



Special Executive Committee Meeting

July 23, 2025
1250 West Main Street
El Centro, CA 92243
12:00 p.m.

Executive Committee members please be advised: If an item on the meeting agenda relates to the provision of services by you, your immediate family, the entity you represent, or any person who has made \$250 in campaign contributions to you during the last 12 months, or if approval or disapproval of an agenda item would have a foreseeable material effect on an economic interest of you, your immediate family, or the entity you represent, then please follow these procedures: When the agenda item is first introduced, please immediately announce that you are recusing yourself from participating in the agenda item, and then refrain from discussing, voting on, or otherwise influencing the Executive Committee consideration of the agenda item. Supporting documentation is available for public review at the Imperial County Workforce Development Board Office.

1. Call to Order
 - a. Conflict of Interest Forms
2. Discussion of Agenda
 - a. Items to be pulled from Agenda
 - b. Approval of Meeting Agenda
3. Approval of Minutes
 - a. June 18, 2025.....pg. 2-5

ACTION AGENDA

4. Discussion/Action to conditionally approve the Southern Border Regional Plan and authorize ICWDB Chair Signature.....pg. 6-36

INFORMATIONAL AGENDA

5. Public Comment: *This is an opportunity for members of the public to address the Executive Committee on any subject matter within the Executive Committee's jurisdiction, but not an item on the agenda. Each speaker should complete and submit a "Public Comment Request to Speak" form to the Executive Committee Chair. When addressing the Executive Committee, state your name for the record prior to providing your comments. Individuals will be given three (3) minutes to address the Committee.*
6. Meeting adjournment

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Next Executive Committee Meeting Wednesday, August 27, 2025, at 11:00 a.m.

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1250 W. Main Street
El Centro, CA 92243
Special Executive Committee
Minutes of June 18th, 2025

Present: Erik Freeman, Elvira Anaya, Robert Rubio, Ruth Duarte, Mark Gran

Absent: Timothy Kelley, Jason Jackson

Staff: Priscilla Lopez, David Baquerizo (AJCC Operator), Veronica Curiel, Jeff Burquist, Camilo Garcia, Allison Duran, Francisca German, Angelica Padilla, Blanca Soto

Guests: None.

Agenda Items

1. Call to Order ICWDB Chair, Erik Freeman, called the meeting to order at 11:03 a.m. with a quorum present.

1a. Conflict of Interest Forms Members were directed to turn in their Conflict of Interest Forms to staff.

2. Discussion of Agenda

2a. Items to be pulled from Agenda

None.

2b. Approval of Meeting Agenda

- ❖ **Motion:** A motion was made by **Mark Gran** and seconded by **Elvira Anaya** to approve the meeting agenda as is. There were no opposed and there were no abstentions. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Approval of Meeting Minutes – April 16, 2025

- ❖ **Motion:** A motion was made by **Elvira Anaya** and seconded by **Ruth Duarte** to approve the meeting minutes of April 16, 2025, as presented. There were no opposed and there were no abstentions. The motion carried unanimously.

Action Agenda

4. Discussion/Action to approve WIOA training expenditure plan for PY2025-2026 at a cost not to exceed \$2,570,485

ICWED Director Priscilla Lopez discussed the approval of the WIOA training budget of \$2,570,485 for the next program year. This amount exceeds the required 30% minimum training expenditure requirement and is close to 40%, which the department is working towards. She noted that this increase helps prepare for possible changes to

WIOA, which may raise the training requirement to 50%, with 40% required to go directly to training and 10% allowed for supportive services. Ms. Lopez also presented the number of training slots available for each program, noting that this is just a starting point and that additional slots can be added later if more funding becomes available.

Motion: A motion was made by **Elvira Anaya** and seconded by **Ruth Duarte** to approve WIOA training expenditure plan for PY2025-2026 at a cost not to exceed \$2,570,485. There were no opposed and none abstained. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Discussion / Action to approve PY25-26 agreement for WIOA Youth Services with Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program at a cost not to exceed \$1,765,965.

ICWED Director Priscilla Lopez introduced the agenda item and shared that, initially, youth providers were told they might need to reduce their contracts by 30% due to uncertainty in funding. In June, the department was notified it would receive about \$1 million more than expected. Although the youth program did not receive additional funding, it also did not face any cuts. As a result, the department informed the youth providers and adjusted their contracts with only a 20% decrease instead. Under IVROP's proposed program budget, they would aim to serve up to 240 youth by offering services aligned with the 14 WIOA Youth Elements.

Motion: A motion was made by **Mark Gran** and seconded by **Elvira Anaya** to approve PY 25-26 agreement for WIOA Youth Services with Imperial Valley Occupational Program at a cost not to exceed \$1,765,965. There were no opposed and none abstained. The motion carried unanimously.

6. Discussion/Action to approve PY25-26 agreement for WIOA Youth Services with Equus Workforce Solutions at a cost not to exceed \$1,114,034.

ICWED Director Priscilla Lopez discussed the item and shared the agreement for WIOA Youth services with Equus Workforce Solutions for the period of July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026, in an amount not to exceed \$1,114,034. Although the youth program did not receive additional funding, it also did not face any cuts. The department informed the youth provider to adjust their contract with a 20% decrease instead of the initially proposed 30%. The proposed budget reflected Equus providing services to 215 youth across Imperial County.

Motion: A motion was made by **Elvira Anaya** and seconded by **Ruth Duarte** to approve PY25-26 agreement for WIOA Youth Services with Equus Workforce Solutions at a cost not to exceed \$1,114,034. There were no opposed and none abstained. The motion carried unanimously.

7. Discussion/Action to approve agreement renewal with Professional Workforce Services Consultant, David Shinder at a cost not to exceed \$40,000.

ICWED Director Priscilla Lopez provided information regarding the contract agreement with professional workforce services consultant David Shinder. Mrs. Lopez noted that Mr. Shinder has supported the development of the local plan, assisted with the regional plan, and continues to provide guidance as needed. He also contributed to the RAM report, and the department would like to retain the ability to contact him should there be any progress related to that report. The goal is to keep him as part of the team. This contract allows for professional local workforce support services on an as-needed basis, in an amount not to exceed \$40,000.

Motion: A motion was made by **Mark Gran** and seconded by **Elvira Anaya** to approve agreement renewal with professional Workforce Services Consultant, David Shinder at a cost not to exceed \$40,000. There were no opposed and none abstained. The motion carried unanimously.

8. Discussion/Action to approve a No-Cost Contract Extension through September 30,2025, with RAND regarding the Lithium Valley Workforce and Economic Development Needs Assessment.

Mrs. Priscilla Lopez introduced the item to approve a no-cost contract extension with RAND for the agreement related to the Lithium Valley Workforce and Economic Development Needs Assessment. A draft report was submitted for the County's review, and feedback was provided. The intention is to incorporate this feedback into the final report, which will require additional time but will have no fiscal impact. The department expects to receive an update on the RAND report by the end of August or early September.

Motion: A motion was made by **Elvira Anaya** and seconded by **Robert Rubio** to approve a No-Cost Contract Extension through September 30,2025, with RAND regarding the Lithium Valley Workforce and Economic Development needs Assessment. There were no opposed and none abstained. The motion carried unanimously.

9. Discussion/ Action to approve the Imperial County WIOA Partner MOU and authorize ICWDB Chair signature.

Mrs. Priscilla Lopez provided information on the Imperial County WIOA Partner Memorandum of Understanding and requested authorization for the Imperial County Workforce Development Board Chair to sign the agreement on behalf of the Board.

Motion: A motion was made by **Elvira Anaya** and seconded by **Mark Gran** to approve the Imperial County WIOA Partner MOU and authorize ICWDB Chair signature. There were no opposed and none abstained. The motion carried unanimously.

10. Discussion/ Action to approve attendance at the California Workforce Association (CWA), Meeting of the Minds Conference from September 2-4, 2025, in Monterey, California.

Mrs. Priscilla Lopez stated information about the upcoming California Workforce Association Meeting of the Minds Conference in Monterey, California, taking place from September 2–4, 2025. The department is requesting approval for a total of six individuals to attend—two Workforce Development Board members and four staff members. The fiscal impact is not to exceed \$21,000.

Motion: A motion was made by **Elvira Anaya** and seconded by **Ruth Duarte** to approve attendance at the California Workforce Association (CWA) Meeting of the Minds Conference, to be held from September 2–4, 2025, in Monterey, California. There were no opposed and none abstained. The motion carried unanimously.

11. Discussion/ Action to approve CWA Membership Dues at a cost not to exceed \$14,260.

Mrs. Priscilla Lopez provided information regarding the annual membership dues to the California Workforce Association (CWA) for Program Year 2025–2026. The dues total \$14,260, calculated based on a percentage of WIOA allocations. There is no increase from last year's dues. Mrs. Lopez shared that Curtis Notsinne, the current CEO of the California Workforce Association (CWA), will be leaving his position. A job description has been shared, and the position will be posted soon. Mrs. Lopez also announced that she has been elected as the new Treasurer/Secretary of CWA.

Motion: A motion was made by **Robert Rubio** and seconded by **Elvira Anaya** to approve CWA Membership Dues at a cost not to exceed \$14,260. There were no opposed and none abstained. The motion carried unanimously.

12. Discussion/ Action to approve National Association of Workforce Development Board Dues at a cost not to exceed \$2,300.

Mrs. Priscilla Lopez shared information regarding the \$2,300 annual membership dues to the National Association of Workforce Boards (NAWB) for Program Year 2025–2026. She also noted that, for the first time in 30 years, NAWB’s annual conference will be relocating from Washington, D.C. to Las Vegas.

Motion: A motion was made by **Ruth Duarte** and seconded by **Robert Rubio** to approve CWA Membership Dues at a cost not to exceed \$14,260. There were no opposed and none abstained. The motion carried unanimously.

Informational Agenda

13. Public Comment.

None.

14. Meeting Adjourned at 11:29 a.m.

Next Meeting: August 27, 2025, at 11:00 a.m.

**Imperial County Workforce Development Board
Executive Committee
Action Agenda Item 4**

MEETING DATE: July 23, 2025

ITEM: 4

SUBJECT: Discussion/Action to conditionally approve the PY2025-2028 Southern Border Regional Plan and authorize the ICWDB Chair Signature

FROM: Priscilla Lopez, ICWED Director

RECOMMENDATION:

ICWED Director recommends the conditional approval of the 2025-2028 Southern Border Regional Plan and authorize the ICWDB Chair Signature.

BACKGROUND:

In accordance with WIOA Section 106, Regional Plans serve as strategic frameworks for aligning resources and investments within California's 15 Regional Planning Units (RPU). These plans outline how regions will engage industry sectors, improve workforce development outcomes across jurisdictions, and expand access to career pathways—particularly for individuals with barriers to employment.

The Program Year (PY) 2025–2028 Southern Border Regional Plan sets forth a unified vision to promote equity, economic mobility, and climate resilience across San Diego and Imperial Counties. Developed jointly by the San Diego Workforce Partnership and the Imperial County Workforce Development Board (ICWDB), the plan reflects shared priorities, strong regional partnerships, and a commitment to building an inclusive, high-performing workforce system.

The public comment period for the Southern Border Regional Plan began on **July 19, 2025**, and will conclude on **August 20, 2025**. In order to meet submission deadlines while still incorporating public and stakeholder feedback, the ICWDB may consider approving the plan with the understanding that:

- All public comments received will be documented and submitted as an addendum to the plan.
- If substantial changes are required based on feedback, staff will return with a revised version for Board consideration at the **September 24, 2025**, ICWDB meeting.

FISCAL IMPACT:

None.

Imperial County Workforce Development Board and
San Diego Workforce Partnership

Southern Border Regional Plan

2025-2028

Contact: Melanie Hitchcock, 619-228-2944,
melaniehitchcock@workforce.org



Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY..... | 3 |
| Key Regional Priorities and Strategies..... | 3 |
| ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW OF THE REGION..... | 4 |
| San Diego County | 4 |
| Imperial County | 9 |
| REGIONAL INDICATORS..... | 13 |
| Selected Indicator 1: Job Quality Improvements..... | 13 |
| Selected Indicator 2: Equity in Access and Outcomes | 14 |
| Tracking and Evaluation Strategy | 15 |
| FOSTERING DEMAND-DRIVEN SKILLS ATTAINMENT | 15 |
| Priority Sectors for the Southern Border Region..... | 16 |
| Training and Employment Program Alignment..... | 19 |
| Current Gaps and Strategic Opportunities..... | 19 |
| ENABLING UPWARD MOBILITY FOR ALL CALIFORNIANS..... | 20 |
| Integrated Navigation and Career Services | 20 |
| Wraparound Services and Co-Enrollment..... | 20 |
| Employer-Aligned Pathways and Advancement | 21 |
| Serving Priority Populations..... | 21 |
| Coordination and Accountability | 21 |
| CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY | 22 |
| A Regional Clean Economy Strategy..... | 22 |
| Workforce System Contributions to Climate Resilience..... | 23 |
| Strategic Investments and Program Examples | 23 |
| A Regional Clean Economy Strategy..... | 24 |
| Workforce System Contributions to Climate Resilience..... | 24 |
| Strategic Investments and Program Examples | 24 |
| EQUITY AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE..... | 25 |
| Disaggregated Data and Equity Analysis..... | 25 |
| Equity in Program and Service Design..... | 25 |
| Inclusive Access to Sector Strategies | 25 |
| Community Engagement and Equity Governance | 26 |
| Alignment with Statewide Priorities | 26 |
| ALIGNING, COORDINATING, AND INTEGRATING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES..... | 26 |
| Regional Governance and Alignment | 26 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Coordination Across WIOA Titles and Core Programs | 27 |
| Shared Service Delivery and Data Infrastructure | 27 |
| Program Integration with Public and Community Partners..... | 27 |
| Continuous Improvement and Shared Learning..... | 28 |
| Commitment to a Unified, Participant-Centered System..... | 28 |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Southern Border Regional Plan (2025) outlines a unified vision and strategic roadmap for advancing equity, economic mobility, and climate resilience across San Diego and Imperial Counties. Developed jointly by the San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP) and the Imperial County Workforce Development Board (ICWDB), this plan reflects the priorities, partnerships, and shared commitment of the Southern Border Regional Planning Unit (SBRPU) to build a high-performing, inclusive workforce system.

Rooted in the California Workforce Development Board's High Road principles and fully aligned with the California Jobs First Economic Blueprint and the Master Plan for Career Education, the plan serves as both a compliance document and a call to action. It synthesizes extensive labor market analysis, regional performance data, community engagement insights, and cross-system planning efforts into a seven-part framework required by state guidance (WSD24-09).

Key Regional Priorities and Strategies

1. **Analytical Overview of the Region:** The plan profiles the diverse demographic, economic, and workforce characteristics of San Diego and Imperial Counties. Despite shared geographic and economic ties, the two counties face distinct challenges— from concentrated poverty and youth disconnection in rural Imperial, to housing affordability and career mobility barriers in urban San Diego. The region is home to over 29,000 disconnected youth and features wide disparities in educational attainment, wage levels, and labor force participation.
2. **Regional Indicators:** Two core indicators guide this plan: (1) Job Quality Improvements, defined by placement into family- sustaining, high-road jobs; and (2) Equity in Access and Outcomes, measured through disaggregated credential attainment, earnings, and skill gains. Baseline WIOA data shows youth and underserved populations face disproportionately low outcomes across nearly all metrics, underscoring the urgency of targeted strategies.
3. **Fostering Demand-Driven Skills Attainment:** The SBRPU has adopted the ten California Jobs First priority sectors, including clean economy, healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and logistics. Sector profiles and labor market data guide investments in employer- aligned training, apprenticeship development, and regional career pathways. Special attention is given to lithium recovery in Imperial County and green infrastructure efforts in San Diego, both of which offer high- impact, growth-oriented employment opportunities.
4. **Enabling Upward Mobility for All Californians:** The region is expanding integrated navigation, stackable credential pathways, and wraparound services to ensure job seekers—particularly those with multiple barriers—can enter and progress through high- opportunity careers. Career navigation tools like Partner Portal and MyNextMove are widely used, while training models are increasingly linked to formal advancement ladders co-designed with employers.
5. **Climate and Environmental Sustainability:** Climate workforce strategies are embedded throughout the plan, including solar and energy efficiency pre- apprenticeships, clean construction, and the buildout of lithium workforce infrastructure. The region also emphasizes environmental literacy, equity in clean energy hiring, and regional coordination with infrastructure and economic development entities to align climate investments with training capacity.
6. **Equity and Economic Justice:** Equity is treated not as a standalone priority but as a cross-cutting imperative. The region is addressing disparities through targeted investments, culturally responsive service models, community voice integration, and expanded access to high-road pathways for Opportunity Youth, English learners, justice-involved individuals, and residents in historically disinvested communities.

7. **Aligning, Coordinating, and Integrating Programs and Services:** A regionally coordinated approach is central to this plan. SDWP and ICWDB jointly manage sector councils, share staff and data systems, and align procurement strategies to ensure consistency, accountability, and equity across the region. Partnerships span all WIOA titles, public agencies, community-based organizations, and education systems, with integrated infrastructure to support co-enrollment, joint case management, and continuous improvement.

The 2025 Southern Border Regional Plan reflects the region's readiness to lead on workforce innovation, equity, and climate resilience. Grounded in data, shaped by community input, and aligned with California's broader economic transformation goals, the plan provides a roadmap for collective impact. Through strategic coordination, shared accountability, and inclusive service delivery, the Southern Border RPU is building a workforce system that expands opportunity and strengthens economic mobility for all.

ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW OF THE REGION

The Southern Border Region, comprising San Diego and Imperial Counties, represents one of California's most diverse, economically complex, and opportunity-rich areas. As neighboring counties along the U.S. – Mexico border, these two jurisdictions are bound by shared economic corridors and regional labor market dynamics, while also facing markedly different local challenges and demographic realities. This section first presents a detailed overview of San Diego County, followed by a corresponding analysis of Imperial County – examining each county's economic base, population trends, workforce composition, and emerging opportunities and risks. Together, these profiles lay the foundation for targeted, regionally responsive workforce development strategies.

San Diego County

San Diego County, the second-most populous in California, is home to more than 3.2 million residents and accounts for over 8% of the state's population. Its economy is characterized by:

- A thriving innovation sector
- World-class research institutions
- A large military presence
- A fast-growing health and life sciences ecosystem

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the racial and ethnic composition of San Diego County, offering insight into the broad racial and cultural diversity of the region. The data show the substantial share of Latino and multiracial residents alongside significant Asian, Black, and Pacific Islander populations. This demographic richness informs how workforce services must be culturally competent, multilingual, and tailored to local contexts.

Table 1: Race & Ethnicity – San Diego County

| Race | Total | % |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|-----|
| White | 1,531,946 | 47% |
| Black / African Amer | 149,172 | 5% |
| American Indian alone | 25,478 | 1% |
| Alaska Native alone | 115 | 0% |
| American Indian and Alaska Native | 11,249 | 0% |
| Asian alone | 414,699 | 13% |

| | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Nat Haw / Pac Isl | 11,711 | 0% |
| Some other race alone | 423,448 | 13% |
| 2+ Races | 700,984 | 21% |
| Total Race | 3,268,802 | 100% |

| Ethnicity | Count | % |
|------------------------|------------------|-------------|
| Hisp/Lat | 1,141,063 | 35% |
| Non-Hisp/Lat | 2,127,739 | 65% |
| Total Ethnicity | 3,268,802 | 100% |

| Age Range | Count | % |
|--------------|------------------|-------------|
| 0 to 9 | 361,401 | 11% |
| 10 to 19 | 404,936 | 12% |
| 20 to 29 | 472,854 | 14% |
| 30 to 39 | 519,066 | 16% |
| 40 to 49 | 418,354 | 13% |
| 50 to 59 | 380,780 | 12% |
| 60 to 69 | 358,307 | 11% |
| 70 to 79 | 233,972 | 7% |
| 80+ | 120,303 | 4% |
| Total | 3,269,973 | 100% |

By contrast, Imperial County – with a population of approximately 180,000 – is predominantly rural and agricultural. It faces persistently high unemployment and structural economic barriers, yet it also sits at the epicenter of California's clean energy transformation due to its lithium reserves and solar potential. This urban- rural dichotomy presents both challenges and synergies in regional workforce planning.

Demographically, the region is young, multilingual, and racially and ethnically diverse:

- In San Diego County, Latinos make up more than one-third of the population, with large communities of Asian, Black, and Pacific Islander residents.
- Imperial County has one of the highest proportions of Latino residents in the state – over 85% – and a median age nearly five years younger than the state average.
- Across both counties, a growing immigrant population and significant shares of residents speaking languages other than English at home call for culturally responsive service delivery models.

Table 2 illustrates poverty rates in San Diego County by race and ethnicity, underscoring deep disparities in economic stability across different groups. White and multiracial residents account for a majority of those living in poverty, but Black, Latino, and Native residents experience poverty at disproportionately high rates relative to their share of the population. This highlights the urgency of investing in historically under-resourced neighborhoods and population groups.

Table 2: Poverty Rates by Race & Ethnicity – San Diego County (ACS, 2023)

| Race | Poverty Count | Poverty % |
|-------------------------|----------------|---------------|
| White | 132,544 | 40.5% |
| 2+ Races | 72,264 | 22.1% |
| Some Other Race | 52,150 | 15.9% |
| Asian | 38,397 | 11.7% |
| Black | 26,374 | 8.1% |
| Amer Ind/Alaska Nat | 4,835 | 1.5% |
| Native Haw/Pac Islander | 755 | 0.2% |
| Total | 327,319 | 100.0% |
| Non-Hisp/Lat | 202,154 | 61.8% |
| Hisp/Lat | 125,165 | 38.2% |
| Total | 327,319 | 100.0% |

San Diego's economy continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic with notable strength in:

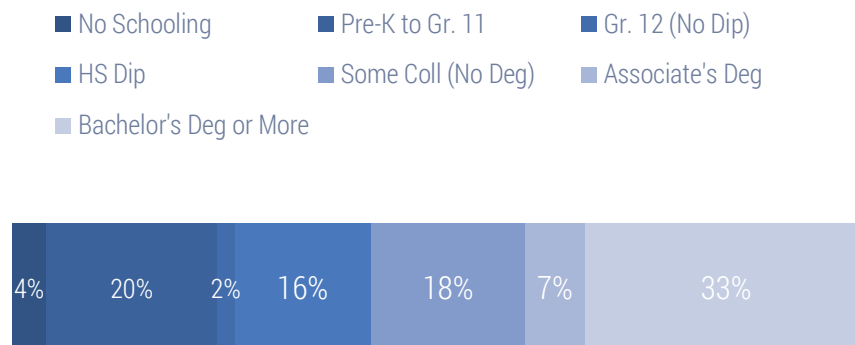
- Healthcare
- Life Sciences
- Advanced Manufacturing
- Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)
- Professional and Technical Services
- Transportation and Warehousing

Meanwhile, lower-wage service sectors – such as Retail and Accommodation – remain large employers, particularly for entry-level and transitional workers. The county's median household income is approximately \$97,000, but housing affordability and the overall cost of living rank among the highest in the nation, placing significant pressure on low- and middle-income households.

While overall economic indicators are strong, disparities persist in household income and poverty by race and geography. Certain ZIP codes – particularly in Central and Southeast San Diego, Lemon Grove, and El Centro – experience disproportionately high poverty rates and limited access to quality employment. These patterns reflect structural inequities and highlight the importance of equity-focused investments.

Figure 1 illustrates the educational attainment distribution in San Diego County, underscoring both opportunity and challenge. In San Diego, over 40% of adults age 25+ hold at least a bachelor's degree, while just under 20% have only a high school diploma or less. In Imperial, more than half of working-age adults have a high school diploma or less, and fewer than 15% hold a bachelor's degree. These disparities have direct implications for access to quality employment. Moreover, English learners, opportunity youth, and individuals with disabilities across both counties face particular challenges accessing education and training opportunities.

Figure 1: Educational Attainment – San Diego County

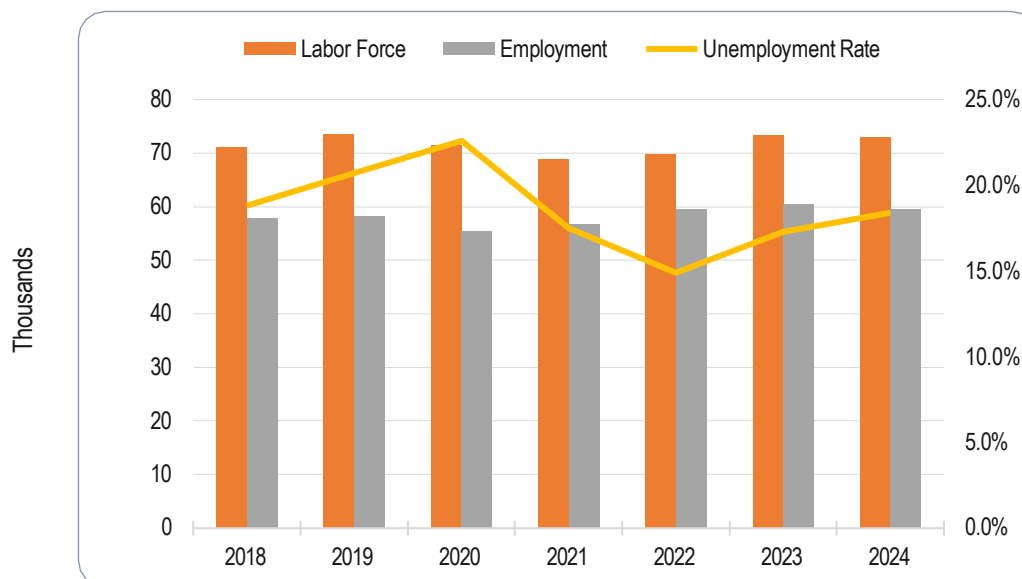


At the regional level, workforce participation patterns are shifting:

- San Diego's labor force participation rate rose from 61.2% in 2019 to 63.4% in 2024, despite a net population decline.
- Employment among women, older adults, and residents of color remains below pre-pandemic levels.
- Imperial's labor market remains segmented by seasonality, limited job diversity, and infrastructure gaps.

Figure 2 presents recent labor force and employment trends in San Diego County from 2018 to 2024. The data show a sharp employment drop during the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a steady recovery in labor force participation and job levels. However, the region has not fully recovered pre-pandemic employment for all population segments, particularly for women and communities of color. The chart emphasizes the continued need for targeted workforce interventions.

Figure 2. Labor Force and Employment Trends – San Diego County, 2018-24



Looking ahead, projected occupational demand through 2030 highlights both opportunity and equity gaps:

- The greatest job growth is expected in Healthcare, Construction, and ICT.
- Only 1% of projected jobs that pay above \$53/hour (enough to support a single parent with one child) are accessible without a bachelor's degree.
- Yet, 34.5% of projected jobs paying at least \$29/hour (supporting two adults working with one child) do not require a bachelor's degree.

Table 3 summarizes the projected alignment between job growth and wage thresholds in San Diego County. It shows that while a substantial number of jobs projected through 2030 offer wages above \$29/hour, relatively few of these are accessible without a bachelor's degree. This reinforces the need to scale high-quality, non-degree training pathways to ensure broader access to family-sustaining employment across the region.

Table 3. Wage Threshold Summary Table (San Diego County)

| Wage Threshold | Projected Jobs (2030) | % of Jobs Requiring < Bach Deg |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| ≥ \$53.53/hr (1 adult + 1 child) | 129,820 | 1.0% |
| ≥ \$49.13/hr (2 adults, 1 working + child) | 229,970 | 6.0% |
| ≥ \$29.06/hr (2 adults working + child) | 528,630 | 34.5% |

San Diego County: Opportunity Youth and Disconnection Trends

San Diego County is home to an estimated 28,817 Opportunity Youth – young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither in school nor working. These youth represent 7.3% of the total 16–24 population in the county, with especially high rates of disconnection in communities such as Lemon Grove, El Cajon, Mid-City San Diego, and South Bay. These patterns of disconnection are deeply tied to place-based disparities in income, education, access to transportation, and exposure to trauma.

Table 4 presents Opportunity Youth counts and rates by Public Use Microdata Area (PUMA), highlighting geographic clusters where youth disconnection is most severe. These localized insights underscore the importance of neighborhood-embedded programming and culturally responsive reengagement strategies.

Table 4: Counts & Rates of Opportunity Youth by San Diego PUMA (ACS 2023)

| PUMA | OY | Total | % OY | Share of OY |
|--|---------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|
| Oceanside & Camp Pendleton | 3,242 | 42,365 | 7.7% | 11.3% |
| San Diego (Central/Mid-City) | 2,706 | 31,899 | 8.5% | 9.4% |
| El Cajon & Santee | 2,594 | 19,969 | 13.0% | 9.0% |
| San Diego (Central/Centre City & Balboa Park) | 2,214 | 17,114 | 12.9% | 7.7% |
| Lemon Grove, La Presa & Spring Valley | 2,183 | 14,158 | 15.4% | 7.6% |
| Chula Vista (W) & National City | 1,943 | 17,814 | 10.9% | 6.7% |
| San Diego (S/Otay Mesa & South Bay) | 1,669 | 14,915 | 11.2% | 5.8% |
| San Diego (SE/Encanto & Skyline) | 1,427 | 17,895 | 8.0% | 5.0% |
| Escondido | 1,394 | 14,825 | 9.4% | 4.8% |
| San Marcos & Escondido (W) | 1,294 | 17,975 | 7.2% | 4.5% |
| Vista | 1,204 | 12,087 | 10.0% | 4.2% |
| San Diego (SW/Central Coastal) | 962 | 19,894 | 4.8% | 3.3% |
| San Diego (NW/Del Mar Mesa) | 916 | 10,660 | 8.6% | 3.2% |
| San Diego (NE/Rancho Bernardo) & Poway | 914 | 9,710 | 9.4% | 3.2% |
| Sweetwater Region-Chula Vista (E) | 896 | 19,831 | 4.5% | 3.1% |
| San Diego (E Central/Navajo) & La Mesa | 810 | 14,241 | 5.7% | 2.8% |
| Fallbrook, Alpine & Valley Center | 666 | 8,081 | 8.2% | 2.3% |
| San Diego (Central/Clairemont & Kearny Mesa) | 619 | 17,411 | 3.6% | 2.1% |
| Lakeside, Winter Gardens & Ramona | 327 | 12,036 | 2.7% | 1.1% |
| San Diego (Central/Mira Mesa & University Heights) | 327 | 33,955 | 1.0% | 1.1% |
| San Diego (NW/San Dieguito) & Encinitas | 316 | 15,271 | 2.1% | 1.1% |
| Carlsbad | 194 | 11,395 | 1.7% | 0.7% |
| Total | 28,817 | 393,501 | 7.3% | 100.0% |

Demographic patterns reveal stark disparities. Latino youth represent 43.6% of all disconnected youth in the county, while Black youth are overrepresented relative to their share of the general population. Nearly 30% of disconnected youth live in households below 150% of the poverty line, and over half are male. These indicators point to the need for targeted interventions that address both economic precarity and identity-based marginalization.

Table 5 summarizes the demographic characteristics of San Diego County's disconnected youth population, reinforcing the call for trauma-informed, equity-centered approaches to youth reengagement.

Table 5: Demographic Characteristics of Disconnected Youth (San Diego County; ACS 2023)

| Age Group | Count | < 150% Pov | Male | Hisp. / Lat | White | Black | Asian | 2+ Races | Other |
|--------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 16-18 | 3,607 | 1,076 | 2,829 | 1,468 | 2,132 | 17 | 49 | 976 | 234 |
| 19-24 | 25,210 | 7,510 | 13,115 | 12,848 | 10,424 | 1,260 | 1,247 | 6,822 | 5,203 |
| All OY | 28,817 | 8,586 | 15,944 | 14,316 | 12,556 | 1,277 | 1,296 | 7,798 | 5,437 |
| % of All OY | | 29.79% | 55.33% | 49.7% | 43.6% | 4.4% | 4.5% | 27.1% | 18.9% |

Workforce boards across the region are committed to designing strategies that address the unique needs of Opportunity Youth through:

- Integrated education and workforce programming that accommodates young people's life circumstances
- Paid work experiences, subsidized employment, and sector-based internships in high-opportunity industries
- Peer navigation and mentorship models that reflect the lived experiences of participants
- Mental health, housing, and transportation supports to increase program retention.

These approaches are grounded in youth development best practices and are co-designed with young adults, community-based organizations, and front-line practitioners. Addressing youth disconnection in San Diego County remains a critical priority for regional equity and long-term labor market vitality.

Imperial County

Imperial County, home to approximately 180,000 residents, represents one of California's most rural, binational, and agriculturally driven economies. Over 88% of the population identifies as Hispanic or Latino, making it one of the most demographically concentrated counties in the state. The population is also significantly younger than the statewide average, with nearly one-third under the age of 20. This youthful, predominantly Latino population represents both an opportunity and a challenge for workforce development: opportunity in the form of untapped talent and demographic growth, and challenge due to entrenched structural barriers in education, transportation, and job access.

Table 6 provides an overview of the county's racial, ethnic, and age distribution. The data reinforce the importance of bilingual service delivery, culturally responsive workforce strategies, and investments in youth-focused career pathways.

Table 6: Population by Race, Ethnicity, and Age – Imperial County

| Race | Total | % |
|---------------------|--------|--------|
| Some Other Race | 15,717 | 54.5% |
| 2+ Races | 7,295 | 25.3% |
| White | 4,003 | 13.9% |
| Amer Ind/Alaska Nat | 899 | 3.1% |
| Asian | 550 | 1.9% |
| Black | 375 | 1.3% |
| Total | 28,839 | 100.0% |

| Ethnicity | Total | % |
|--------------|--------|--------|
| Hisp/Lat | 25,548 | 88.6% |
| Non-Hisp/Lat | 3,291 | 11.4% |
| Total | 28,839 | 100.0% |

| Age Range | Total | % |
|-----------|---------|-------|
| 0 to 9 | 25,536 | 14.3% |
| 10 to 19 | 29,881 | 16.7% |
| 20 to 29 | 25,613 | 14.3% |
| 30 to 39 | 23,142 | 12.9% |
| 40 to 49 | 22,990 | 12.8% |
| 50 to 59 | 18,479 | 10.3% |
| 60 to 69 | 16,548 | 9.2% |
| 70 to 79 | 11,119 | 6.2% |
| 80+ | 5,749 | 3.2% |
| Total | 179,057 | 100% |

Poverty and Economic Barriers

Imperial County has one of the highest poverty rates in California, with more than 25% of residents living below the federal poverty line. These economic disparities intersect with limited transportation infrastructure, housing instability, and digital exclusion – creating barriers to workforce participation that are unique in scale and scope compared to urban counties.

Localized solutions must address both immediate service needs and broader infrastructure investments. Cross-agency partnerships – spanning workforce, education, housing, and social services – will be essential to mitigating these structural challenges.

Table 7: Poverty Rates by Race & Ethnicity – Imperial County (ACS, 2023)

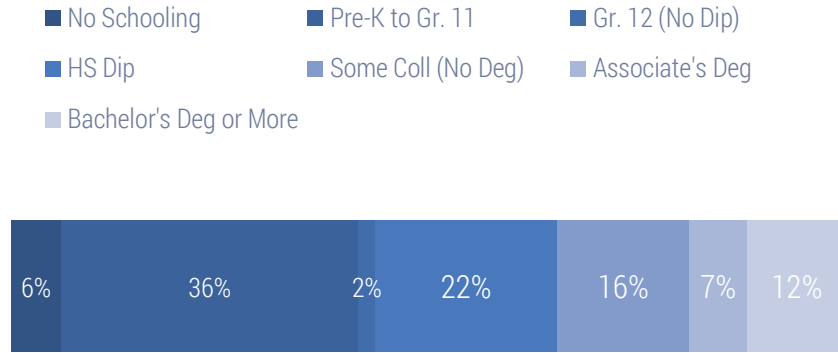
| Race | Poverty Count | Poverty % | Race | Poverty Count | Poverty % |
|---------------------|---------------|-----------|--------------|---------------|-----------|
| Some Other Race | 15,717 | 54.5% | Non-Hisp/Lat | 25,548 | 88.6% |
| 2+ Races | 7,295 | 25.3% | Hisp/Lat | 3,291 | 11.4% |
| White | 4,003 | 13.9% | Total | 28,839 | 100.0% |
| Amer Ind/Alaska Nat | 899 | 3.1% | | | |
| Asian | 550 | 1.9% | | | |
| Black | 375 | 1.3% | | | |
| Total | 28,839 | 100.0% | | | |

Educational Attainment

Imperial County faces a pronounced gap in educational attainment compared to the state average. More than half of working-age adults possess a high school diploma or less, and fewer than 15% hold a bachelor's degree or higher. This dynamic directly limits access to higher-wage, high-growth sectors – particularly those requiring postsecondary credentials or technical certifications.

Strategic investment in adult education, noncredit-to-credit bridge programs, and short-term credential pathways will be critical. Figure 3 displays the educational attainment distribution in Imperial County and highlights the opportunity to expand training options accessible to learners without a four-year degree.

Figure 3. Educational Attainment Distribution – Imperial County (ACS, 2023)

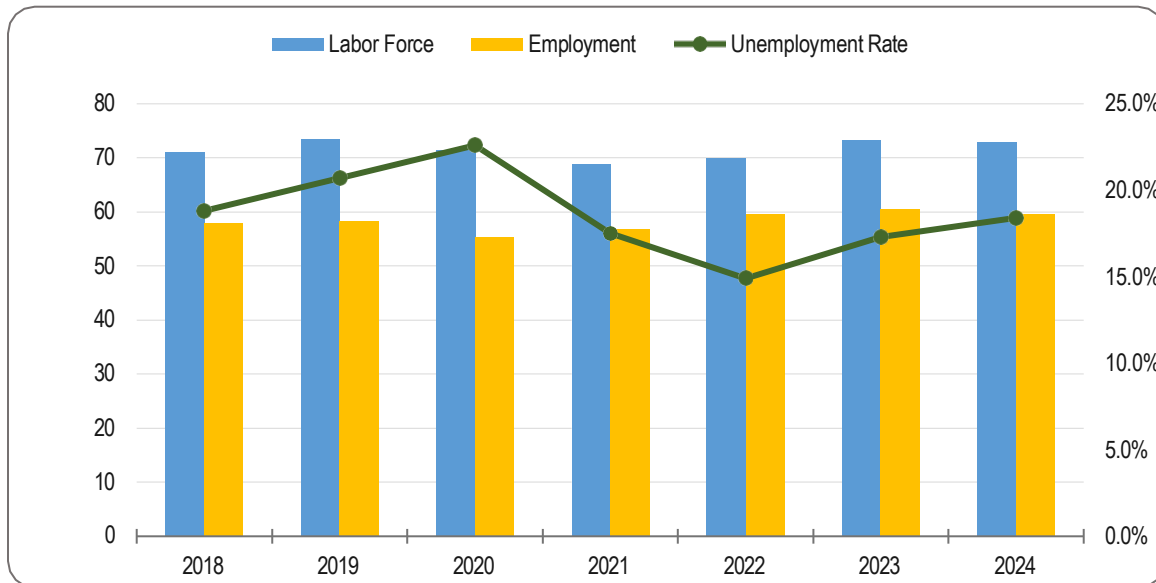


Labor Force and Employment Trends

Imperial County's labor force is shaped by seasonality, geographic isolation, and a relatively narrow employment base. Agricultural employment dominates the regional economy, and unemployment rates remain consistently among the highest in the state. Persistent underemployment – particularly among youth and low-income adults – demands targeted interventions in workforce infrastructure and sector diversification.

Figure 4 illustrates employment trends in the county from 2018 to 2024, including seasonal volatility and COVID- 19-related disruptions. Despite a partial recovery in recent years, job growth remains uneven, and long-term employment stability remains a concern – particularly for young adults, rural residents, and residents without postsecondary credentials.

Figure 4. Labor Force and Employment Trends – Imperial County, 2018-2024



Occupational Demand and Wage Thresholds

Imperial County is projected to support roughly 140,000 jobs by 2030. However, a significant share of these occupations fall below self-sufficiency wage thresholds. Using the MIT Living Wage Calculator, three tiers were analyzed:

- \$38.69/hr for one adult supporting one child
- \$38.27/hr for two adults (one working) with one child

→ \$21.93/hr for two adults (both working) with one child

Table 8 summarizes the distribution of projected 2030 jobs by wage tier and the educational requirements for access. Notably, 67% of occupations meeting the lowest wage threshold are accessible without a bachelor's degree – creating an important opportunity for middle-skill training strategies.

Table 8. Wage Threshold Summary Table (Imperial County)

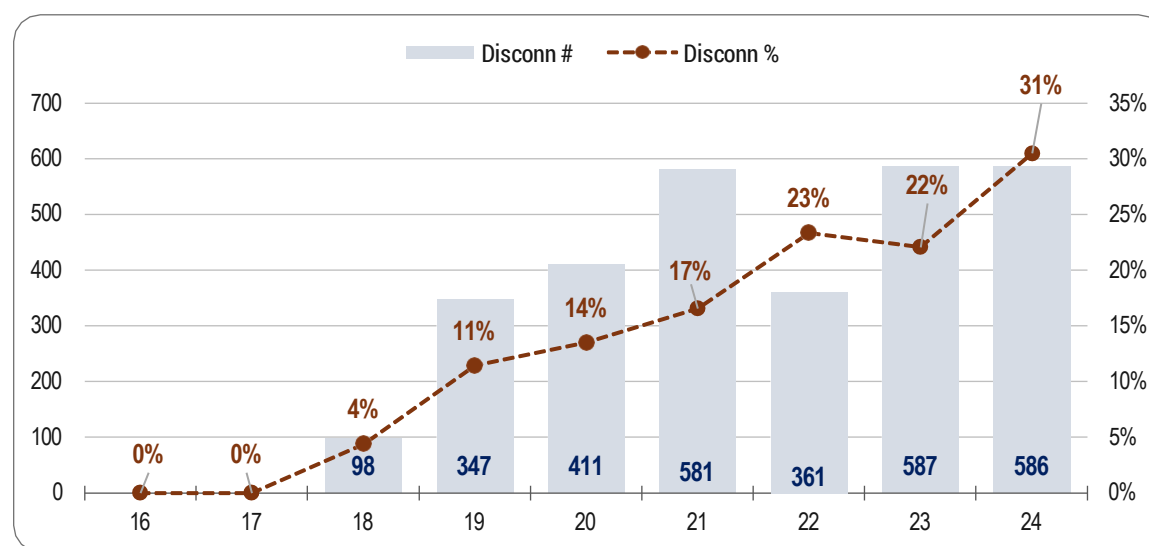
| Wage Threshold | Projected Jobs (2030) | % of Jobs Requiring < Bach Deg |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| ≥ \$38.69/hr (1 adult + 1 child) | 7,640 | 41.0% |
| ≥ \$38.27/hr (2 adults, 1 working + child) | 7,920 | 39.5% |
| ≥ \$29.06/hr (2 adults working + child) | 22,750 | 66.6% |

Targeting these occupations – particularly in transportation, utilities, public safety, and clean energy – should remain a top priority for regional investments.

Opportunity Youth and Disconnection Trends

Youth disconnection remains a pressing concern in Imperial County, particularly among residents aged 19-24. Nearly one-third of 24-year-olds are disconnected from both school and work. This trend is especially severe among American Indian/Alaska Native youth (ages 19-24), who face a disconnection rate exceeding 70%, though their overall population size is small.

Figure 5. Disconnection Counts and Rates by Age (ACS 2023)



Disconnection is closely associated with poverty, Medicaid enrollment, and parenting responsibilities, underscoring the need for trauma-informed, flexible service models. Community-informed programming must also address the unique needs of Latino and rural youth, who comprise the majority of the disconnected population in the region.

Table 9: Demographic Profile of Opportunity Youth – Imperial County

| Characteristic | Estimated Share or Rate | Notes |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Age 16-18 | Low | Lower disconnection rates among teens |
| Age 24 | 31% OY | Highest disconnection rate of any single age group in the county |
| Latino/a | Majority of youth population | Latinos represent the dominant demographic group in the county |
| Amer Ind/Al Nat (16-24) | 41% disconnected (71% for ages 19-24) | Highest disconnection rate among subgroups, but small N (~588) |
| Living in Poverty | 37% of OY (vs. 30% of connected) | Indicates economic vulnerability and need for supportive services |
| Receiving Medicaid | High | Common among disconnected youth; indicator of low income |
| Parenting (raising children) | Notable share | May impact availability for training or work |
| Some college, no degree | Higher employment rate | Represents postsecondary non-completion |
| Associate's degree | Lower employment rate | Surprisingly weak labor market outcomes despite credential |

Together, San Diego and Imperial Counties possess the assets, talent, and political will to build a more inclusive and resilient workforce. Realizing this potential requires a dual strategy that supports innovation- and growth- oriented sectors through aligned training pathways, while also expanding access to high-road jobs for historically underserved populations. Place-based investments must address geographic disparities – particularly in communities facing concentrated poverty and high youth disconnection – and cross-county coordination will be essential to ensure inclusive participation in the clean economy and other emerging sectors. By leveraging shared strengths and addressing long-standing inequities, the Southern Border Region can serve as a statewide model for demand-driven, equity-centered workforce transformation.

REGIONAL INDICATORS

The Southern Border Regional Planning Unit (SBRPU) has strategically selected two indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of the Southern Border Regional Plan, aligning directly with state policy priorities, regional goals on equity, job quality, and responsive employer engagement. Each indicator has defined baseline metrics, clear targets, and robust evaluation strategies, thereby ensuring accountability and transparent tracking of progress.

Selected Indicator 1: Job Quality Improvements

Improving job quality across key sectors – particularly in terms of wages, benefits, career advancement opportunities, and working conditions – is a central priority for the SBRPU. To effectively track regional efforts, the selected indicator focuses explicitly on the number and percentage of job placements meeting the High Road framework criteria. Jobs categorized under this standard must pay a living wage, offer comprehensive benefits, and have demonstrated pathways for upward career mobility.

The SBRPU will establish baseline metrics for the percentage of job placements meeting self-sufficiency wage thresholds, disaggregated by county. These baselines will serve as the foundation for setting improvement targets and measuring

progress over time. The region will work with partners to define and adopt a common self-sufficiency wage methodology, such as the MIT Living Wage Calculator or a similar locally validated benchmark.

By 2028, the region aims to substantially raise the proportion of quality job placements across the economy, with specific targets to be determined based on the established baseline metrics and methodology.

To accomplish this target, the SBRPU will leverage several strategies:

- Embedding equity-weighted performance incentives into service provider contracts to ensure quality placements.
- Strengthening partnerships with employers to co-design training programs that align directly with high-demand, high-quality employment opportunities.
- Focusing training resources and job placement support on identified priority sectors with proven upward mobility potential, including clean energy, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing.
- Increasing employer engagement through sector councils and collaborative planning to enhance job quality standards and ensure industry alignment.
- Promoting apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship programs specifically designed to prepare participants for quality employment opportunities.

Progress will be tracked rigorously through CalJOBS wage records, internal placement tracking systems, and verified wage calculations using the MIT Living Wage Calculator. A regional performance dashboard will consolidate these data sources into actionable insights and help stakeholders monitor changes over time.

Selected Indicator 2: Equity in Access and Outcomes

Ensuring equity in access and outcomes is foundational to the regional strategy. While credential attainment among WIOA Youth is lower than among adults in both counties, this partially reflects longer timelines to completion and the inclusion of in-school youth who are still progressing toward diplomas or other secondary credentials. Nonetheless, these outcomes highlight the importance of tailored supports and extended follow-up for youth participants. The SBRPU has identified persistent gaps in employment and training outcomes, notably for Black, Indigenous, and Latino/a workers, residents of rural communities, and Opportunity Youth. The following table summarizes disaggregated WIOA performance data from 2023 and highlights baseline disparities in credential attainment and job placements.

In Program Year 2023-24, WIOA performance data revealed consistent equity gaps across key indicators. In Imperial County, the credential attainment rate for youth (57.1%) lagged behind adults (65.9%), while San Diego showed a similar disparity (60.2% for youth vs. 74.7% for adults). Measurable Skill Gains were particularly uneven: just 44.7% of youth in San Diego achieved skill gains compared to 75.5% of adults. Median earnings for youth remained under \$4,700 in both counties – less than half the earnings of adults – reinforcing the need for career aligned training and wraparound supports that promote upward mobility.

Recognizing the urgency of addressing these inequities, the regional target is to narrow or completely eliminate outcome disparities by at least 25% by 2028, with annual public reporting to ensure accountability and responsiveness to the community. Achieving this goal requires targeted, culturally responsive interventions:

- Disaggregating all enrollment and outcome data by key demographic variables to precisely monitor progress and adjust strategies.
- Enhancing outreach and engagement strategies through trusted community-based organizations deeply rooted within marginalized communities.

- Providing targeted technical assistance to workforce providers to improve culturally responsive programming and equitable service delivery practices.
- Integrating robust career navigation supports that specifically address barriers faced by underserved populations, such as language proficiency, transportation, and childcare.
- Expanding mobile and digital service delivery models to reach geographically isolated and underserved communities effectively.

Progress toward equity outcomes will be monitored quarterly using regional dashboards and partner-submitted performance data. Regular forums will be held with community stakeholders to ensure accountability and transparency, and insights from these forums will inform iterative strategy adjustments.

Tracking and Evaluation Strategy

Both indicators will be systematically tracked through quarterly regional dashboards, which compile comprehensive partner-submitted performance data. The evaluation approach includes quantitative analysis combined with qualitative assessments – such as employer feedback, stakeholder interviews, and participant surveys – to provide a nuanced understanding of both progress and remaining challenges.

Lessons from the Previous Planning Cycle

In the previous planning cycle, the Southern Border Region identified critical lessons regarding the importance of consistently tracking quality-of-placement metrics and disaggregating outcomes by population subgroups. Earlier planning efforts lacked sufficient granularity in tracking data, leading to challenges in clearly demonstrating impact and accountability to underserved populations.

In response, the SBRPU has established shared dashboards and robust equity frameworks designed explicitly to ensure ongoing plans are grounded in real-time, actionable data. This shift toward SMART indicators – specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound – enables more precise measurement of the region's strategic progress and ensures ongoing accountability to the communities served. Additional lessons include the necessity of clearly defined stakeholder roles and the continuous engagement of community partners to achieve long-term systemic improvements.

By rigorously applying this improved approach, the Southern Border Regional Planning Unit strengthens its ability to drive meaningful change in job quality and equity, setting clear benchmarks that ensure the regional workforce development system remains responsive, transparent, and accountable to all residents.

FOSTERING DEMAND-DRIVEN SKILLS ATTAINMENT

The Southern Border Regional Planning Unit (RPU) has adopted the ten strategic sectors identified in the California Jobs First Economic Blueprint as the foundation for regional workforce development planning. These sectors were selected by the state through an extensive process involving labor market data analysis, stakeholder engagement, and coordination with regional economic development entities. As such, the RPU did not conduct a separate sector selection process but rather affirms the Jobs First priorities as central to the region's workforce development strategy.

These ten sectors provide a framework for organizing investments in career pathway development, employer engagement, training infrastructure, and equity-centered service delivery. They align with both regional economic trends and the need to ensure all communities benefit from California's evolving economy. The Southern Border RPU's approach focuses on using this shared statewide framework while tailoring strategies to reflect the distinct dynamics of San Diego and Imperial Counties.

Priority Sectors for the Southern Border Region

California Jobs First, the state's regional economic strategy, identifies ten priority sectors as essential drivers of inclusive, climate-resilient, and future-ready economies. These sectors are intended to guide investment and coordination across workforce, education, and economic development systems throughout California's 13 economic regions. Rather than developing an independent sector framework, the Southern Border RPU has adopted these ten sectors in full, recognizing their strategic relevance to both San Diego and Imperial Counties.

Each sector was selected at the state level based on rigorous labor market analysis, projected job growth, quality job potential, and stakeholder consultation. The Southern Border RPU's adoption of these sectors ensures that its workforce planning aligns with broader statewide economic transformation efforts while allowing for localized strategy based on the region's unique industrial mix, geography, and populations.

The sectors outlined below serve as a roadmap for targeted training, career pathway development, employer engagement, and regional investment. They represent a shared framework for addressing current workforce gaps and preparing for emerging industry demand:

Figure 6. California Jobs First Priority Sectors in the Southern Border Region



These sectors reflect not only the existing employment base in the region but also areas of projected job growth, state and federal investment alignment (e.g., CHIPS, IRA, infrastructure), and opportunities for developing inclusive, high-quality jobs. The emphasis is on fostering workforce systems that promote upward mobility and shared prosperity across the diverse economic landscapes of both counties.

County Sector Profiles

While the Southern Border Regional Planning Unit affirms all ten of the California Jobs First priority sectors, this section focuses on the five sectors in each county that currently exhibit the highest employment demand, strategic alignment, training infrastructure, and regional significance. These sectors were selected based on regional labor market data, program

availability, employer engagement, and equity relevance. The profile format below presents key details in a consistent table structure to help identify where the region is positioned for success – and where gaps persist.

San Diego County's five priority sectors reflect the county's diversified economy and robust infrastructure for education and training. With strong industry presence in healthcare, clean economy, logistics, advanced manufacturing, and the creative economy, the region benefits from a mix of high employment demand and established workforce pipelines. However, challenges remain – particularly around career-ladder clarity, underrepresentation in certain fields, and the need for stronger employer-aligned curricula. These dynamics shape ongoing efforts to strengthen access, equity, and progression across training pathways.

Table 10: San Diego County Sector Profile

| Sector | Estimated Jobs | Key Occupations (SOC) | Training Availability | Workforce Needs & Gaps |
|------------------------|----------------|---|--|---|
| Healthcare | 47,555 | Registered Nurses (29-1141), Medical Assistants (31-9092), Behavioral Health Counselors (21-1018) | Strong: adult schools, SDWP SUD Apprenticeship, college programs | Severe shortages in behavioral and bilingual care; underrepresentation of men and nontraditional learners |
| Clean Economy | 22,084 | Solar Installers (47-2231), HVAC Techs (49-9021), Energy Auditors (13-1199) | Growing: SD City, Southwestern College | Career ladder clarity lacking; limited bridge programs for ELLs |
| Transport & Logistics | 41,224 | Truck Drivers (53-3032), Freight Clerks (43-5071), Warehouse Associates (53-7062) | AJCC training, CDL prep programs | Employer-aligned curriculum still limited; few apprenticeships and unclear advancement pathways |
| Advanced Manufacturing | 1,658 | CNC Operators (51-9161), Electromechanical Techs (17-3024) | SkillCraft, college mechatronics programs | Employer partnerships limited in public training system; upskilling underdeveloped |
| Creative Economy | 3,062 | Multimedia Artists (27-1014), Graphic Designers (27-1024), Web Developers (15-1254) | Pilots via youth-serving CBOs and K–14 pipeline | Informal sector pathways dominate; employer recognition varies |

Imperial County's five priority sectors reflect the region's evolving position in California's clean energy transition, agriculture economy, and logistics infrastructure. While the county faces challenges such as limited training infrastructure and rural access gaps, it also benefits from unique geographic assets and emerging growth opportunities – particularly in solar energy, lithium extraction, and food production. The following table outlines the most critical workforce and training needs tied to Imperial's leading sectors.

Table 11: Imperial County Sector Profile

| Sector | Estimated Jobs | Key Occupations (SOC) | Training Availability | Workforce Needs & Gaps |
|--------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
|--------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|

| | | | | |
|---------------------------|-------|--|--|--|
| Working Lands & Water | 4,798 | Farmworkers (45-2092), Food Batchmakers (51-3092), Ag Equipment Operators (45-2091) | IVC, noncredit offerings | Aging workforce; few credentialed training pathways beyond entry level |
| Transport & Logistics | 2,384 | Truck Drivers (53-3032), Freight Clerks (43-5071), Warehouse Workers (53-7062) | AJCC, IVC CDL programs | No formal pipeline coordination; cross-border skills alignment needed |
| Healthcare | 1,679 | Medical Assistants (31-9092), LVNs (29-2061), Home Health Aides (31-1121) | Limited: IVC, IVROP; emerging CHW training | Bilingual and rural access gaps; retention and wage competitiveness challenges |
| Clean Economy | 771 | Solar Installers (47-2231), Power Plant Operators (51-8013), Environmental Techs (19-4091) | Limited but growing: IVC, IVROP | Lack of formal apprenticeships; rapid growth exceeds system readiness |
| Tourism & Public Services | 129 | Recreation Attendants (39-3091), Local Government Clerks (43-4031) | On-the-job; limited formal training | Opportunity for earn-and-learn pilots; underserved by sector councils |

In both counties, sector strategies reflect local labor markets while aligning with the broader framework of California Jobs First. San Diego offers sector depth, scale, and training infrastructure, while Imperial represents critical land-based and energy-sector assets that are essential to statewide climate and workforce goals.

Imperial County plays a unique and essential role in California's green energy, agriculture, and border economy. The clean economy – particularly lithium recovery from the Salton Sea and utility-scale solar deployment – is one of the most transformative regional opportunities in the state. Imperial is poised to become a global hub for lithium production, and associated workforce strategies are being developed with urgency.

The county's agricultural production and logistics systems remain a major source of employment, deeply tied to both national food security and binational supply chains. This sector links directly to the "Working Lands and Water" category, which also includes blue economy strategies now emerging through regional coordination with water infrastructure and environmental resilience projects.

Tourism and public-sector employment are also significant, and healthcare workforce needs are growing as the region faces shortages of bilingual and culturally responsive providers. The county's role as a logistics corridor – with high-volume border crossings and goods movement – makes Transport and Logistics a particularly high-impact sector. While manufacturing is more limited compared to San Diego, growth in food processing and agtech technologies are opening new possibilities.

Table 12: Regional Economic Integration

| Integration Theme | Description | Cross-County Relevance |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Clean Economy Workforce | Lithium extraction in Imperial aligns with green infrastructure and solar/EV grid upgrades in San Diego | Shared pipeline needs for energy techs, solar installers, and environmental scientists |
| Healthcare Workforce | Behavioral health, bilingual care, and provider shortages exist in both counties | Joint need for SUD apprenticeships, CHW training, and regional placement coordination |
| Logistics & Border Trade | I-8 corridor and port-of-entry activity connect goods movement systems across counties | Shared demand for CDL licensing, logistics tech, and safety training standards |
| Cross-System Planning | SDWP and ICWDB align on sector strategy and training priorities through joint planning and shared sector council input | Unified narrative for CA Jobs First investment and performance tracking |
| Employer Engagement | Regional employers and associations (e.g., chambers, IVEDC, EDCSD) engage on workforce issues spanning both counties | Opportunity to expand multi-county sector convenings and pre-apprenticeship pilots |

Training and Employment Program Alignment

Each of the ten Jobs First sectors is either currently supported or targeted for expanded support through local and regional workforce programs. Examples include:

- Clean Economy: Pre-apprenticeship programs in solar and energy efficiency (Imperial); green construction partnerships in San Diego; emerging lithium workforce planning.
- Life Sciences and Manufacturing: SkillCraft programs in biotechnology and mechatronics; partnerships with biotech employers for career pathway co-design.
- Healthcare: Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Apprenticeship program; CHW training pilots; expansions in CNA, LVN, and behavioral health technician tracks.
- Transport and Logistics: Truck driver training and warehousing programs delivered through AJCCs and college partners; efforts to improve CDL licensing access.
- Creative Economy: Digital media and graphic design training pilots supported by youth-focused CBOs and schools.

Several additional efforts are underway to strengthen cross-sector linkages and ensure stackable pathways between entry-level and advanced credentials. These include dual enrollment programs in clean energy and healthcare, sector-specific bridge programs for English learners, and expansion of employer-based earn-and-learn strategies.

Current Gaps and Strategic Opportunities

While the alignment with Jobs First is strong, several gaps persist:

Training availability in Imperial County lags behind sector growth potential, especially in clean energy and healthcare.

Advanced Manufacturing and High-Tech sectors need stronger publicly funded training pipelines and more equitable access.

Sector councils and employer advisory structures are uneven across the two counties, limiting coordinated sector leadership. Earn-and-learn models are underrepresented in several sectors (e.g., creative economy, logistics) despite being suitable for youth and transitional workers.

To address these issues, the RPU will:

- Strengthen sector council coordination with a focus on employer engagement and workforce equity.
- Build sector-specific crosswalks to guide curriculum development, career navigation, and participant advancement.
- Invest in training infrastructure for Imperial County and explore co-funding with state and federal climate investments.
- Expand intermediary partnerships to scale work-based learning and apprenticeship across priority sectors.

This sector prioritization strategy reflects the Southern Border RPU's commitment to data-informed investment, equity in access, and alignment with statewide economic and environmental transformation. The region is well positioned to lead in both traditional and emerging industries – provided that training systems, employer partnerships, and population-specific supports continue to evolve in tandem with labor market demands.

ENABLING UPWARD MOBILITY FOR ALL CALIFORNIANS

The Southern Border Regional Planning Unit (SBRPU) is committed to enabling upward mobility for all Californians by ensuring that all individuals – especially those with barriers to employment – can access meaningful, family-sustaining careers. This commitment is rooted in a comprehensive approach that integrates navigation, wraparound supports, aligned training systems, and employer partnerships to help residents move from disconnected or underemployed to economically self-sufficient.

Integrated Navigation and Career Services

Career navigation is a critical pillar of upward mobility. Across the region, AJCCs, community-based organizations, and WIOA partners provide personalized career guidance, job matching, and connection to training. The SBRPU supports the use of dedicated navigators who help participants identify career goals, understand labor market information, enroll in training, and persist through employment transitions.

Digital navigation tools like Partner Portal and MyNextMove have strengthened this ecosystem by offering real-time access to opportunities, allowing job seekers to track progress, communicate with staff, and explore career ladders. These systems promote transparency, empower users, and help staff prioritize outreach to those needing more intensive support.

Wraparound Services and Co-Enrollment

Many participants face significant personal and structural barriers. To ensure no one is left behind, the region integrates wraparound services into the workforce experience, including:

- Subsidized childcare and dependent care
- Transportation assistance and transit passes
- Mental health and trauma recovery support
- Housing assistance and access to public benefits
- Digital literacy and device access

Wraparound supports are coordinated through **co-enrollment models** and **braided funding**, including partnerships with CalWORKs, Title II adult education providers, and community health networks. These models ensure that job seekers with multiple needs receive services without duplication and with clear accountability.

Employer-Aligned Pathways and Advancement

The SBRPU is working with employers and sector councils to formalize and communicate advancement opportunities within regional growth sectors. Efforts focus on developing stackable credential pathways, linking training progression to wage and role advancement. For example:

- Clean Economy: Entry-level solar installation linked to energy auditing and HVAC licensing
- Healthcare: CNA to LVN to behavioral health technician tracks, with SUD and CHW apprenticeship pathways
- Logistics: Warehouse roles to freight tech and CDL-based transport operations

Many of these pathways are supported by community colleges, pre-apprenticeship programs, and earn-and-learn models, which combine wages and work experience with structured skill development.

Focus on Job Quality and Retention

Upward mobility is not only about getting a job – it is about keeping a good one. The SBRPU emphasizes job quality in both placement strategies and follow-up services. Job quality indicators include:

- Living wages based on family needs
- Benefits access (healthcare, leave, retirement)
- Predictable scheduling
- Worker voice and advancement potential

Retention is supported through ongoing coaching, reengagement after layoff, and collaboration with employers to adjust roles or identify upskilling needs. The region's tracking systems allow staff to monitor participant outcomes after exit and offer support as needed to maintain progress.

Serving Priority Populations

Specialized interventions help ensure upward mobility reaches all communities. Examples include:

- Peer mentor programs for Opportunity Youth and young parents
- Gender-responsive training and reentry support for justice-involved individuals
- Embedded bilingual navigation in communities with high concentrations of English learners
- Inclusive service design for individuals with disabilities, including assistive technology and accessibility audits

These programs are often co-designed with community partners and include trauma-informed and culturally competent practices.

Coordination and Accountability

The SBRPU works to ensure that the full system – across counties and providers – shares responsibility for upward mobility. This includes:

- Coordinated planning among SDWP, ICWDB, and regional partners
- Shared outcome dashboards and learning collaboratives
- Contractual requirements for equitable outcomes and career advancement metrics
- Alignment with high road principles and California's Master Plan for Career Education

Together, these strategies reflect a unified, system-level commitment to upward mobility – not as an aspirational slogan, but as a measurable, actionable priority. As workforce systems evolve to meet new economic realities, the Southern Border Region is positioning itself to ensure that residents do not just access jobs – but build lifelong careers that provide dignity, stability, and opportunity.

CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

The Southern Border Regional Planning Unit (SBRPU) recognizes that climate and environmental sustainability are not only urgent global imperatives but also significant economic and workforce opportunities. The region is home to several of California's most climate-vulnerable populations, and also to some of the state's most promising clean energy assets – including Imperial County's emerging lithium economy, the solar-rich deserts of the southeast, and the energy transition infrastructure developing across San Diego County.

Addressing climate change requires a coordinated response that not only reduces emissions and supports sustainability but also ensures that workers and communities can equitably benefit from the green economy. For the Southern Border Region, this means strengthening both the supply side (training pipelines, sector infrastructure) and the demand side (quality jobs, inclusive hiring) of the clean economy labor market.

A Regional Clean Economy Strategy

The SBRPU is advancing a coordinated strategy to prepare the regional workforce for the transition to a low-carbon economy. The region has adopted the California Jobs First framework, which emphasizes clean energy generation, grid modernization, energy efficiency, sustainable construction, and related infrastructure investment. These sectors are expected to drive substantial job growth over the next decade.

Imperial County is uniquely positioned to support California's clean energy future. Lithium recovery from the Salton Sea – often referred to as "Lithium Valley" – is poised to become a globally significant source of battery-grade lithium for electric vehicles and grid storage. Investments in this sector are projected to expand sharply, generating new demand for electrical technicians, plant operators, environmental scientists, and geotechnical engineers. However, this growth will require a corresponding buildout of workforce training capacity, especially in Imperial's rural and underserved communities.

San Diego County, by contrast, offers depth in clean tech, energy storage, building decarbonization, and sustainable construction. Programs supporting HVAC upgrades, solar installation, and energy efficiency retrofits already exist, but scaling these programs to meet demand will require deeper employer alignment, updated curricula, and expanded apprenticeship infrastructure.

To guide this expansion, the SBRPU is investing in regional sector strategies, engaging employers and education partners in co-designing training models, and aligning clean economy career pathways with equity and inclusion goals. This includes connecting K–12 and community college students to pre-apprenticeship opportunities, integrating sustainability into existing CTE and workforce training programs, and working with regional planning and economic development agencies to ensure investments align with workforce capacity.

Workforce System Contributions to Climate Resilience

In addition to preparing workers for clean energy jobs, the region's workforce system contributes to climate resilience in several ways:

- Promoting green skills in traditional occupations (e.g., water conservation in construction, sustainable agriculture techniques)
- Partnering with K–12 and higher education to promote environmental literacy
- Coordinating with local governments on climate action planning and infrastructure funding
- Designing inclusive pathways for frontline and historically marginalized communities to access green careers
- Supporting reskilling and transition supports for workers impacted by industry shifts, including displaced fossil fuel workers

The SBRPU also recognizes that climate resilience is a matter of equity. Low-income and rural communities in both San Diego and Imperial Counties are more likely to be affected by extreme heat, water scarcity, and natural disasters. Climate investments must be distributed equitably and include strong local and targeted hire provisions. Regional efforts must ensure that residents facing historical and structural disadvantage are prioritized in workforce development and hiring pipelines.

Strategic Investments and Program Examples

Current and planned initiatives contributing to regional climate and workforce goals include:

- Solar and energy efficiency pre-apprenticeship programs in Imperial County (in partnership with IVROP and IVC)
- Green construction initiatives and decarbonization projects led by San Diego's community colleges and workforce intermediaries
- Lithium workforce planning convenings supported by Imperial Valley economic development organizations
- Sector council coordination with clean energy employers to define competencies, establish career ladders, and build cross-training models
- Cross-agency coordination with housing and transportation authorities to align workforce planning with climate-resilient infrastructure investments

The Southern Border Region is also pursuing expanded use of High Road Training Partnerships (HRTPs) and Climate Forward workforce models in line with CWDB priorities. These efforts embed labor standards, equity benchmarks, and community voice into climate workforce planning, ensuring that clean energy investments produce not just jobs – but quality, sustainable careers accessible to all.

These efforts reflect the region's growing role in meeting state and national sustainability goals. The Southern Border RPU is committed to integrating climate-aligned strategies into all aspects of workforce development – from training and employer engagement to supportive services and regional planning. As California accelerates toward a climate-resilient economy, the region will continue to lead in preparing an inclusive workforce capable of powering the transition. (SBRPU) recognizes that climate and environmental sustainability are not only urgent global imperatives but also significant economic and workforce opportunities. The region is home to several of California's most climate-vulnerable populations, and also to some of the state's most promising clean energy assets – including Imperial County's emerging lithium economy, the solar-rich deserts of the southeast, and the energy transition infrastructure developing across San Diego County.

A Regional Clean Economy Strategy

The SBRPU is advancing a coordinated strategy to prepare the regional workforce for the transition to a low-carbon economy. The region has adopted the California Jobs First framework, which emphasizes clean energy generation, grid modernization, energy efficiency, sustainable construction, and related infrastructure investment. These sectors are expected to drive substantial job growth over the next decade.

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EQUITY AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

The Southern Border Regional Planning Unit (SBRPU) is committed to advancing equity and economic justice by designing and delivering workforce development strategies that prioritize historically marginalized populations. This commitment is embedded throughout the regional plan – from indicator design and stakeholder engagement to sector strategies and service delivery models – and is informed by the realities of systemic exclusion that many San Diego and Imperial County residents continue to face.

Disaggregated Data and Equity Analysis

The region actively tracks disparities in outcomes by race, ethnicity, age, geography, gender, and other demographic variables. As documented in Section II, youth, rural residents, Latino/a and Black workers, and Opportunity Youth continue to experience lower credential attainment, lower measurable skill gains, and lower median earnings compared to their peers. These disparities are not coincidental; they reflect structural inequities in access to education, digital tools, employer networks, and social services.

To confront these inequities, the SBRPU applies an equity lens to all performance metrics and planning strategies. Key practices include:

- Regular disaggregation of performance data by population group
- Community-led validation of equity goals and benchmarks
- Prioritization of investment in high-need, low-opportunity areas
- Alignment with equity commitments in the California State Plan and Jobs First framework

Equity in Program and Service Design

Workforce programs across the region are explicitly designed to meet the needs of communities that have historically been underserved or excluded. Examples include:

- Culturally responsive training curricula developed with trusted community-based organizations Trauma-informed navigation and coaching models
- Co-enrollment partnerships with agencies focused on housing, food security, behavioral health, and disability services
- Multilingual outreach, navigation, and instructional services to increase engagement and persistence among English learners

Equity-centered program design also means lifting up participant voice. The region regularly engages job seekers through surveys, focus groups, and community forums – especially young adults, parents, individuals with disabilities, and justice-involved residents – to ensure services are relevant and responsive.

Inclusive Access to Sector Strategies

The region's sector strategies explicitly focus on expanding access to high-road jobs for populations with systemic barriers. This includes building bridge programs for individuals with low literacy or basic skills, expanding pre-apprenticeship pipelines that include supportive services, and recruiting from high-disconnection neighborhoods and rural census tracts.

Sectors prioritized for inclusive access include:

- Healthcare, where CHW and SUD tracks provide onramps to underrepresented groups
- Clean Economy, which is expanding training access through IVROP, community colleges, and local energy firms
- Logistics and Transportation, where AJCCs are embedding equity practices in CDL and warehousing pathways

Community Engagement and Equity Governance

Equity is not only a service design principle but a governance commitment. The region integrates community voice into strategic planning and implementation through:

- Community advisory councils
- Regional forums and listening sessions
- Youth and peer mentor leadership opportunities
- Transparent reporting of disaggregated outcomes to stakeholders

These mechanisms ensure that equity is embedded in both the goals and the processes of the regional workforce system.

Alignment with Statewide Priorities

The SBRPU's equity approach is fully aligned with the California Workforce Development Board's High Road vision, Jobs First framework, and the Master Plan for Career Education. These frameworks emphasize:

- Centering equity in planning and evaluation
- Investing in underserved regions and communities
- Promoting inclusive and worker-centered training design
- Measuring success through equity-adjusted outcomes

The Southern Border Region's equity strategy reflects a commitment to not only reducing disparities but also transforming the systems that produce them. Through targeted investments, inclusive governance, and systemic accountability, the region is advancing economic justice as a central outcome of workforce development.

ALIGNING, COORDINATING, AND INTEGRATING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The Southern Border Regional Planning Unit (SBRPU), consisting of the San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP) and the Imperial County Workforce Development Board (ICWDB), operates with a unified vision for a high-impact, coordinated, and equity-centered workforce system. This vision is implemented through formal regional agreements, shared data systems, integrated service delivery, and strong collaboration across WIOA titles and partner programs.

Regional Governance and Alignment

The SBRPU maintains a governance structure that includes regular joint planning sessions, data sharing agreements, and coordination across procurement cycles. The SDWP and ICWDB collaborate on the development of sector strategies, performance dashboards, equity goals, and alignment with state policy priorities including the California Jobs First framework, the Master Plan for Career Education, and the CWDB's High Road vision.

Joint staffing arrangements for regional planning functions – such as research, employer engagement, and training development – have streamlined coordination and allowed the two boards to function as a unified system in areas of regional significance.

Coordination Across WIOA Titles and Core Programs

Workforce services are delivered in coordination with Title I (Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth), Title II (Adult Education and Literacy), Title III (Employment Services), and Title IV (Vocational Rehabilitation) programs. The SBRPU collaborates with these programs to provide cross-referrals, co-enrollment, and integrated case management.

Partners coordinate on:

- Intake and eligibility processes
- Co-enrollment to align funding and support
- Shared use of CalJOBS and other regional databases
- Jointly hosted job fairs, workshops, and events

Each board has MOUs and Infrastructure Funding Agreements in place with core partners. These agreements are reviewed annually to ensure relevance and to adjust based on funding levels, policy shifts, and participant needs.

Shared Service Delivery and Data Infrastructure

The SBRPU has adopted common digital tools (e.g., Partner Portal, MyNextMove, regional dashboards) that streamline service coordination and ensure shared visibility into participant progress. This infrastructure allows for:

- Tracking of referrals and service utilization
- Outcome alignment across agencies
- Real-time performance monitoring by region, site, or population

In addition, both workforce boards are aligning procurement and contract oversight strategies to ensure consistency in service quality, equity benchmarks, and outcome targets.

Program Integration with Public and Community Partners

Beyond the core WIOA titles, the SBRPU has built strong relationships with other systems impacting economic mobility. These include:

- CalWORKs and SNAP E&T
- County health and behavioral health departments
- Continuums of Care (housing and homelessness)
- Community colleges and adult schools
- Community-based organizations focused on justice-involved individuals, immigrants, and disconnected youth

These relationships support a "no wrong door" service model in which participants can enter the system through any partner and be connected to the full menu of workforce supports available in the region.

Continuous Improvement and Shared Learning

To maintain high-quality and adaptive service delivery, the SBRPU invests in ongoing training and technical assistance for frontline staff and partner organizations. This includes:

- Joint training academies for case managers and navigators
- Regional convenings on topics such as trauma-informed care, equity, and sector strategies
- Shared evaluation strategies, including mystery shopping, participant satisfaction surveys, and performance audits

Both SDWP and ICWDB use performance data to drive decision-making and provide technical assistance to underperforming sites. Regional learning collaboratives are used to identify promising practices and scale innovations.

Commitment to a Unified, Participant-Centered System

Aligning, coordinating, and integrating programs and services is not simply about efficiency – it is about creating a seamless and empowering experience for job seekers. The SBRPU is committed to reducing fragmentation, eliminating unnecessary duplication, and ensuring that all residents – regardless of where they enter the system – receive the guidance, training, and support they need to achieve lasting economic security.

This shared commitment is foundational to the region's ability to implement its vision for equity, sustainability, upward mobility, and demand-driven workforce development.



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We provide equal opportunity for our programs, services and employment. Auxiliary aids and services for individuals with disabilities are available upon request.
Rev. 2025.05