poor air and water quality, and cross-border pollution were identified as concerns affecting farmworkers, children, seniors, and the broader community. Participants described high rates of chronic and fatal illnesses, limited preventative screening, inadequate cancer and mental health services, and barriers to care due to cost, language, transportation, and provider shortages—often requiring travel outside the county for treatment.

Structural barriers to resources, mobility, and economic dignity

Environmental justice organizations highlighted systemic barriers that limit access to education, workforce training, healthcare, and basic needs, particularly for seniors, farmworkers, immigrants, Spanish speakers, and people with disabilities. These include language barriers at resource centers, restrictive education requirements (e.g., GED access), long and physically demanding workdays, food insecurity driven by limited healthy food options, insufficient disability payments, and lack of clear information about available services.

Environmental Justice

Organizations:

- » Climate Action Campaign
- » Comité Cívico del Valle
- » Imperial Valley Equity & Justice Coalition
- » San Diego 350
- » San Diego Food System Alliance
- » San Diego State University

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (May 22, 2024)

Reframing net-zero and high-road jobs through an environmental justice lens

Participants emphasized that net-zero and high-road job goals should be grounded in environmental justice principles, including power, governance, and historical harm. They cautioned against technocratic or growth-driven approaches that risk false solutions, and instead urged centering community benefit, equitable hiring, safe employment for undocumented workers, and recognition of Indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge.

Community investments and displacements

Strong concern was raised about large-scale projects and green investments leading to displacement, gentrification, and unequal local benefit—particularly in Imperial County and border communities. Participants highlighted the need to assess cross-border impacts related to housing, transportation, watersheds, food systems, militarization, and pollution, noting that disinvestment and extraction in Imperial County have ripple effects into neighboring regions such as Tijuana.

Environmental harms and industry accountability

Participants called for treatment of environmental impacts tied to industry, including lithium mining, agricultural runoff, pesticides, plastics and Styrofoam, sewage crises, port and Navy pollution, military waste, and cross-border runoff. They emphasized separating urban and agricultural impacts, naming toxic exposures explicitly.

Industry definitions, sector prioritization, and inclusive pathways

There was significant feedback on how industry clusters are defined, named, and prioritized, with concern that current lists over-emphasize technology while under-representing food systems, natural lands, community healthcare, arts, small businesses, and sustainable agriculture. Participants supported alternative sector frameworks used in other regions and encouraged collaboration across environmental justice, education, arts, and Indigenous sectors to shape industry pathways that are equitable, locally beneficial, and responsive to community needs.

Workforce Entities

Organizations:

- » Imperial Regional Alliance
- » Imperial Valley Economic Development Corporation
- » San Diego & Imperial Counties Labor Council
- » San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center
- » San Diego State University
- » San Diego Workforce Partnership

[Meeting/Presentation - Imperial County \(May 28, 2024\)](#)

Economic competitiveness and emerging industry clusters

Participants emphasized Imperial County's competitive advantages, including lower costs of doing business, proximity to major Southern California markets, and growing interest from new companies. There was strong interest in conducting a cluster analysis to better understand existing and emerging industries and to identify opportunities to retain more value locally.

Infrastructure, housing, and capacity constraints to growth

While economic interest is increasing, participants noted that infrastructure limitations—particularly drainage systems, municipal development timelines, housing supply, and disaster response capacity—pose challenges to sustaining growth. Insufficient housing development relative to job creation and limited local emergency funding were identified as risks to long-term resilience.

Workforce dynamics and AI technology

The discussion highlighted nontraditional workforce and recruitment practices, including reliance on word-of-mouth, social media, and rapid-response job fairs, reflecting local labor market realities not always captured in standard data sources. Participants also noted the growing role of automation and AI across sectors, with some jobs facing displacement while others evolve to emphasize human judgment and customer service.

Disinvested Communities

Organizations:

- » Adalem Consulting
- » Comité Cívico del Valle, Inc.
- » Imperial Valley Wellness Foundation
- » San Pasqual Band of Kumeyaay Indians
- » South Bay Community Services
- » Universidad Popular

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (May 28, 2024)

Transportation, traffic, and daily mobility are major barriers

Participants repeatedly described how long commutes, limited transit options, expensive gas, and lack of parking make it extremely difficult to get to work, school, childcare, or medical appointments. Even people with cars struggle due to traffic congestion and fuel costs, while buses and trolleys are infrequent or unavailable during early mornings or late nights. Poor lighting, unsafe intersections, and blocked streets further affect walking safety, emergency access, and quality of life—especially in dense neighborhoods and near schools.

Housing costs and development are not meeting community needs

Residents expressed deep frustration with rising rents, long waiting lists for “affordable” housing, and new developments that feel out of reach for long-time community members. Many noted that new housing projects often fail to account for parking, traffic, and neighborhood safety, creating tension and daily conflict among residents. There was also concern that people who have lived and worked in the community for years are being priced out, while new developments benefit outsiders rather than local families.

Lack of local services, classes, and safe spaces leaves families with few options

Participants emphasized the shortage of local classes, recreational programs, cultural spaces, and youth activities. Families described having to travel far for basic enrichment like dance, sports, or adult education—if those opportunities exist at all. The absence of community centers and after-school options leaves children with few safe places to go, increasing isolation, screen time, and exposure to unsafe street conditions.

Economic insecurity is driven by part-time work, low wages, and limited support

Many residents described working multiple part-time jobs without benefits, making it nearly impossible to afford housing or build stability. Small businesses also face challenges, including high fees, complex application processes, and limited access to grants—especially after the pandemic. Participants called for simpler, more accessible financial support for local entrepreneurs and fairer employment practices that provide full-time hours and benefits.

Community voices feel overlooked in planning and decision-making

Residents expressed a strong sense that decisions about housing, transportation, traffic, and development are made without meaningful community input. They questioned where tax dollars are going when services for children, safety, and infrastructure remain inadequate. Participants emphasized the importance of civic engagement—such as attending planning meetings—but also acknowledged how difficult participation can be when meetings are poorly attended, inaccessible, or feel disconnected from real outcomes.

Meeting/Presentation - Imperial County (May 28, 2024)

Gaps in local infrastructure limit opportunity and community retention

Participants highlighted the absence of arts-related jobs in high-wage occupation lists, limited access to higher education—especially for residents in the north end of the county—and a broader lack of entertainment, recreation, and cultural spaces. The shortage of parks, arts venues, recycling centers, and affordable after-school programs was seen as a barrier to supporting families, attracting young adults, and creating a more livable community. Even when programs or safe spaces exist, cost and distance often make them inaccessible to those who need them most.

Current investment frameworks do not adequately capture local concerns and risks

There was concern that economic development strategies and Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) assessments overstate certain “strengths” while overlooking environmental and infrastructure vulnerabilities, particularly around wastewater systems and resource extraction. Participants questioned whether large projects tied to environmental risk should be framed as strengths without deeper community dialogue. They also emphasized that funding based on population size—rather than need—leaves smaller, high-need communities underserved, and that the lack of locally controlled disaster preparedness and prevention funding weakens long-term resilience.

Worker Centers

Organizations:

- » San Diego Black Worker Center
- » San Diego & Imperial Counties Labor Council
- » San Diego Regional Policy & Innovation Center

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (May 30, 2024)

Inclusive data, visibility, and access to information

Participants emphasized that census- and tract-level data is not fully inclusive, as disinvested populations within gentrifying areas such as formerly incarcerated individuals, seniors working

provisionally, and people returning home after long prison terms are not captured. They stressed the need for more accessible, user-friendly ways to interact with data and planning processes, recognizing that many residents lack digital fluency or awareness of how to navigate available information and resources.

Workforce access, job quality, and re-entry barriers

There was strong support for expanding middle-class, unionized jobs with healthcare and pensions, including recognition of on-the-job training and apprenticeships as core workforce strategies. Participants highlighted persistent barriers for formerly incarcerated individuals—especially restrictions on federal worksites and unlawful hiring discrimination—as well as the need for transportation support tied to jobs, training, grants, and scholarships. Seniors re-entering or remaining in the workforce due to rising costs were also identified as a group needing targeted analysis and support.

Cost of living, basic needs, and equitable investments

Rising healthcare costs, housing affordability gaps, transportation access, and lack of healthy food options in underserved areas were cited as compounding pressures on working families and older adults. Participants called for stronger accountability in public investments, attention to emissions and environmental justice in impacted communities, and better alignment with net-zero and energy-efficiency initiatives—such as California Energy Commission programs—that can reduce household costs while creating accessible, community-based employment pathways.

San Diego & Imperial Community Forums, 2025

MiraCosta Community College District - Community Forum

Organizations:

- » Ace Parking, Inc.
- » ChildCare Careers
- » Children's Paradise
- » City of Carlsbad
- » Community Resource Center
- » Education to Career Network
- » Mano A Mano Foundation
- » Metropolitan Area Advisory Committee
- » MiraCosta College
- » San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence
- » San Diego County Public Authority
- » San Diego Regional Economic Development Corporation
- » San Diego Workforce Partnership
- » UDW Resource Center
- » University of California San Diego Center for Research and Evaluation
- » Vista Chamber of Commerce

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (July 30, 2025)

Refining data to better reflect working-age adults

Participants largely confirmed the overall patterns in the data but emphasized that ZIP code-level findings must be refined to more accurately reflect the working-age CTE population. Several groups questioned whether seniors—particularly those over 50—were skewing indicators related to disability, transportation access, and internet use, potentially overstating barriers among prospective students. Participants suggested restricting analyses to age groups more consistent with CTE enrollment (e.g., under 35 or working-age adults). While the concentration of need in Oceanside was widely acknowledged, stakeholders stressed the importance of pairing equity goals with precision so that outreach and investments are directed where they will have the greatest impact.

Access barriers, special populations, and targeted outreach

Across discussions, participants identified disability, lack of transportation, and limited internet access as the most prominent barriers in high-need ZIP codes, particularly in Oceanside. Veterans, parents, and households without reliable digital access were repeatedly cited as priority populations. Participants emphasized that data should be used to drive localized, relationship-based outreach, rather than broad messaging, with strong support for partnerships with libraries, community-based organizations, and K–12 districts. Suggested strategies included creating community internet access points, tailoring outreach to parents through dual enrollment and high school-specific offerings, and working through trusted intermediaries to reach families, older siblings, and prospective adult learners. Several groups underscored that effective outreach depends not just on identifying ZIP codes, but on understanding who within those communities is most likely to engage.

Workforce alignment and student support

Participants generally agreed with the priority jobs identified but stressed the need to anticipate AI-driven disruption, particularly in administrative and logistics roles, and to prioritize occupations likely to persist alongside automation. Universal AI literacy was viewed as essential for all Career Education students, regardless of field. Stakeholders also highlighted gaps in current offerings, notably in the beauty industry, childcare, hospitality, and home health, and suggested that job quality indicators—such as union density—could make some lower-wage roles more attractive. For adult learners, persistent barriers included childcare, transportation, and the need to balance work with schooling; flexible scheduling, online and evening/weekend classes, paid apprenticeships, and supportive services were consistently identified as effective retention strategies. Finally, participants raised emerging concerns around climate-related disruptions and immigration-related fears (e.g., ICE activity), reinforcing the need for trauma-informed supports, flexible attendance options, and contingency planning to ensure persistence during periods of instability.

San Diego Community College District - Community Forum

Organizations:

- » Advanced Manufacturing Institute San Diego
- » Border Region Talent Pipeline K-16 Collaborative

- » Care Service Workforce Apprenticeships Program
- » Children of the Rainbow
- » Education to Career Network
- » Goodwill Industries of San Diego and Imperial Counties
- » Helix Charter High School
- » Mirka Investments, LLC
- » Ocean Discovery Institute
- » Open Paths
- » R&R Career Educational Services
- » San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence
- » San Diego & Imperial Regional Consortium
- » San Diego City College
- » San Diego College of Continuing Education
- » San Diego Community College District
- » San Diego Mesa College
- » San Diego Miramar College
- » SB Consulting
- » Steele Canyon High School

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (August 27, 2025)

Data interpretation and how need is represented

Participants felt the data largely confirmed their expectations but raised concerns about how certain metrics shaped conclusions. Several were disappointed to see biotech and business/entrepreneurship fall off the high-wage, high-need list, given existing programs and perceived demand. Others questioned the realism of “living wage” assumptions in San Diego, noting that housing costs vary significantly by subregion (e.g., Santee versus central San Diego), which may skew interpretations of affordability and need. Across groups, participants emphasized that data alone does not fully capture local context—such as students commuting across service areas, hidden populations, or campuses serving students far outside their traditional ZIP codes—leading to a sense that the data did not always reflect lived realities on the ground.

Career awareness, engagement, and equity of exposure

A dominant theme was that students and families often lack awareness of the breadth of CTE careers and pathways. Participants highlighted that many roles—such as flight attendants, advanced manufacturing, health information management, and skilled technical occupations—are not widely understood, and that awareness needs to begin earlier, ideally in middle school. Engagement strategies centered on people rather than programs: champion faculty, engaging instructors, mentorship, and early industry exposure were repeatedly cited as critical to sustaining interest. Participants also stressed the importance of involving parents and counselors, using career assessments to help students understand themselves, and reframing career conversations around lifestyle and financial realities rather than abstract job titles. Transportation and access were framed as equity issues, with suggestions such as train passes or gas card to support.

Adult learners, job readiness, and structural barriers

Participants repeatedly emphasized that adult learners—many balancing work, caregiving, and financial pressures—are central to SDCCD’s CTE population, yet systems remain misaligned with their needs. Employers reported that students often graduate with theoretical knowledge but lack practical skills, reinforcing the need for applied learning, internships, externships, and explicit career planning that sets realistic expectations about progression and wages. Flexible scheduling, short-term and modular coursework, career and academic coaching, and employer-college partnerships that allow stop-outs and re-entry without penalty were highlighted as effective supports. Several participants questioned whether current CTE structures adequately account for varied learner goals, noting that not all students seek immediate employment, rapid completion, or traditional definitions of “success,” and warning that overly rigid ROI assumptions can obscure legitimate pathways for adult learners.

Targeted outreach and regional coordination

Participants emphasized using ZIP-code data as a *starting point*—not an endpoint—for outreach and program planning. Groups identified multiple populations underrepresented or obscured in the data, including military-connected dependents, students with disabilities, refugees, English learners beyond ELL classifications, and students commuting from outside service areas. Effective outreach was described as localized, multilingual, and relationship-based, leveraging DSPS, veterans’ offices, community liaisons, and trusted CBOs rather than relying solely on digital or school-based channels. Participants also noted tension around service-area boundaries, arguing for greater regional coordination so students can access programs wherever they exist. Overall, the discussion pointed to the need for SDCCD to align data, outreach, and program design with the realities of adult learners’ lives, regional mobility, and a rapidly shifting labor market shaped by automation and AI—while keeping equity, access, and human-centered support at the core of CTE strategy.

Imperial Community College District - Community Forum

Organizations:

- » City of Brawley
- » Controlled Thermal Resources Holdings, Inc.
- » El Centro Fire Department
- » EnergySource Minerals, LLC
- » Five Crowns Marketing
- » Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District
- » Imperial County Office of Education
- » Imperial Irrigation District
- » Imperial Valley College
- » Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program
- » Instituto de los Mexicanos en el Exterior
- » San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence
- » San Diego State University – Imperial Valley
- » TerraLithium LLC

Meeting/Presentation - Imperial County (August 28, 2025)

Data interpretation and how need is represented

Participants said the findings largely matched expectations, but emphasized that ZIP-code *percentages* can be misleading in very small communities (e.g., Ocotillo, Salton Sea), where high percentages may represent only a handful of residents. They recommended pairing percentages with raw counts (and ideally “potential reach”) to better communicate scale and support more practical decision-making. They also underscored the need to balance equity and impact—directing resources to the highest-need areas while considering approaches (e.g., satellite sites) that can serve communities with meaningful population reach.

Access barriers for rural communities and adult learners

Across the discussion, transportation and childcare emerged as the most persistent barriers—especially in northern/rural ZIP codes where many residents lack vehicles and already feel “forgotten.” For adult learners, participants stressed that flexible scheduling is essential, with strong demand for Friday evening and Saturday classes to accommodate full-time work. Childcare support at IVC was seen as helpful but limited (weekday-only and income-restricted), and participants recommended expanding childcare to evenings and weekends. Reduced-cost/free transit options and recent IV Transit improvements (app and schedule expansion) were viewed as promising, along with small but meaningful campus supports (tutoring, snacks, informal staff assistance) that help students persist.

Targeted outreach and trusted partnerships

Participants favored localized, in-person outreach tailored to small communities, noting residents respond when information is brought directly to them through townhall-style meetings, school-based flyers, and community-facing communication channels (including social media). They emphasized partnering with trusted local intermediaries—nonprofits, schools, chambers of commerce, and agencies—because these organizations are already embedded in the community and can improve credibility, turnout, and follow-through.

Workforce alignment, missing sectors, and program gaps

The group generally agreed with the priority jobs list, highlighting ongoing demand in healthcare (home health, nursing assistants, allied health), public safety, and trucking/logistics, while noting that low wages can deter entry into some healthcare roles despite short training and strong outlooks. AI was seen as most likely to disrupt customer service and administrative work rather than healthcare or public safety. Participants also flagged potential growth areas—manufacturing, lithium-related jobs, and geothermal—but cautioned about uncertainty and timelines (especially lithium before 2030). In terms of training alignment, nursing and criminal justice were viewed as strong matches to local demand, while truck driving and broader manufacturing/trades visibility were identified as key gaps; even where programs exist (e.g., welding), participants felt awareness is limited, and they suggested IVC could expand offerings and improve program visibility and employer awareness.

Palomar Community College District - Community Forum

Organizations:

- » Border Region Talent Pipeline K-16 Collaborative
- » California State University San Marcos
- » City of San Marcos
- » Federal Reserve Bank
- » Metropolitan Area Advisory Committee
- » Palomar College
- » Poway Adult School
- » Poway Chamber of Commerce
- » Poway Unified School District
- » San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence
- » San Diego & Imperial Regional Consortium
- » San Diego County Office of Education
- » San Diego Workforce Partnership
- » Vista Chamber of Commerce
- » Vista Community Clinic

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (September 11, 2025)

Data interpretation, limitations, and trust

Overall, participants felt the data largely aligned with their lived experience and generally confirmed existing assumptions, particularly regarding high-need ZIP codes and rural communities. However, many raised concerns about data completeness and framing. Census-based ZIP code data were seen as limited, especially in rural areas and communities with low census participation, potentially undercounting need. Participants emphasized the importance of distinguishing population size from concentration, supplementing ZIP code data with census tracts, real-time employer input, and business intelligence, and incorporating additional metrics such as household disability impacts. Several groups also noted that workforce data can unintentionally devalue essential but lower-wage occupations—particularly early childhood education and senior care—by prioritizing earnings thresholds over societal importance.

Alignment between workforce demand and training pathways

Participants consistently questioned whether current “top jobs” lists and program offerings fully reflect regional workforce realities. In particular, healthcare demand appeared underrepresented beyond nursing, despite persistent employer shortages in radiologic technology, medical assistants, allied health, and culturally competent care roles. High start-up costs for certain programs (e.g., specialized labs) were cited as barriers for community colleges, even as private providers expand at much higher student cost. Similar concerns were raised in trades and manufacturing, where aging workforces, succession gaps, and limited capacity constrain training pipelines. Across sectors, employers emphasized that job readiness—not just credentials—remains a challenge, with a need for

stronger hands-on training, clearer career progression expectations, and better alignment between educational outcomes and actual job requirements.

Equity, access, and adult learner realities

A dominant theme across groups was that CTE systems are still largely structured around traditional-aged students, despite nearly half of CTE learners being 25 or older. Adult learners face overlapping barriers related to work schedules, caregiving, childcare availability, transportation, food insecurity, housing costs, and limited access to technology. Participants highlighted strategies that improve persistence, including flexible and asynchronous scheduling, online and hybrid modalities, noncredit pathways with stacked credentials, apprenticeships and earn-and-learn models, and robust wraparound supports (mental health services, food pantries, childcare, transportation assistance). Institutional policies—especially rigid cohort structures, reapplication requirements, and limited re-entry options—were identified as significant obstacles to completion, reinforcing the need for more flexible off-ramps and on-ramps.

Future readiness, regional coordination, and system design

Participants emphasized that rapid labor-market shifts—particularly AI adoption—require faster and more flexible responses than traditional curriculum cycles allow. While many human-service and skilled-trade occupations were seen as less vulnerable to automation, AI literacy was widely viewed as essential across fields. Suggested strategies included short-term bootcamps, noncredit AI courses, co-enrollment models, and integration of language support (e.g., ESL co-teaching). To address geographic inequities and high program costs, participants strongly supported regional coordination across K–12, adult education, and community colleges, including shared program specialization, transportation solutions, and mobile or bootcamp-style training models for rural and education-desert communities. Across discussions, measuring and understanding employment outcomes are central to understanding the success of programs.

Southwestern Community College District - Community Forum

Organizations:

- » Able-Disabled Advocacy
- » Border Region Talent Pipeline K-16 Collaborative
- » Gaylord Pacific
- » Grossmont College
- » Metropolitan Area Advisory Committee
- » San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence
- » San Diego & Imperial Regional Consortium
- » San Diego Workforce Partnership
- » Scripps Health
- » South County Economic Development Council
- » Southwestern College

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (September 24, 2025)

Interpreting the data and understanding local context

Participants generally felt the data aligned with expectations but surfaced important contextual nuances. A key surprise was the relatively low poverty rate in National City compared to San Ysidro, which participants attributed in part to the presence of the naval base, military-connected households, and a local chamber of commerce—assets not present in San Ysidro. In contrast, limited broadband access across South County ZIP codes was more concerning and unexpected, given its direct impact on access to education and services. Participants emphasized that data should be interpreted through a local lens to ensure it meaningfully informs how institutions meet student needs, rather than being viewed as a standalone assessment.

Adult learners, basic needs, and student-centered supports

Adult learners' ability to persist in CTE programs was framed as fundamentally tied to basic needs. Affordable childcare—often extending to both childcare and adult care—was identified as one of the most significant barriers, particularly given evening-heavy schedules at San Ysidro campuses and the mismatch between work hours and available childcare. Transportation challenges were also acute: many students rely on public transit, ride-shares, or drop-offs, sometimes arriving well before campuses open. Participants suggested practical supports such as extended campus access hours, student rest pods, food pantries, and travel stipends. Mental health emerged as a critical and often overlooked component of student success; informal mental health workshops and access to licensed therapists generated strong engagement, prompting discussion about whether disability definitions adequately capture mental health needs. Partnerships with adult schools, binational community groups, and English conversation clubs were seen as essential for supporting students with limited English proficiency and lower educational attainment.

Workforce demand, geography, and changing labor-market dynamics

Participants largely agreed that the priority occupations reflected workforce board guidance but questioned whether many of those jobs actually exist in sufficient numbers within the Southwestern service area. This raised a broader tension: whether colleges should primarily train students to work close to where they live or instead prepare them for jobs elsewhere through improved transportation access, hybrid models, or remote work options. Participants noted that San Diego's unemployment rate is rising faster than state and national levels, with layoffs increasing in advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and biosciences, while job openings flatten. AI was seen as compounding these challenges by intensifying competition through automated hiring systems, making social capital, relationships, and “who you know” increasingly important for job placement. Several participants suggested that alongside financial literacy, students may need workforce literacy—explicit guidance on navigating hiring systems, expectations for in-person work, and realistic career pathways amid AI-driven change.

Program alignment, gaps, and future readiness

While participants identified areas of alignment—particularly in mechanics and hands-on training—they also highlighted notable gaps and opportunities. Emerging needs included aircraft mechanics, EV and diesel technologies, plumbing, electrical trades, and expanded hands-on training options

at Southwestern. Participants questioned why engineering pathways were not more visible among priority programs, despite strong student interest in STEM. Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) surfaced as a major opportunity, especially for internationally trained professionals and long-tenured workers (e.g., nurses with decades of experience now learning ESL), to translate prior skills into accelerated credentials. The creative economy was also flagged as an unexpected but encouraging area of demand. Looking ahead, participants urged a more balanced and intentional approach to AI—moving beyond fear-based narratives toward thoughtful integration that supports accessibility (for people with disabilities and English learners), reduces administrative burden, and prepares students to work with AI over the long term rather than compete against it.

Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District - Cuyamaca College - Community Forum

Organizations:

- » Border Region Talent Pipeline K-16 Collaborative
- » CAREERworks at A-DA
- » Cuyamaca College
- » Educational Enrichment Systems
- » Grossmont Adult Education
- » Grossmont College
- » Grossmont Union High School District
- » Joint Tactics and Technologies, Inc.
- » Leaf It To Us Tree Service, LLC
- » San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence
- » San Diego & Imperial Regional Consortium
- » San Diego Workforce Partnership
- » Tony Washington Art
- » Viejas Casino & Resort

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (November 7, 2025)

Interpreting the data and recognizing access gaps

Participants said the data generally aligned with what they see, but several findings stood out: persistent lack of internet access despite rapid technological change (especially as AI expands), and the severity of cost-of-living pressures—with wages like ~\$24K/year viewed as incompatible with basic stability. They also emphasized that geography shapes decisions to return to school, including transportation/commute realities and differences across East County sub-areas. Some raised methodological concerns about how data captures (or fails to capture) tribal communities/reservations and whether standard datasets align with local rules, definitions, and reporting structures.

Strengthening the high school-to-college pipeline and re-engaging learners

A major concern was the “fall-off” between high school and college: stakeholders cited Grossmont

Union-type patterns where a large share of graduates do not enroll anywhere, even when community college is low-cost/free. The group questioned why younger students aren't being funneled into the district and noted that the traditional pipeline is competing with "YouTube University," social media, and free/low-cost training alternatives. Promising tactics included hands-on preregistration support in high schools (e.g., staff showing up with registration materials) and clearer messaging that students go to a college "for a specific reason," such as a short credential with labor-market value. Participants also asked for better insight into where students are going and why (work, other training, nothing), and noted that many learners now come to college primarily for upskilling—often after already earning degrees.

Supportive services and needs of adult learners and special populations

Across groups, the top barriers for adults were childcare (especially evenings), transportation/traffic, food/basic needs, and time. Participants recommended expanding the Child Development Center's hours, offering evening childcare, aligning bus schedules with evening classes, and ensuring food availability later in the day. They also emphasized embedded tutoring/counseling and partnerships with external organizations that can fund supportive services when college dollars are limited. Programs like C-Path (SB 554) were highlighted as effective because they pair stackable credentials with intensive, relationship-based supports.

AI literacy, trades access, and mobility

Participants argued the narrative needs to shift from "get one credential and you're set" to continuous upskilling, with AI literacy as a baseline across fields and a more balanced, positive framing of AI (tool for productivity, accessibility, and tutoring—not just threat). They also highlighted a structural mismatch: many in-demand trades (HVAC, electrical, plumbing, some construction pathways) are on priority lists, but district offerings and/or capacity don't match, and long waitlists can discourage students. Suggested solutions included pre-apprenticeship or short crossover programs, providing space/operational support for partners, and introducing hands-on technical exposure earlier through dual enrollment. Participants also raised the practical constraint that some "priority" jobs may be outside the immediate service area, so planning should consider commuting burden, remote/hybrid work realities, and career mobility, not only neighborhood-based placement. Finally, several groups stressed that keeping programs current requires stronger program marketing (e.g., horticulture/ arboriculture) and adequate full-time faculty capacity to sustain and grow CTE.

Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District - Grossmont College - Community Forum

Organizations:

- » Border Region Talent Pipeline K-16 Collaborative
- » Children of the Rainbow
- » County of San Diego
- » Cuyamaca College
- » Empowerment One | RISE One
- » Foundation for Grossmont and Cuyamaca Colleges

- » Grossmont Adult Education
- » Grossmont College
- » Grossmont Union High School District
- » Mirka Investments, LLC
- » Open Paths
- » Otay Ranch High School
- » Porpoise Robotics
- » San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence
- » San Diego & Imperial Regional Consortium
- » San Diego Police Department
- » San Diego Regional East County Chamber of Commerce
- » San Diego State University
- » San Diego Workforce Partnership
- » The Water Conservation Garden

Meeting/Presentation - San Diego County (November 13, 2025)

Data needs and local context matters

Participants generally felt the data reflected what they saw locally, but they wanted more economic context to interpret outcomes—especially East County–specific indicators (poverty, housing costs, income disparity, and “wealth creation”). Several noted that ZIP-code profiles (e.g., El Cajon) showed residents “just trying to get by,” and that completing an award can feel unrealistically time-intensive under those conditions. They also flagged gaps in what was available or visible in the data (e.g., active-duty military not captured, commuter patterns, and languages spoken at home shifting beyond Spanish/Arabic to greater variety), and questioned why some expected needs (like paraprofessionals/education) were not reflected in the top occupations.

Equity, diversity, and the need for tighter coordination across partners

Across groups, East County was described as highly diverse, with concentrated challenges for first-generation students and students juggling English acquisition and college—particularly in El Cajon and Santee. Participants emphasized that the barrier was not simply a lack of services; rather, it was often fragmentation—limited communication and coordination across organizations. Some also questioned why certain populations (notably veterans) appeared in local ZIP codes but did not show up among the “top” categories, suggesting either data limitations or misalignment between what’s measured and what partners observe on the ground.

Adult learner persistence required flexibility, welcoming entry points, and basic needs supports

When discussing adult learners and priority populations, the strongest throughline was the need to redesign access around real schedules and constraints. Participants called for more night/weekend options, flexible hours, and hybrid models that reduce required time on campus. Childcare surfaced repeatedly, alongside transportation and competing responsibilities (work, senior care). Several individuals emphasized that adults (including many in their 50s, often returning after career

disruption) need different re-entry supports: technology/LMS help, 1:1 advising, and “support classes” that build confidence and navigation skills. There was also a strong call to improve frontline capacity—training staff and faculty to better serve adult learners, following up on initial inquiries quickly, and creating a campus culture that doesn’t assume everyone is on a transfer track.

Job lists were directionally right, but stakeholders stressed “middle-skill” pathways

Participants noted that many high-demand roles were in healthcare and the trades, but they pushed for clearer emphasis on jobs that do not require a bachelor’s degree (the perceived “sweet spot” for community colleges). At the same time, they raised real-world constraints: some jobs may be regionally needed but not concentrated in East County, so planning should consider commuting, where graduates actually work, and how far programs should align to the local vs. regional labor market. Some priority roles (childcare workers, public safety/fire, HVAC) were cited as hard to fill, but wages and bottlenecks (e.g., clinical placements) continued to limit supply.

Program alignment and gaps centered on trades, work-based learning, and emerging tech

Stakeholders repeatedly highlighted the need for more work-based learning, internships, and employer input so credentials translate into jobs and students build experience. Several comments pointed to gaps in police/fire and trades preparation and suggested partnerships with high school programs and stackable credentials. Others argued that some fields were under-identified in lists (e.g., drones, additional allied health roles like OTA) and that student awareness of pathways is uneven. A separate but related gap was credit for prior learning—participants felt the college should better recognize decades of experience for returning professionals (including immigrants with prior training).

AI and technology were viewed as both tool and storyline that needs calibration

AI surfaced in two ways: (1) as a core literacy that should be embedded across programs and used productively (tutoring, counseling/planning tools, productivity supports), and (2) as a topic where the hype cycle creates confusion. Some participants wanted more concrete “AI-in-the-workplace” integration; others cautioned against over-centering AI as a job category and emphasized fundamentals (“garbage in, garbage out”). Overall, the shared implication was that the district should teach applied AI skills + critical thinking, while keeping program planning grounded in employer demand.

Acknowledgments

San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence

- Dr. Tina Ngo Bartel, Executive Director
- John Edwards, Research Analyst

Mod Research Consulting

- Dr. Priscilla Fernandez, Research Consultant

Important Disclaimers and Limitations

All representations included in this report have been produced from primary research and/or secondary review of publicly and/or privately available data and/or research reports. This study examines the most recent data available at the time of the analysis; however, data sets are updated regularly and may not be consistent with previous reports. Efforts have been made to represent data that is available and to qualify and validate the accuracy of the data; however, neither the Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research (COE), COE host district, nor California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office are responsible for the applications or decisions made by individuals and/or organizations based on this report or its recommendations.