



# STRATEGIC PLANNING REPORT

PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2025-2030



**Workforce**  
Santa Cruz County

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP



**ANDY STONE, DIRECTOR**  
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD

## **Dear Community Members, Partners, and Stakeholders,**


We are excited to share with you the Santa Cruz County Workforce Development Board's Strategic Plan for 2025–2030. This plan represents our shared commitment to building a workforce system that provides fair access, meets real community needs, and opens doors of opportunity for everyone who lives and works here.

Over the past year, we engaged deeply with residents, job seekers, employers, educators, and community partners from across Santa Cruz County. We listened carefully to their experiences, their challenges, their resilience, and their hopes for a better system. What emerged clearly is a call to action, grounded in three essential priorities:

- **Job Quality & Economic Mobility** – Connecting residents to stable, good-paying jobs that provide genuine pathways for growth and dignity.
- **Employer and Small Business Engagement** – Building stronger relationships with our local businesses, particularly small and mid-sized employers, who form the heart of our local economy.
- **Skills Gaps & Training Alignment** – Making sure that training opportunities match the real needs of employers, especially in our county's fastest-growing industries.



**ROB MORSE, CHAIR**  
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD



These priorities reflect the real experiences of our neighbors and address the challenges we see every day. Together, they offer us a practical roadmap to build a more inclusive and effective workforce system, one that truly benefits all of us.

We know this vision can only become a reality through collaboration. This is not the work of one agency alone, but a shared effort that demands ongoing engagement, accountability, and partnership across our entire community. As we move forward, we warmly invite you to join us in this meaningful work.

On behalf of the Santa Cruz County Workforce Development Board, thank you for your commitment, your collaboration, and your dedication to building a more just and thriving local economy.

With gratitude,

**Andy Stone**

Director, Workforce Development Board  
Santa Cruz County

**Rob Morse**

Chair, Workforce Development Board  
Santa Cruz County





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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The Santa Cruz County Workforce Development Board (SCCWDB) has developed this 2025-2030 strategic plan to chart a bold and actionable path forward for workforce development in the region. In a time marked by rapid economic transformation, affordability challenges, and growing inequities in access to opportunity, the Board recognized the need for a forward-looking, equity-centered roadmap to guide investments and partnerships over the next five years.

To support this effort, SCCWDB contracted New Ways to Work to lead the planning process, facilitate stakeholder engagement, and support the Board in identifying and prioritizing its most urgent focus areas. Between January and April 2025, the project team conducted 20 stakeholder interviews, 38 job seeker surveys, 13 community surveys, 11 facilitated sessions, and 3 targeted SWOT exercises. These were combined with labor market analysis and regional economic data to form a comprehensive view of the county's workforce system.

From this process, seven strategic priority areas were identified to reflect the community's needs, the Board's leadership vision, and regional economic opportunity. The full list of priority areas is included in Appendix A. Among these, the SCCWDB formally selected three top priorities to anchor its strategic direction:

1. **Job Quality & Economic Mobility:** Focused on ensuring that placements lead to long-term, living-wage jobs with upward mobility.
2. **Employer and Small Business Engagement:** Aimed at deepening employer partnerships and supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs as both customers and contributors to workforce development.
3. **Skills Gaps & Training Alignment:** Addresses the disconnect between training offerings and real-world job requirements, especially in high-growth sectors.

These priorities reflect both systemic needs and lived experience. The workforce system must not only meet hiring demands – it must also ensure that job seekers, especially those from underserved communities, can access meaningful and sustainable employment. Residents from across the county voiced challenges related to housing instability, digital access, language barriers, and systemic exclusion



At the same time, employers cited persistent gaps in skilled labor, difficulty navigating training systems, and a need for faster, more responsive partnerships. Bridging these perspectives was a core aim of the strategic planning process.

To bring these priorities to life, the Board adopted a new framework grounded in breakthrough objectives, measurable 2030 goals, and progress indicators. For instance, under Job Quality & Economic Mobility, the Board aims to significantly increase the share of job placements that meet or exceed the self-sufficiency wage, ensuring that workforce investments lead to lasting economic stability for local residents.

These strategic directions are informed not only by engagement and labor market data, but also by alignment with the broader statewide and regional ecosystem. This plan reinforces the priorities of the California Workforce Development Board's High Road Training Partnership model, the California Jobs First Economic Blueprint, and the North Central Coast Regional Plan. In particular, it centers equity as a foundational principle – not a separate goal – by embedding inclusive outreach, wraparound services, and system accountability throughout the implementation approach.

Importantly, this plan is structured using a framework that aligns with SCCWDB's existing Operational Plan format. Each priority area includes specific goals, strategies to achieve those goals, and time-bound targets to track progress. This alignment ensures that the strategic plan can be operationalized effectively and that outcomes can be monitored through SCCWDB's ongoing performance review and reporting structure.

The next phase of this work will focus on implementation and refinement. A final round of community validation and Board review should take place by Fall 2025. During this time, SCCWDB will also work with local partners and providers to align service delivery, resource allocation, and accountability mechanisms with the goals and targets outlined in this plan. Over the next five years, SCCWDB will report regularly on progress and adapt strategies as needed to respond to economic shifts, demographic trends, and community needs.

This plan represents not just a roadmap, but a collective commitment – to high-quality jobs, to equity, and to systems that work for people. With clear priorities and a shared sense of purpose, SCC is positioned to lead with intention and to ensure that all residents have the opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, a thriving local economy.

# INTRODUCTION & **STRATEGIC FRAMING**

The Santa Cruz County Workforce Development Board (SCCWDB) plays a critical leadership role in shaping the region’s workforce development landscape. As the county navigates a post-pandemic labor market, widening equity gaps, and accelerating sectoral change, SCCWDB is responsible for ensuring that local workforce systems are not only responsive to employer demand but also equitable, accessible, and aligned with broader economic strategies.

This 2025-2030 strategic planning process marks a key moment of reflection and direction-setting. With support from planning partner New Ways to Work, SCCWDB launched a comprehensive effort to assess system strengths, identify shared priorities, and build a forward-looking roadmap for action. From the outset, the process has centered equity and inclusion, aiming to elevate community voice and integrate data with lived experience.

The planning approach was designed to blend engagement, research, and board-driven decision-making. Between January and April 2025, New Ways to Work conducted 20 stakeholder interviews, 38 job seeker surveys, 13 community surveys, 11 public and partner engagement sessions, and 3 SWOT analyses. These inputs were combined with labor market analysis and regional economic data to inform a shared understanding of current conditions and opportunities.



Importantly, the process was grounded in listening. Rather than beginning with a static framework or policy checklist, SCCWDB and its partners made space to surface the insights, frustrations, and aspirations of community members, service providers, employers, and frontline staff. Voices from both North and South County highlighted systemic challenges in workforce accessibility, digital connectivity, career mobility, and program navigation. These challenges are not new, but the planning process made them newly visible – offering a path to shift from awareness to action.

Equity was not treated as an isolated theme but woven throughout every component of the planning effort. Special attention was paid to reaching underserved groups, including Spanish-speaking communities, justice-involved individuals, youth disconnected from school or work, immigrants, and people with disabilities. The process also examined how structural barriers – such as housing insecurity, lack of transportation, and child care access – impact the ability of residents to participate in training and secure sustainable employment. These equity considerations were central to the formation of both the engagement strategy and the Board’s decision-making framework.

The strategic planning process unfolded in stages. After gathering input and synthesizing key themes, the SCCWDB held a full board strategy session on April 16, 2025. During this facilitated session, board members reviewed findings, discussed emerging themes, and participated in a structured prioritization exercise using the Nominal Group Technique (NGT). This method enabled each board member to independently assess and rank the most pressing challenges – and then work collaboratively to group and consolidate their perspectives.

Through that process, seven strategic priority areas were identified. These included long-standing concerns like system navigation and youth engagement, as well as more recent emphases like entrepreneurship support and digital skills. The complete list of these seven areas is included in Appendix A. While all seven remain relevant to the future of workforce development in Santa Cruz County (SCC), the Board reached strong consensus on three top priorities to anchor its strategic direction moving forward:

1. **Job Quality & Economic Mobility:** Focused on ensuring that placements lead to long-term, living-wage jobs with upward mobility.
2. **Employer and Small Business Engagement:** Aimed at deepening employer partnerships and supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs as both customers and contributors to workforce development.
3. **Skills Gaps & Training Alignment:** Addresses the disconnect between training offerings and real-world job requirements, especially in high-growth sectors.



These three priorities reflect the Board's desire to rebalance the system – ensuring it remains employer-responsive while centering job seekers and community need. They also represent areas of opportunity where SCCWDB can lead regionally, align with state-level frameworks, and drive measurable improvement in workforce outcomes.

Over the months following the April session, SCCWDB, New Ways to Work, and community partners began to develop draft goals, strategies, and targets aligned with each of the top three priorities. These components are designed to bring focus and accountability to the plan, and to create a structure that aligns well with SCCWDB's existing Operational Plan format. While these strategic components have not yet been formally adopted, they reflect the best available synthesis of board vision, stakeholder voice, and system potential. They are presented in this report to inform future implementation planning and Board deliberation.



This plan is being developed at a time of significant transformation in the broader workforce development field. Across the state and country, workforce boards are being called to lead not only in program coordination but also in equity strategy, systems alignment, and regional economic development. SCC is no exception. The strategic plan presented here is intended to serve as a vehicle for that leadership – a roadmap that reflects shared values, trusted partnerships, and a strong foundation of community input.

In the chapters that follow, this report outlines the full planning process, presents a detailed breakdown of the final strategic priorities, and documents the draft goals and strategies developed thus far. It also identifies how these priorities connect to regional sector needs, state policy direction, and SCCWDB's internal performance and contracting structures. As the plan moves into its next phase – community validation, implementation design, and integration with WIOA and state plan alignment – SCCWDB will continue to serve as a convener, advocate, and driver of workforce equity and economic mobility for all SCC residents.

# FINAL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES & DIRECTION

At the April 16, 2025 board engagement session, board members selected seven strategic priority areas that reflect the most pressing opportunities and challenges in the region's workforce system. These priorities emerged through a combination of deep community engagement, data analysis, and structured board deliberation. From this list, the Board identified three top priorities to serve as the primary focus for goal setting, strategy development, and resource alignment in the 2025-2030 strategic plan.

A streamlined framework with four interconnected elements was developed (see Figure 1 below): Priority Areas that capture high-level challenges or opportunities; Breakthrough Objectives that articulate bold outcomes for 2030; concrete Goals that provide time-bound benchmarks; and focused Measures that monitor progress and drive continuous improvement. This structure establishes a clear long-term vision while creating flexibility for year-to-year collaboration with staff and partners on implementation.

**Figure 1.** Strategic Planning Framework



The following section presents an in-depth focus on the three strategic priorities selected by the Board for immediate and sustained action. Each of these priorities reflects an intersection of labor market need, community voice, and system-level opportunity. By concentrating resources and strategies in these areas, SCCWDB aims to generate meaningful, measurable improvements in workforce outcomes across the county.

## **Priority Area 1: Job Quality and Economic Mobility**

This priority area represents a foundational pillar of the SCCWDB's long-term vision. It addresses not just whether residents are working, but whether they are in jobs that lead to lasting stability and growth.

### **Framing and Importance**

SCC's high cost of living, housing constraints, and reliance on seasonal or low-wage employment create a mismatch between worker qualifications and job quality. While the region has a relatively well-educated population, many residents are employed in jobs that do not provide living wages, benefits, or career mobility. In fact, local labor market data shows that 39.6% of jobs require only a high school diploma or less, while only 16.2% of the population falls into that educational bracket – indicating widespread underemployment.

Throughout interviews, community sessions, and board discussion, one theme echoed loudly: the workforce system must move beyond basic job placement and instead focus on connecting people to good jobs – those that are stable, upwardly mobile, and sustainable in Santa Cruz's economic environment. A community-based provider put it plainly: "It's not about getting someone a job. It's about getting them a job they can live on – and grow from."

This priority is directly aligned with the California Workforce Development Board's High Road Training Partnership framework and the California Jobs First Economic Blueprint. It also reflects SCCWDB's operational commitment to supporting economic mobility, particularly for historically excluded populations. Stakeholders called for a system that creates multiple entry points into quality jobs – including self-employment, entrepreneurship, and sector-based pathways – and tracks placement quality, not just quantity.

The following strategic priority areas – each with a defined objective, goal, and set of measures – were informed by input from stakeholders, community partners, workforce system participants, and SCCWDB board members, staff, and leadership. Together, these areas reflect a multi-pronged approach to advancing workforce development efforts beyond job placement alone, emphasizing long-term economic security, equity, and upward mobility.



## Priority Area 1: Breakthrough Objective, Goal, and Measures

The strategic focus for this priority centers on improving job placement outcomes by increasing the number of participants who secure high-quality jobs that offer self-sufficient wages, benefits, and long-term mobility. The goal associated with this objective is designed to shift the system's emphasis from placement volume to placement quality, while deepening partnerships with employers committed to equitable employment practices.

**Figure 2.** Increasing Access to High-Quality Jobs with Upward Mobility



This focus area reflects both the quantitative and qualitative inputs from the Board's April session and the broader stakeholder community. Employer representatives, particularly from healthcare and clean energy, underscored the need to match job seekers with roles that offer clear advancement potential. Community-based organizations emphasized the importance of wraparound support, retention strategies, and system accountability – not just placement. These perspectives have shaped a strategy that values job quality as a foundational element of workforce equity and emphasizes sustained support beyond the point of hire.

## Priority Area 2: Employer and Small Business Engagement

This section highlights the second Board-selected priority, emphasizing the need to strengthen partnerships with employers and expand support for small businesses and entrepreneurs.

### Framing and Importance

A responsive workforce system depends on strong, sustained partnerships with employers of all sizes – especially the small and mid-sized businesses that anchor SCC's economy. While many larger employers engage with the workforce system, smaller businesses, entrepreneurs, and gig workers often remain unaware of available programs or face barriers accessing them. This priority area focuses on building deeper, more inclusive relationships with employers and positioning small business engagement and entrepreneurship as valid, supported career pathways.

Stakeholders consistently emphasized that employer engagement must go beyond participation in advisory groups or hiring events. To be effective, it must include co-development of training programs, easier access to business services, and responsiveness to hiring timelines. Small business owners also noted challenges in accessing support due to limited staff capacity, language barriers, and complex eligibility requirements. WDB members called for a dual approach: elevate employer voice in system design and ensure that entrepreneurs and small businesses are recognized as both customers and contributors to workforce development.

## Priority Area 2: Breakthrough Objective, Goal, and Measures

The strategic focus for this priority centers on strengthening employer participation in the workforce system and expanding support for small businesses, entrepreneurs, and gig workers. The goal associated with this priority focuses on establishing lasting partnerships through sector-based councils and delivering high-value services that meet the needs of local businesses.

**Figure 3.** Expanding Employer Participation in Workforce Partnerships



This priority area builds on multiple rounds of stakeholder input. Board members emphasized the need for more visible employer relationships, while staff and providers identified gaps in small business support infrastructure. This dual emphasis – on employer engagement and entrepreneurial inclusion – ensures that SCC’s workforce system remains aligned with the evolving nature of work and business.

## Priority Area 3: Skills Gaps and Training Alignment

The third core priority selected by the Board focuses on closing the gap between training programs and real-world employment opportunities across the county.

### Framing and Importance

Despite relatively high educational attainment across the region, many SCC residents remain disconnected from jobs in high-demand sectors due to training mismatches and limited access to industry-aligned learning pathways.

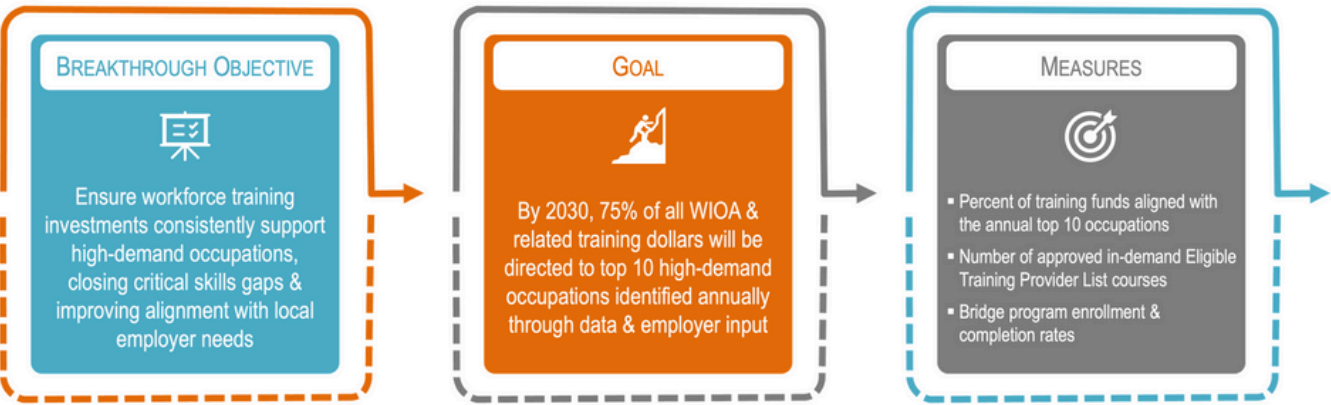
Employers routinely report difficulty finding workers with the right mix of technical and soft skills, while job seekers describe confusion navigating training options or encountering long waitlists for programs that lead to viable employment.

This priority area addresses the need to align workforce training more closely with real-time labor market needs and to ensure that education and training providers work in collaboration with employers to design accessible, stackable pathways. It also emphasizes the need to improve the system’s responsiveness to changing industry needs – particularly in growth sectors like healthcare, clean energy, tech, and construction. Board members and stakeholders emphasized the importance of ensuring that all training efforts are connected to meaningful outcomes: not just credentials, but jobs. Stakeholders also emphasized the importance of ensuring training investments are targeted toward the county’s most in-demand occupations and populations with the greatest barriers to employment.

### Priority Area 3: Breakthrough Objective, Goal, and Measures

The following strategic focus emphasizes expanding access to training that is industry-relevant, responsive to employer needs, and designed to reach populations facing significant barriers to employment. Although training enrollments are guided by an annual list of more than 100 in-demand occupations, employers in healthcare, construction, and technology continue to report gaps in both technical and soft skills. Many individuals who could benefit most from training require bridge programs to build foundational skills and receive the support necessary to succeed in both training and employment. This priority area aims to improve alignment between training investments and the skills most needed in Santa Cruz County’s high-growth sectors.

**Figure 4.** Aligning Training with In-Demand Occupations



Stakeholder input highlighted a consistent theme: training must be practical, employer-driven, and accessible to people with complex lives. From job seekers in South County to healthcare employers and training providers, there was consensus that programs must be designed not just to teach – but to lead to lasting employment. This strategic focus ensures that workforce training in SCC becomes a true bridge to quality jobs, rather than a standalone effort.



# COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT INSIGHTS

Community voices were central to the strategic planning process. The SCCWDB and New Ways designed an engagement strategy that prioritized inclusion, regional representation, and the intentional elevation of underserved perspectives. The findings in this section distill what we heard from job seekers, employers, service providers, and community members throughout the county – and lay the foundation for the strategic priorities identified later in this report.

## Engagement Overview

The SSCWDB's planning effort was anchored in robust, participatory engagement that prioritized community voice and lived experience. Input was collected through a variety of methods, including structured interviews, surveys, forums, and collaborative analysis sessions. Across all formats, three core themes consistently emerged: challenges with navigating the workforce system, limited access to high-quality jobs, and a misalignment between available training and employer needs. These findings offer both a mirror of the system's current state and a roadmap for improvement.

## Thematic Findings

The following thematic areas were derived from recurring insights across all engagement activities. They reflect the most pressing issues facing job seekers and system stakeholders, consistently highlighted through both qualitative feedback and direct participant quotes.



## Barriers to Navigation

Participants across all engagement formats emphasized how difficult it is for job seekers – especially those from historically underserved communities – to understand, access, and navigate the workforce system. The entry points are often unclear, processes are bureaucratic, and services can feel fragmented.

*“It’s not that services don’t exist. It’s that people don’t know where to go, and when they do, they often hit a wall.” – Community Forum Participant, Watsonville*

### Key Insight

- Many job seekers were unaware of available services or confused by eligibility requirements.
- Intake processes were seen as repetitive and duplicative, with clients often asked for the same information by multiple providers.
- A strong preference emerged for co-location of services and “warm handoffs” between partners.
- Trusted intermediaries, particularly community-based organizations in South County, were described as essential gateways to the system.

## Limited Access to High-Quality Jobs

Even for those able to connect to services, participants expressed frustration with the quality of job opportunities available through the system. Many felt that available positions lacked livable wages, benefits, or clear career advancement.

### Community engagement reflections included:

- “A job isn’t enough if it doesn’t pay the rent or come with stability.”
- “We train people, but then place them in entry-level roles with no future.”

### What we heard:

- Job seekers want employment that leads to long-term security – not just initial placement.
- Small and mid-sized employers acknowledged the need to offer better wages but cited cost-of-living challenges and profit margins as barriers.
- Both youth and adults voiced interest in apprenticeships, mentorships, and on-the-job training that could lead to promotion.

## Training Mismatch and Skills Gaps

Across community forums, surveys, and interviews, employers consistently highlighted a disconnect between existing training programs and the skills needed in the workplace – particularly in soft skills, digital literacy, and job readiness. While technical skills and certifications remain important, many employers expressed frustration that training often overlooks foundational workplace competencies.

### Key themes included:

- **Credential misalignment:** Some training programs prioritize certificates or curricula that do not reflect actual job requirements in local industries.
- **Gaps in core competencies:** Communication, professionalism, and digital fluency were cited as frequent weaknesses among new hires – regardless of credential level.
- **Limited employer voice in training:** Stakeholders emphasized the need for greater employer involvement in curriculum development, and called for more experiential models like internships, on-the-job training, and industry-informed instruction.

**These concerns directly reinforce the importance of SCCWDB's focus on training alignment, sector partnerships, and skills-based strategies as outlined in the strategic priorities.**

### *Regional Differences*

The workforce challenges – and assets – differed markedly between regions of the county. This divide highlights the need for regional strategies that reflect localized strengths, gaps, and infrastructure.

#### **North County**

- Older workforce, higher educational attainment
- Less racial/ethnic diversity, more established service infrastructure

#### **South County**

- Younger and more Latino workforce
- Greater barriers to access: transportation, language, housing insecurity
- High dependence on trusted CBOs and school-based programs for outreach

### *Perspectives from Underserved Populations*

A deliberate effort was made to elevate voices often underrepresented in workforce planning. The following groups consistently surfaced in interviews and surveys as needing targeted support:

- Youth and Opportunity Youth: Need for paid work-based learning, soft skill development, and school-to-work pathways
- Immigrants and English Language Learners: Require language access, documentation support, and culturally responsive navigation
- Justice-Involved Individuals: Face employer stigma, lack of wraparound supports, and housing instability
- Rural Residents: Struggle with broadband gaps, transportation access, and limited proximity to services

Together, these insights confirm that workforce development in SCC must move beyond transactional service delivery to a more coordinated, inclusive, and regionally responsive system. The findings outlined here provide a clear direction for the strategic priorities and systemic improvements needed in the next phase of planning.



# WORKFORCE & ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE

The following section explores the economic and labor market forces shaping the workforce development landscape in SCC. These data points are not just context – they are central to understanding how and why the identified strategic priorities emerged. By examining population dynamics, employment patterns, wages, and commuting trends, this section sets the stage for designing a responsive and equity-driven workforce strategy.

## Overview

SCC's economy and workforce dynamics reflect a region at a crossroads. Demographic shifts, sectoral imbalances, commuting patterns, and underemployment trends are not just economic markers – they are workforce system imperatives. For the SCCWDB, understanding these patterns is critical to aligning services, identifying high-impact investments, and designing programs that move beyond placement and toward long-term economic mobility.

The insights presented in this section are not abstract metrics. They directly reinforce and contextualize the strategic priorities identified through community engagement and the Board's prioritization process – namely, Workforce System Accessibility & Navigation, Job Quality & Economic Mobility, and Skills Gaps & Training Alignment. Each data point is presented not just descriptively, but analytically, with an emphasis on how it intersects with local workforce development decision-making.



## Population and Labor Force Trends

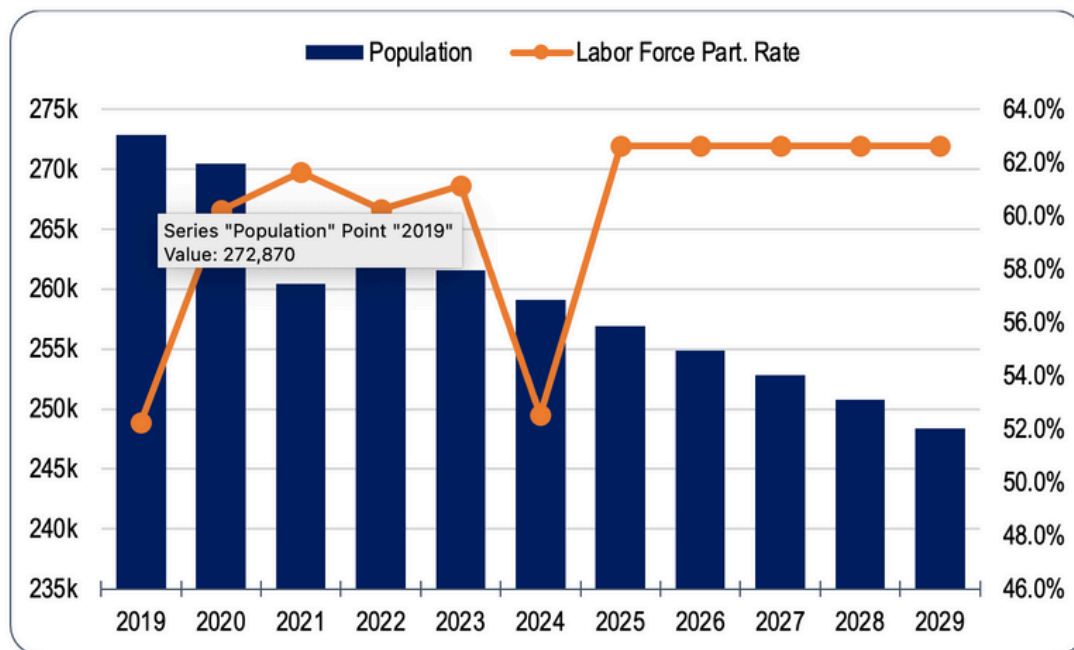
SCC's population has declined by over 13,700 since 2019 – a 5.1% decrease – and is projected to lose another 10,700 residents by 2029. These declines are not evenly distributed across the county. Younger, working-age populations – especially in rural and agricultural areas – are shrinking faster than older cohorts, while the proportion of residents nearing retirement age continues to rise.

From a workforce development perspective, this contraction limits the pool of available workers and creates succession planning challenges for local employers. It also increases the urgency of tapping into underutilized talent pools – such as opportunity youth, justice-involved individuals, and residents who are not currently in the labor force.

The labor force participation rate (LFPR), a key indicator of economic engagement, has fallen slightly since 2019 – from 61.3% to 60.9% – but recent data suggests modest recovery in early 2025. However, this modest rebound does not yet reflect a system-level intervention. For SCCWDB, this highlights a pressing need to focus on re-engagement strategies and system navigation improvements that reduce friction and increase access for disengaged populations.

Figure 5 shows how these trends intersect over time, with population projections and labor force participation moving in parallel decline. While recent data suggests some recovery in labor force engagement, the overall picture reinforces the urgency of SCCWDB's strategic priorities – particularly around reaching disengaged workers and stabilizing the local labor pipeline amid demographic contraction.

**Figure 5. Population and Labor Force Trends in SCC (2019-2029)**



**\*Note: Data for 2025-2029 are projections**

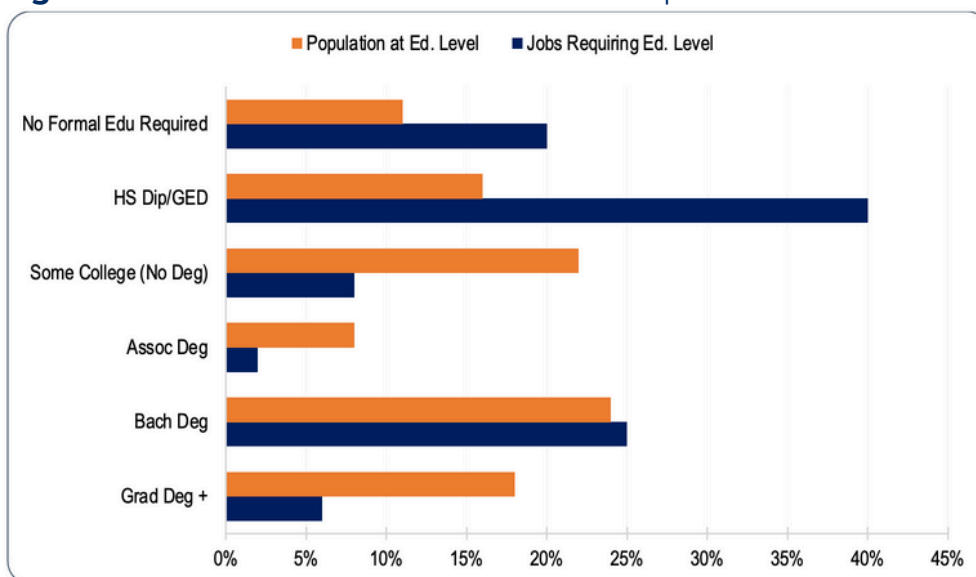
## Underemployment and Skills Mismatch

Educational attainment in SCC is relatively high: 24.3% of adults hold a bachelor's degree, and another 18.2% have a graduate degree – both above the national average. However, 39.6% of jobs in the county require only a high school diploma or less. This gap reflects a significant underemployment challenge and suggests that local talent is frequently working in roles that do not require or reward their educational investment.

This misalignment affects both economic outcomes and job satisfaction – and it weakens the impact of workforce programs that are measured solely by job placement rather than job quality or relevance. Stakeholder interviews confirmed this: several employers noted difficulty filling middle-skill roles that require technical training, even while job seekers reported frustration at being placed in low-wage, dead-end jobs despite higher qualifications.

Figure 6 illustrates the structural disconnect between workforce qualifications and the region's job mix. While many residents have advanced degrees, the regional job market remains heavily skewed toward low-education, low-wage roles. For SCCWDB, this reinforces the importance of evaluating job placements by quality and fit – not just completion or credentialing metrics.

**Figure 6. Educational Attainment vs. Job Requirements**



This research indicates a need for demand-driven training programs that reflect real-time labor market conditions and employer input. System navigators and AJCC staff must be equipped to guide clients toward occupations that both match their capabilities and provide long-term advancement. Moreover, this data suggests a need to reframe success metrics – not just "was someone placed," but "was someone placed well."

## Industry Structure and Sector Dynamics

SCC's largest industries by employment include Food Services, Agriculture, and Local Government Health and Education. Yet these sectors differ markedly in quality, stability, and upward mobility. Food Services and Agriculture are dominated by seasonal and low-wage roles, while government-linked health and education sectors offer more stability and benefits.

What's notable is the disconnect between dominant industries and growth industries. Sectors with the strongest projected job growth through 2029 – such as Healthcare, Construction, and Manufacturing – are not always the ones receiving focused training investments. For example, Healthcare employers repeatedly reported shortages in support and technical staff, despite the availability of job seekers. This disconnect underscores the need for coordinated industry partnerships and curriculum co-design, especially in high-growth sectors.

**Table 1:** Top 10 Industries by Employment (2024) vs. Top 10 by Growth (2024–2029)

Rank	Top 10 Industries by Employment (2024)	Top 10 Industries by Growth (2024-2029)
1	Government	Manufacturing
2	Health Care & Social Assistance	Arts, Entertainment, & Rec
3	Accommodation & Food Services	Transport & Warehousing
4	Retail Trade	Utilities
5	Manufacturing	Health Care & Social Assistance
6	Ag, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	Construction
7	Other Services (except Public Admin)	Government
8	Construction	Accommodation & Food Services
9	Prof, Sci, & Technical Services	Other Services (except Public Admin)
10	Admin & Support & Waste Mgmt & Remed	Finance & Insurance

Wage patterns further complicate the landscape. While the region's median household income is \$104,400 – well above the national average – the high cost of living erodes much of this advantage. Industries with the highest employment often offer the lowest wages. For instance, median wages in Food Services and Agriculture remain well below the self-sufficiency standard for the county.

These realities directly connect to SCCWDB's emphasis on Job Quality & Economic Mobility. The workforce system must proactively support job seekers in navigating toward sectors that offer sustainable wages and benefits, not just immediate openings.

# Occupational Patterns and Workforce Composition

The region’s largest occupations mirror its dominant industries: Office and Administrative Support, Food Service, Sales, and Educational Services. The occupations with the fastest projected growth, however – Business and Financial Operations, Healthcare Support, Community Services – offer better wages and upward mobility. These occupations are often underserved in current training offerings.

Table 2 compares the top 10 occupations by size and by projected growth through 2029. It underscores a strategic tension: some of the largest roles are in lower-wage, lower-mobility sectors, while many growth roles are in higher-wage, upwardly mobile sectors that are not yet central to local training pipelines. This reinforces the importance of aligning program design with future opportunity—not just current demand.

**Table 2:** Side-by-side chart showing largest vs. fastest-growing occupations (2024-2029)

Rank	Top 10 by 2024 Employment	Top 10 by Net Growth (2024-2029)
1	Food Prep & Serving	Healthcare Support
2	Office & Admin Support	Food Prep & Serving
3	Sales & Related	Edu Instruction & Lib
4	Edu Instruction & Lib	Healthcare Pract & Technical
5	Management	Production
6	Transport & Material Moving	Management
7	Healthcare Support	Transport & Material Moving
8	Healthcare Pract & Technical	Personal Care & Service
9	Business & Financial Ops	Community & Social Service
10	Production	Construction & Extraction

This misalignment suggests a dual need: support current workers in transitioning into growing sectors, and prepare future workers through stronger K-12 and postsecondary integration. SCCWDB and its training partners must ensure that AJCCs, CBOs, and schools understand these trends and are embedding them into advising, cohort development, and placement strategies.

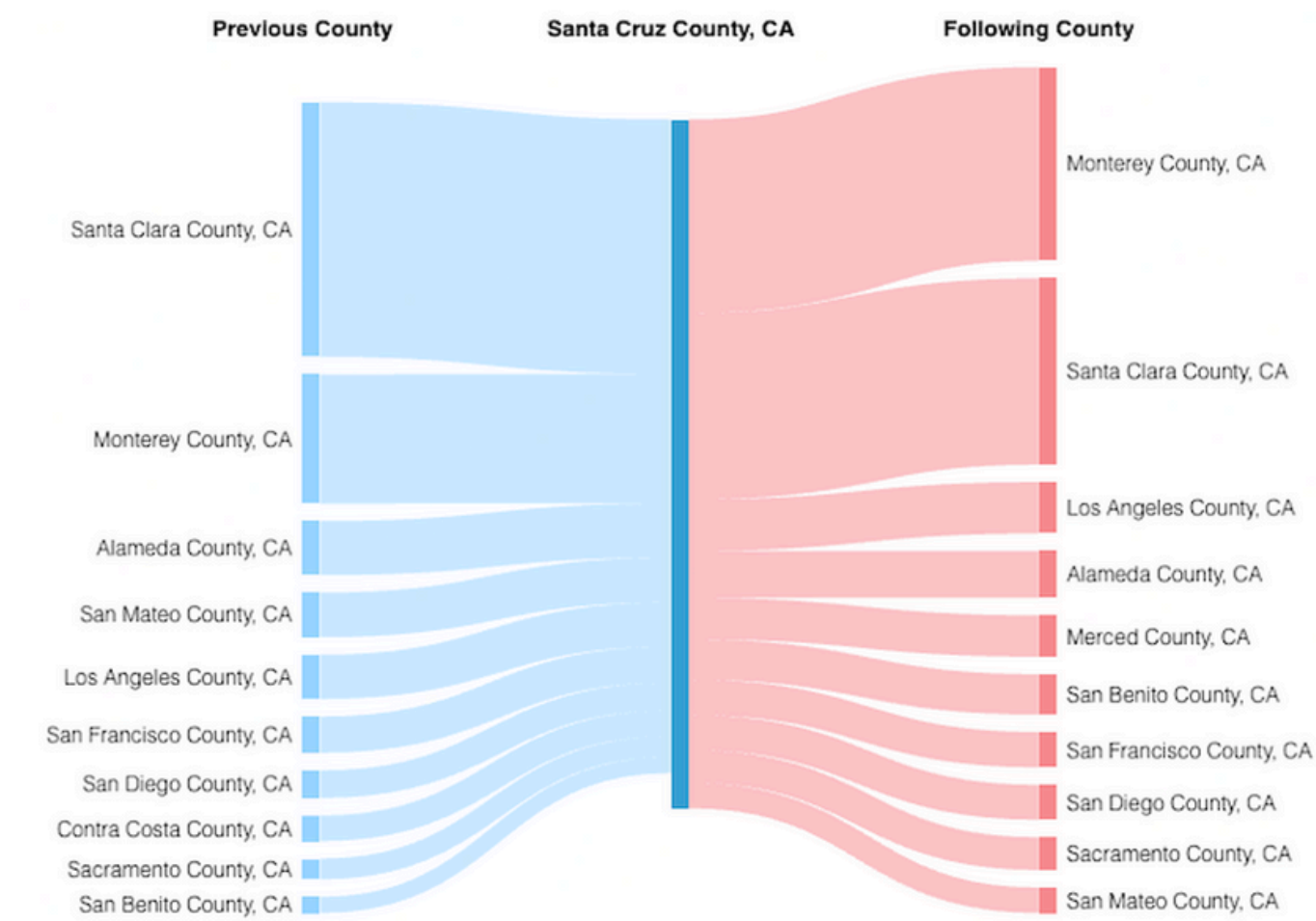


# Commuting Patterns and Economic Leakage

Santa Cruz is both an exporter and importer of labor. In 2024, large numbers of residents commuted out of the county for work – particularly to Santa Clara, Monterey, and Alameda counties – while the hospitality and agriculture sectors drew in workers from nearby areas.

Figure 10 presents a snapshot of regional migration patterns, with inbound and outbound flows that help explain SCC’s commuter economy. The data confirms the dual challenge of retaining local workers while addressing the systemwide strain caused by cross-county inflows. These flows also carry implications for housing, training site geography, and service availability.

**Figure 7:** Net migration flows by county, showing top inbound and outbound flows (2022)



Top Previous Counties	Migrations	Top Following Counties	Migrations
Santa Clara	1,775	Monterey	1,351
Monterey	902	Santa Clara	1,299
Alameda	378	Los Angeles	359
San Mateo	311	Alameda	326
Los Angeles	309	Merced	289
San Francisco	253	San Benito	281
San Diego	193	San Francisco	246
Contra Costa	179	San Diego	244
Sacramento	144	Sacramento	229
San Benito	113	San Mateo	178

This dynamic has major implications for workforce system accessibility. If residents are commuting long distances for work, AJCC operating hours, program locations, and training schedules must adapt. Conversely, if employers rely on in-bound workers, SCCWDB must assess how this affects local hiring, advancement, and employer participation in workforce programs.

In stakeholder interviews, employers cited geographic mismatch as a core reason for chronic vacancies. South County employers in healthcare and logistics, in particular, pointed to lack of local training infrastructure and housing as barriers to building a sustainable workforce. These insights reinforce the importance of Workforce System Accessibility & Navigation as a strategic priority.



## Strategic Implications for SCCWDB

Taken together, these trends underscore a central truth: SCC has the raw ingredients for a resilient, inclusive workforce system – but it lacks cohesion. Talent is here. Demand is here. But the system to match them – across geography, industry, and identity – is still evolving.

### For SCCWDB, this means:

- Investing in training tied to occupations with strong wage and growth trajectories
- Supporting workforce transitions, not just entry
- Prioritizing equity in regions and populations underserved by the current system
- Coordinating with economic development to retain workers and reduce out-commuting

As part of the California Jobs First framework, the Central Coast region – including SCC – has identified eight strategic industry sectors positioned for long-term economic growth and investment. These sectors were chosen based on their potential to drive regional prosperity, innovation, and resilience. However, while these sectors present significant opportunities for economic development, not all of them translate directly into immediate, accessible pathways for the individuals served by the workforce development system.

Many residents engaged through SCCWDB's workforce programs face barriers to employment such as limited formal education, English language learning needs, prior justice system involvement, caregiving responsibilities, or geographic and digital access limitations. These realities must shape how SCCWDB responds to the state's economic agenda. It is not enough to align with regional priorities in name alone – the task is to interpret these priorities in ways that connect local residents to real, reachable, and rewarding careers.

The SCC workforce system must therefore focus on the segments of each strategic sector that offer middle-skill, career pathway jobs accessible through short- to moderate-term training and supportive services. These include roles such as medical assistants in the healthcare sector, HVAC technicians within clean energy and infrastructure, or CNC machine operators in precision manufacturing. These occupations offer viable on-ramps into high-demand industries, often with opportunities for advancement into higher-wage roles.

To identify and target these opportunities effectively, SCCWDB must blend macroeconomic priorities with localized insight. This includes triangulating data from the California Jobs First Economic Blueprint, the 2023 and 2024 SCC State of the Workforce Reports, and the High Demand Job Opportunities analysis. The result is a workforce strategy that is both externally aligned and internally responsive – grounded in economic reality while centered on equity, inclusion, and opportunity.

The table below provides a strategic crosswalk that translates state-designated priority sectors into actionable workforce pathways for SCC. For each sector, it highlights occupations that are accessible to residents without advanced degrees and that offer potential for sustainable employment. It also outlines strategic implications for SCCWDB in terms of training design, employer partnerships, and investment focus over the next five years.

**Table 3.** Strategic Sector Alignment  
Central Coast Priorities vs. Accessible Workforce Opportunities in Santa Cruz

Central Coast Priority Sector	Workforce-Relevant Roles in SCC (Middle-Skill Focus)	Workforce Development Implications
Healthcare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Medical Assistants</li> <li>Behavioral Health Techs</li> <li>CNAs</li> <li>Admin Coordinators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Expand clinical and nonclinical training pathways</li> <li>Include wraparound supports</li> </ul>
Tourism & Outdoor Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hotel Front Desk Staff</li> <li>Food Service Supervisors</li> <li>Outdoor Rec Guides</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job quality focus</li> <li>Upward mobility pathways in hospitality</li> </ul>
Working Lands & Water (Ag & Blue)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Farm Equipment Operators</li> <li>Food Safety Techs</li> <li>Agricultural Supervisors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Connect ag tech and logistics with accessible job design</li> </ul>
Clean Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Solar Installers</li> <li>HVAC Techs</li> <li>Weatherization Workers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Build apprenticeships in clean infrastructure + construction</li> </ul>
Precision Manufacturing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CNC Operators</li> <li>Assembly Techs</li> <li>QA Inspectors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Collaborate with Joby and regional employers on training-to-placement pathways</li> </ul>
Life Sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lab Techs</li> <li>Biomanufacturing Assistants (entry-level biotech)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited but growing potential</li> <li>Connect with community college pipelines</li> </ul>
High-Tech	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IT Support</li> <li>Network Technicians</li> <li>Data Entry Specialists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus only on IT-adjacent entry roles</li> <li>Avoid overselling inaccessible pathways</li> </ul>
Aerospace & Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Electrical Assembly</li> <li>Quality Control</li> <li>Facilities Technicians</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus only on entry-level adjacent roles with partnerships (e.g., Joby)</li> </ul>

As SCCWDB continues to refine its goals and implementation framework, the economic and labor market realities outlined in this section must be more than context – they must serve as the foundation for action. Every training dollar, every employer partnership, every system improvement must be tied back to these patterns if the region is to build a workforce system that truly works for everyone.

# NEXT STEPS

With its strategic priorities now defined and a draft framework of objectives, goals, and measures in place, the SCCWDB is well-positioned to move into the next phase of work: final validation, implementation planning, and operational alignment. The insights captured throughout this strategic planning process have created a strong foundation for action – but the work of transformation will unfold over the coming months and years.

This section outlines the key next steps SCCWDB and its partners will take to translate the vision of this plan into measurable progress, programmatic alignment, and community impact.

## **Final Validation and Community Feedback**

To ensure that the final strategic plan reflects on-the-ground realities and stakeholder priorities, SCCWDB is encouraged to conduct an additional round of community outreach focused on validating the top three priorities, associated objectives, goals, and proposed measures. This effort should include engagement with the following key groups:

- Community-based organizations and workforce providers
- Local employers, particularly small and mid-sized businesses
- Training and education partners
- Youth and underrepresented job seekers
- South County residents and rural communities





Ideally, SCCWDB – supported by New Ways to Work – would lead this phase using a combination of listening sessions, focus groups, and feedback tools to gather input. The purpose would not be to revisit or re-rank the strategic priorities, but to confirm that proposed elements are achievable and grounded in community context. This process would also help surface potential implementation partners and refine timelines for specific actions under each objective.

## Operational Plan Alignment

Once the plan is finalized, SCCWDB will align its internal Operational Plan and performance reporting framework with the strategic priorities outlined in this document. The Operational Plan serves as SCCWDB’s primary tool for tracking programmatic activity, goal progress, and outcome reporting.

Each of the top three strategic priorities – Job Quality & Economic Mobility, Employer and Small Business Engagement, and Skills Gaps & Training Alignment – will be integrated into the Operational Plan through a consistent framework:

### **Priority Area → Breakthrough Objective → Goal → Measures**

This alignment will allow the Board and staff to monitor implementation efforts, assess return on investment, and adjust course as needed over the life of the plan. Where possible, strategies will be linked to existing performance measures and funding streams (e.g., WIOA performance metrics, High Road Training Partnership deliverables, California Jobs First investments). For newer or emerging strategies, SCCWDB will work with partners to identify relevant data sources, build dashboards, and set baselines.

## Implementation Planning and Partner Engagement

Following plan adoption, SCCWDB will work with partners across the workforce system to begin implementation planning. This will include:

- Clarifying lead and supporting roles for each strategy
- Mapping resource needs and funding sources
- Sequencing strategies based on readiness and feasibility
- Establishing short- and long-term milestones

Some strategies – such as those related to training alignment or employer advisory groups – can begin immediately and build on existing efforts. Others – such as expanding wraparound supports or launching entrepreneurship pilot programs – may require new partnerships, braided funding, or external investment.

SCCWDB will use its quarterly board meetings and existing partner networks to facilitate coordination and collective ownership of the implementation effort. In addition, the Board may establish working groups or designate leads for cross-cutting strategies (e.g., those spanning multiple priority areas or funding streams).

## Integration with WIOA, Regional, and State Plans

This strategic plan is not a standalone document. It is designed to align with and inform the following ongoing planning and compliance efforts:

- SCCWDB WIOA Local Plan (2025-28)
- North Central Coast Regional Plan (2025-28)
- California WIOA State Plan
- California Jobs First implementation efforts

Where relevant, the objectives and goals in this plan will be cross-referenced in regional updates and used to shape SCCWDB's contributions to statewide initiatives. For example, objectives related to training alignment and sector partnerships are well-positioned to support California Jobs First goals in clean energy, healthcare, and advanced manufacturing. Similarly, objectives around job quality and wraparound supports align with the CWDB's High Road Training Partnership framework.

## Performance Tracking and Accountability

SCCWDB is committed to transparent and accountable implementation. The Board will work with New Ways to Work and other partners to develop a performance tracking system for monitoring progress against the strategies and targets outlined in this plan. This system will include:

- Baseline measures for each strategic target
- Annual progress reporting at public board meetings
- Midpoint evaluation and course correction in 2027
- Final impact assessment in 2030

Progress will be tracked not only by numeric targets, but also by qualitative indicators such as partnership strength, community satisfaction, and system adaptability. SCCWDB recognizes that workforce change is dynamic and that flexibility will be needed to respond to economic shifts, demographic change, and evolving community needs.

This process has helped surface challenges, clarify opportunities, and identify shared direction across the workforce ecosystem. With strong partnerships and a clear implementation framework, SCCWDB is now positioned to turn strategy into action – and ensure that the vision outlined in this plan becomes reality.

# CONCLUSION

# LOOKING AHEAD



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The SCC Workforce Development Board initiated this strategic planning process to identify clear priorities, strengthen alignment across partners, and better position the local workforce system to meet evolving needs. To lead this effort, SCCWDB competitively selected New Ways to Work, which carried out the planning process in close collaboration with SCCWDB leadership and staff.

Over the course of six months, New Ways conducted a countywide engagement effort – including interviews, surveys, community sessions, and structured facilitation with the Board. These inputs were synthesized alongside labor market data, policy guidance, and existing plans to develop a framework that reflects both the current state of the system and the direction stakeholders want it to move.

The result is a focused set of strategic priorities and draft objectives that emphasize equity, job quality, employer responsiveness, and training alignment. While not yet final, the content of this plan provides a practical roadmap to inform SCCWDB's ongoing work, resource investments, and performance tracking.

Next steps will include final validation with stakeholders, integration into the Operational Plan, and coordinated implementation with partners. This will require leadership, flexibility, and shared accountability – but the groundwork has been laid. The process has already helped clarify where the system is working, where gaps persist, and where there is strong alignment and momentum.

Ultimately, this strategic plan is a tool to help SCCWDB and its partners move forward with purpose. It reflects input from across the county and is designed to be actionable, measurable, and responsive to change. With continued collaboration, the Board is well-positioned to guide a more inclusive, connected, and effective workforce development system over the next five years.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# OUR APPRECIATION

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the many individuals and organizations who contributed to this project. We are deeply grateful to the community partners, service providers, and workforce development clients whose insights and experiences shaped this project. Special thanks go to the Santa Cruz County Workforce Development Board leadership and members for their commitment and collaboration. Finally, we extend our heartfelt appreciation to Andy Stone and Brenda Diaz-Rivas for their exceptional guidance, unwavering support, and generous assistance throughout this effort. Their leadership, collaboration, and dedication were instrumental to the success of this project, and it was truly a pleasure and a privilege to work alongside them.



# APPENDIX A

## **Comprehensive Priority Areas Emerging from Stakeholder Engagements, Surveys, & SWOT Analyses**

### **1. Job Quality & Economic Mobility**

Workforce efforts must focus on placing people into high-quality jobs with growth potential, not just job placement. Many participants emphasized the lack of livable wages, benefits, and long-term career stability. Workers remain stuck in low-wage, high-turnover jobs that don't provide a pathway to economic self-sufficiency.

- High cost of living in SCC (SCC) exacerbates the impact of low-wage jobs, requiring higher income thresholds for stability
- Job seekers and stakeholders called for clear, stackable career pathways that lead to upward mobility
- Entrepreneurship and hands-on careers were often cited as preferred paths, particularly among younger job seekers
- Employers noted retention is tied directly to wages, housing access, and opportunities for advancement – not just job placement

### **2. Workforce System Accessibility & Navigation**

The local workforce system can be difficult to access and navigate for both job seekers and employers. Many people do not know where to start or whom to contact, and even those who engage with the system often face slow, outdated processes. Improving visibility, responsiveness, and coordination across partners is essential.

- Stakeholders report that WIOA programs are poorly marketed and enrollment processes are slow and outdated
- Waitlists, limited program capacity, and lengthy intake timelines discourage participation
- Stronger integration with community-based organizations was identified as a critical access point, especially in South County
- Both job seekers and employers voiced confusion around who to contact and how to get help from the system



### **3. Skills Gaps & Training Alignment**

There is a consistent mismatch between the skills workers have and the skills employers need. While training opportunities exist, they are often disconnected from local labor market demand, and do not always include the soft skills employers value. Realigning training systems with current and future employer needs is a recurring priority.

- Employers emphasized the need for real-time labor market alignment, particularly in healthcare, tech, and trades
- Soft skills like communication, professionalism, and reliability remain critical gaps in the workforce
- Several stakeholders suggested integrating employers more directly into curriculum development and training delivery
- Stakeholders recommended expanding earn-and-learn models that combine training with paid work experience

### **4. Advancing Equity & Access**

Persistent structural barriers prevent many SCC residents from fully accessing and benefiting from workforce services. Justice-involved individuals, immigrants, youth, people with disabilities, rural communities, and limited-English speakers face compounded challenges navigating the system and securing quality employment. This priority area calls for an equity-centered approach to service design, funding, and accountability—addressing both individual needs and systemic disparities across the county.

- Many residents – especially in South County and rural areas – face persistent barriers such as transportation, housing instability, limited English proficiency, and digital skill gaps
- Programs serving high-barrier populations are often underfunded, fragmented, and unable to meet local demand
- Employers are frequently unaware of hiring incentives, accommodations, or support services available for workers facing employment barriers
- Advancing equity requires both external strategies (inclusive outreach, wraparound services) and internal change (diverse staffing, cultural competence, equity accountability)

### **5. Youth & Young Adult Workforce Engagement**

Youth and young adults, especially those who are disconnected from school or employment, face distinct challenges when entering the workforce. Despite a strong commitment to youth programs in the county, many young people still lack access to the resources, exposure, and support needed to transition into quality careers. Strategic planning must address these gaps through intentional, youth-centered engagement and program design.

- Career exploration, mentorship, and work-based learning opportunities are not equitably accessible
- Foster youth, homeless youth, and justice-involved youth need direct funding streams and targeted programs
- Internship and apprenticeship programs face liability, cost, and coordination barriers – especially for youth under 18
- Youth are often funneled into narrow career pathways without broader exposure to regional labor market opportunities

## **6. Employer and Small Business Engagement**

A responsive workforce system relies on strong, sustained partnerships with employers of all sizes—especially the small and mid-sized businesses that anchor SCC’s economy. While larger employers often engage in workforce initiatives, smaller businesses, entrepreneurs, and gig workers are frequently underrepresented and unaware of available resources. This priority area aims to deepen employer partnerships and elevate entrepreneurship as a viable and valued career pathway.

- Many small businesses lack access to workforce resources and are often unaware of programs due to limited outreach and complex systems
- Sector-based partnerships and advisory groups can better align training with employer needs and boost business engagement
- Entrepreneurs, gig workers, and the self-employed are often excluded from traditional workforce programs despite their growing economic impact
- Expanding engagement requires more responsive services, simplified access, multi-language support, and integrated entrepreneurship training

## **7. Digital Access & Technology Skills**

Digital skills and access to reliable technology are no longer optional – they are essential for full participation in the modern workforce. Many residents still face significant challenges related to digital literacy, internet access, and equipment availability. Addressing these gaps will be critical to building an inclusive and future-ready workforce.

- Participants called out a lack of digital training programs, particularly for older workers and underserved groups
- Broadband gaps persist in rural and lower-income urban neighborhoods, limiting remote work opportunities
- Reskilling in response to automation (especially in logistics and manufacturing) is necessary to future-proof the workforce
- Access to equipment (laptops, devices) and digital navigation support is critical for participation in training and remote jobs

# STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

## A Timeline-Guided, Multi-Phase Structure

The planning effort began in earnest in January 2025 with a scoping phase focused on designing an engagement strategy, setting milestones, and confirming roles and responsibilities. From there, the team implemented a structured process between January and June 2025, with the following key milestones:



This timeline was designed to ensure iterative synthesis, with each phase building on the findings and decisions of the one before it. By staggering engagement and reflection, the planning team was able to validate early findings, test themes, and generate shared ownership of the emerging strategic direction.

## Stakeholder and Community Engagement

Between January and April 2025, SCCWDB and New Ways to Work implemented a four-pronged engagement strategy consisting of:

- 20 in-depth stakeholder interviews across industry, education, labor, nonprofit, and government
- 13 community surveys and 38 job seeker surveys, available in English and Spanish
- 11 community listening sessions, spread across North and South County
- 3 SWOT workshops examining internal strengths and system-wide challenges

The interviews surfaced a range of perspectives on system navigation, employer engagement, training alignment, and youth disconnection. Interviewees emphasized the need for stronger integration across partners and a clearer sense of strategic priorities. Survey responses added depth, particularly around perceived barriers like housing instability, lack of digital access, and long waitlists for training. Open-ended comments from youth, immigrants, and low-income job seekers emphasized the human impact of a system that is often too fragmented to navigate.

The 11 community sessions expanded access for historically excluded groups. These sessions were intentionally designed to uplift rural, Spanish-speaking, and marginalized voices. Participants highlighted issues of transportation, documentation status, and the need for community-based navigators. Community-based organizations echoed these concerns and called for greater coordination, co-enrollment models, and investments in wraparound services.

The three SWOT sessions provided a structured opportunity for partners to explore internal system dynamics. Participants flagged strengths such as experienced staff and growing partnerships, but also highlighted weaknesses such as funding silos and data-sharing limitations.



## Board-Led Prioritization: Nominal Group Technique (NGT)

On April 16, 2025, SCCWDB held a full Board planning session facilitated by New Ways to Work. To ensure transparency and equity of voice, the Board used the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) – a structured method that combines individual reflection with group synthesis. The process included the following steps:

*Silent Reflection → Round-Robin Sharing → Clarifying Discussion → Individual Ranking → Synthesis*

Through this method, Board members reviewed engagement findings, reflected on system challenges, and ranked their top priorities. The session resulted in the identification of seven consolidated strategic priority areas, with the top three prioritized for goal development and alignment with SCCWDB's Operational Plan:

1. Job Quality & Economic Mobility
2. Employer and Small Business Engagement
3. Skills Gaps & Training Alignment

These priorities were selected not only because they reflect stakeholder feedback and labor market trends, but because they are seen as actionable areas where the Board can lead, invest, and drive systemic improvement.

Throughout this process, SCCWDB worked to ensure consistency with major state and regional planning efforts. This included aligning early engagement and analysis with the SCC WIOA Local Plan, the North Central Coast Regional Plan, and the California Jobs First Economic Blueprint. A more detailed discussion of implementation alignment appears in the following section.

These documents provide strong policy scaffolding for equity, sector-based training, and inclusive regional growth. By integrating local input with these frameworks, SCCWDB ensures that its plan is not only relevant to the county – but also responsive to the broader policy landscape.

## A Foundation for Implementation

This planning process affirms that the SCCWDB 2025-2030 Strategic Plan is grounded in equity, evidence, and engagement. The process has elevated community voice, surfaced shared challenges, and enabled the Board to identify clear strategic priorities. As the plan moves into implementation and refinement, it does so with a foundation of trust, partnership, and direction. SCCWDB is now well-positioned to lead the region toward a more inclusive and opportunity-rich workforce future.



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