

# **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Four-Year Regional Plan for North Central Coast Regional Planning Unit**

## **Local Workforce Development Area(s)**

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....3

Analytical Overview of the North Central Coast Region .....4

Workforce and Economic Analysis.....5

Regional Indicators .....14

Fostering Demand-Driven Skills Attainment .....16

Regional Sector Pathways .....16

Enabling Upward Mobility for All Californians.....19

High Road Workforce System.....20

Climate and Environmental Sustainability .....21

Equity and Economic Justice .....21

Aligning, Coordinating, and Integrating Programs and Services .....22

System Alignment .....23

Appendix A: Stakeholder and Community Engagement Summary.....24

Appendix B: Public Comments Received that Disagree with Regional Plan.....27

Appendix C: Signature Page.....28

# Executive Summary

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires local workforce development boards and chief elected officials to engage in an integrated regional and local workforce planning process to prepare, submit, and obtain approval of a single collaborative regional plan that incorporates local plans for each of the local areas within the given workforce planning region. This plan serves as a four-year action plan to develop, align, and integrate service delivery strategies to support the region's vision and its strategic and operational goals.

This four-year Regional Plan comes at a crucial time for the North Central Coast region and its local components. The COVID-19 pandemic had unprecedented impacts on the regional workforce and economy, and strategic recovery efforts have helped ensure that the region rebuilds towards a more prosperous and equitable future. This Regional Plan aims to align regional planning unit (RPU) members along specific approaches to achieving the vision and objectives provided in the State Plan. Fulfilling this vision requires partners to collaborate regularly across agencies, programs, and funding streams to align strategic efforts, investments, and service delivery activities to meet shared outcomes within common in-demand industry sectors.

The North Central Coast RPU focused on crafting a Regional Plan that would meet the State's formal guidance while also considering the temporary and permanent effects that the four-year pandemic had on the region. The RPU members are confident that the themes and objectives outlined in this plan will assist in the continued recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, wildfires, and subsequent flooding, while fostering relationships with partners, and working towards more equitable opportunities for workers in the region.

The North Central Coast RPU builds upon the following strategic goals provided by the State:

1. Fostering demand-driven skills attainment by:
  - a. Leveraging labor market data to uncover strategic opportunities and gaps in training and education.
2. Enabling upward mobility for all Californians by:
  - a. Investing in specific career pathways in key industries, collaborating with regional partners and stakeholders, and ensuring access through America's Job Centers of California (AJCCs).
3. Aligning, coordinating, and integrating programs and services by:
  - a. Collaborating closely with community colleges and adult education providers, community-based organizations, non-profits, industry and chambers representatives, and other local organizations.

A principal component of this Regional Plan involves identifying target and growth opportunity industries and occupational pathways within those industries. The North Central Coast RPU's Regional Plan relies upon the following to drive findings and strategies:

- a. The most-up-to-date labor market information available to identify the current state of the labor market and local economy;
- b. Engagement with regional and industry leaders to get details beyond labor market data; and
- c. Consideration of macroeconomic influences and equity ramifications.

The WIOA Regional Plan for Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito Counties represents a comprehensive approach to workforce development that addresses the unique needs and opportunities of each county. By enhancing workforce skills, supporting youth employment, expanding access to employment, and aligning workforce development with economic growth, we strive to create a thriving labor market that benefits all residents.

# Analytical Overview of the North Central Coast Region

The WIOA is landmark legislation designed to strengthen and improve the public workforce system, helping Americans—including youth and individuals with significant barriers to employment—secure high-quality jobs and careers. This Regional Plan, covering Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito counties, aims to align workforce development strategies with economic development goals to enhance employment opportunities for residents.

This section provides an analysis of the economic conditions, workforce trends, and key challenges in the region. Data for this analysis is compiled from multiple sources, including the State of California's Employment Development Department (EDD) labor market information (LMI), JOBS EQ, and other relevant economic reports.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has largely subsided, its economic impacts persist in certain areas of the region. To accurately assess these conditions, the Santa Cruz Workforce Development Board's Business Services team developed an Industry Spotlight and Economic Overview for all three counties within the North Central Coast Regional Planning Unit (RPU). This analysis provides valuable insights into regional labor market trends and informs strategic planning efforts.

## **WIOA Regional Plan Goals**

The WIOA Regional Plan for the North Central Coast region focuses on the following primary objectives:

- **Enhancing Workforce Skills** – Developing training programs that address current and future skill needs of local employers.
  - **Supporting Youth Employment** – Creating initiatives that equip young people with skills, experiences, and support to thrive in the labor market.
  - **Expanding Access to Employment** – Improving employment opportunities for underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.
  - **Fostering Economic Growth** – Aligning workforce development efforts with economic development strategies to support regional economic expansion.
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# Workforce and Economic Analysis of the Region

This section presents labor market data for the North Central Coast RPU, providing insights that guide strategic planning and decision-making.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on economies, populations, and industries across the RPU, State, nation, and world. While employment levels have rebounded, significant challenges remain, particularly for historically disadvantaged communities facing low wages and limited economic mobility.

The three most pressing workforce challenges in the North Central Coast Region are:

1. Labor Supply Issues – A shortage of workers willing and available to meet employer demand.
2. Population Retention – The difficulty of keeping a sufficient working-age population due to housing affordability, cost of living, and other economic factors.
3. Workforce Adaptability – The need for workers to upskill and transition into new industries as job demands and skill requirements evolve.

## **County-Specific Economic Profiles**

### **Monterey County**

- Key Industries: Manufacturing and agriculture
- Economic Trends: Growth in agriculture and manufacturing, though challenges persist due to an aging workforce and the need for technological advancements.

### **Santa Cruz County**

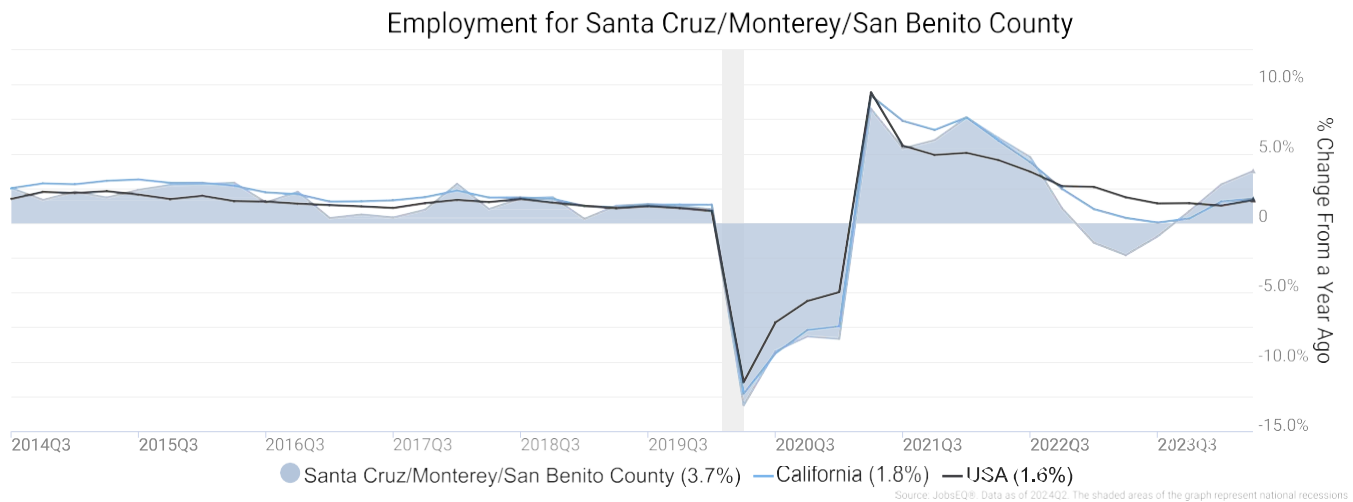
- Key Industries: Healthcare, education, and technology
- Economic Trends: A diverse and dynamic workforce, supported by several educational institutions that provide a steady pipeline of skilled workers.

### **San Benito County**

- Key Industries: Tourism and service industries
- Economic Trends: While tourism and hospitality provide employment, there is a growing need to diversify the local economy and create more stable, year-round job opportunities.

## Current Employment Trends

As of 2024Q2, total employment for the Santa Cruz/Monterey/San Benito County region was 342,404 (based on a four-quarter moving average). Over the year ending 2024Q2, employment increased 3.7% in the region.

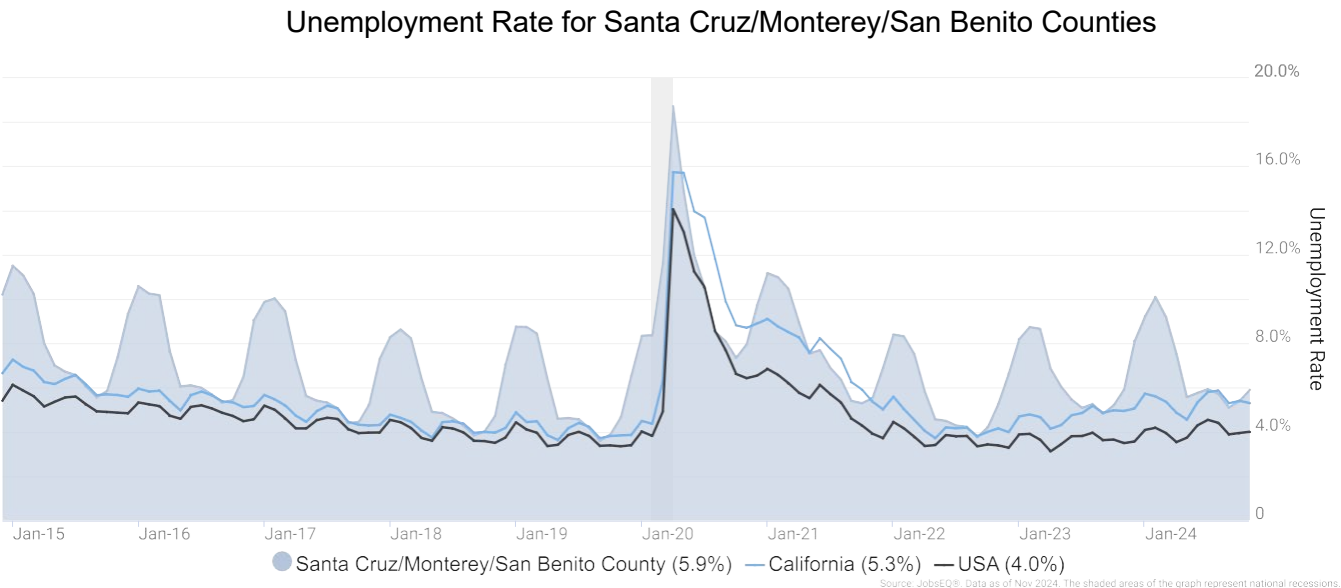


Employment data are derived from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and imputed where necessary. Data are updated through 2024Q1 with preliminary estimates updated to 2024Q2.

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## Unemployment Rate

The unemployment rate for the Santa Cruz/Monterey/San Benito County region was 5.9% as of November 2024. The regional unemployment rate was higher than the national rate of 4.0%. One year earlier, in November 2023, the unemployment rate in the Santa Cruz/Monterey/San Benito County region was 5.9%.

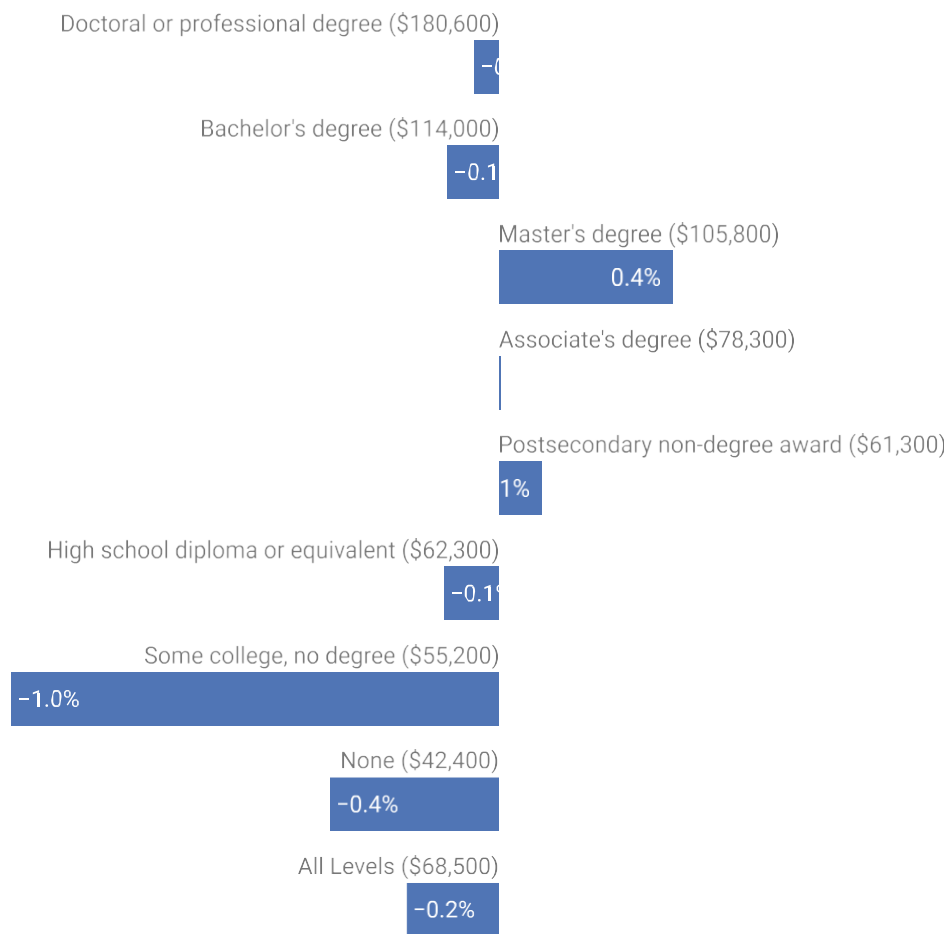


The data are from the Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics, through November 2024.

## Current Education and Skill Levels

Expected growth rates for occupations vary by the education and training required. While all employment in the Santa Cruz/Monterey/San Benito County region is projected to contract 0.2% over the next ten years, occupations typically requiring a postgraduate degree are expected to contract 0.1% per year, those requiring a bachelor’s degree are forecast to contract 0.1% per year, and occupations typically needing a 2-year degree or certificate are expected to remain at 0.0% per year.

Annual Average Projected Job Growth by Education Levels



Source: JobsEQ®  
Data as of 2024Q2

Employment by occupation data are estimates as of 2024Q2. Education levels of occupations are based on BLS assignments. Forecast employment growth uses national projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics adapted for regional growth patterns.

## Occupation Snapshot

The largest major occupation group in the Santa Cruz/Monterey/San Benito County region is Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations, employing 44,297 workers. The next-largest occupation groups in the region are Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (31,613 workers) and Office and Administrative Support Occupations (30,859). High location quotients (LQs) indicate occupation groups in which a region has high concentrations of employment compared to the national average. The major groups with the largest LQs in the region are Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations (LQ = 22.21), Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Occupations (1.19), and Life, Physical, and Social Science Occupations (1.18).

Occupation groups in the Santa Cruz/Monterey/San Benito County region with the highest average wages per worker are Legal Occupations (\$140,700), Management Occupations (\$136,900), and Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations (\$134,600). The unemployment rate in the region varied among the major groups from 1.7% among Legal Occupations to 10.3% among Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations.

Over the next 2 years, the fastest growing occupation group in the Santa Cruz/Monterey/San Benito County region is expected to be Healthcare Support Occupations with a +1.2% year-over-year rate of growth. The strongest forecast by number of jobs over this period is expected for Healthcare Support Occupations (+402 jobs) and Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations (+70). Over the same period, the highest separation demand (occupation demand due to retirements and workers moving from one occupation to another) is expected in Farming, Fishing, and Forestry Occupations (13,290 jobs) and Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (11,768).

### Santa Cruz/Monterey/San Benito County, 2024Q2<sup>1</sup>

SOC	Occupation	Current			5-Year History					2-Year Forecast				
		Empl	Mean Ann Wages <sup>2</sup>	LQ	Unempl	Unempl Rate	Online Job Ads <sup>3</sup>	Empl Change	Ann %	Total Demand	Exits	Transfers	Empl Growth	Ann % Growth
45-0000	Farming, Fishing, and Forestry	44,297	\$40,900	22.21	3,666	8.2%	17	-453	-0.2%	12,990	5,442	7,848	-300	-0.3%
35-0000	Food Preparation and Serving Related	31,613	\$43,200	1.12	3,890	10.3%	1,010	-62	0.0%	11,666	5,074	6,694	-102	-0.2%
43-0000	Office and Administrative Support	30,859	\$55,000	0.77	1,973	5.4%	1,022	-1,824	-1.1%	6,013	2,875	3,704	-566	-0.9%
11-0000	Management	26,699	\$136,900	1.01	819	2.9%	1,592	1,487	1.2%	4,509	1,908	2,560	41	0.1%
53-0000	Transportation and Material Moving	26,573	\$49,100	0.89	3,163	9.9%	605	524	0.4%	6,563	2,538	4,029	-3	0.0%
41-0000	Sales and Related	24,032	\$55,800	0.80	2,175	7.8%	1,614	-1,780	-1.4%	5,747	2,679	3,500	-433	-0.9%
25-0000	Educational Instruction and Library	19,996	\$82,800	1.08	994	4.9%	985	313	0.3%	3,209	1,659	1,888	-339	-0.9%
31-0000	Healthcare Support	16,758	\$42,100	1.06	1,226	6.2%	1,155	1,633	2.1%	5,091	2,185	2,504	402	1.2%
29-0000	Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	16,040	\$134,600	0.79	461	2.6%	4,235	1,261	1.7%	1,828	913	844	70	0.2%
13-0000	Business and Financial Operations	15,548	\$93,600	0.71	858	4.8%	751	851	1.1%	2,469	867	1,613	-11	0.0%
37-0000	Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	13,326	\$46,600	1.19	1,497	9.1%	399	355	0.5%	3,420	1,517	1,984	-82	-0.3%
51-0000	Production	12,294	\$51,300	0.66	1,109	7.3%	176	-648	-1.0%	2,622	1,031	1,696	-104	-0.4%
47-0000	Construction and Extraction	12,263	\$72,100	0.80	1,513	9.2%	152	426	0.7%	1,981	733	1,256	-8	0.0%
49-0000	Installation, Maintenance, and Repair	10,181	\$66,400	0.76	552	4.7%	452	223	0.4%	1,762	721	1,039	2	0.0%
39-0000	Personal Care and Service	8,465	\$45,200	0.96	781	8.0%	250	157	0.4%	3,022	1,144	1,873	4	0.0%
33-0000	Protective Service	7,049	\$79,500	0.96	450	5.7%	242	300	0.9%	1,596	689	963	-56	-0.4%



### Santa Cruz/Monterey/San Benito County, 2024Q2<sup>1</sup>

SOC	Occupation	Current					5-Year History			2-Year Forecast				
		Empl	Mean Ann Wages <sup>2</sup>	LQ	Unempl	Unempl Rate	Online Job Ads <sup>3</sup>	Empl Change	Ann %	Total Demand	Exits	Transfers	Empl Growth	Ann % Growth
21-0000	Community and Social Service	6,615	\$71,300	1.05	433	6.1%	868	327	1.0%	1,184	477	668	39	0.3%
15-0000	Computer and Mathematical	5,784	\$116,800	0.53	345	4.2%	459	-220	-0.7%	696	250	413	32	0.3%
27-0000	Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	5,378	\$79,800	0.87	441	7.3%	215	-214	-0.8%	983	419	598	-34	-0.3%
19-0000	Life, Physical, and Social Science	3,669	\$98,400	1.18	187	4.8%	371	85	0.5%	642	119	520	2	0.0%
17-0000	Architecture and Engineering	3,225	\$115,000	0.59	159	3.7%	300	6	0.0%	410	153	258	-1	0.0%
23-0000	Legal	1,740	\$140,700	0.61	33	1.7%	85	-117	-1.3%	174	80	105	-10	-0.3%
<b>Total - All Occupations</b>		<b>342,404</b>	<b>\$68,500</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>26,727</b>	<b>6.8%</b>	<b>16,954</b>	<b>2,629</b>	<b>0.2%</b>	<b>78,648</b>	<b>33,474</b>	<b>46,559</b>	<b>-1,385</b>	<b>-0.2%</b>

Source: [JobsEQ®](#)

Data as of 2024Q2 unless noted otherwise

Note: Figures may not sum due to rounding.

<sup>1</sup>. Data is based on a four-quarter moving average unless noted otherwise.

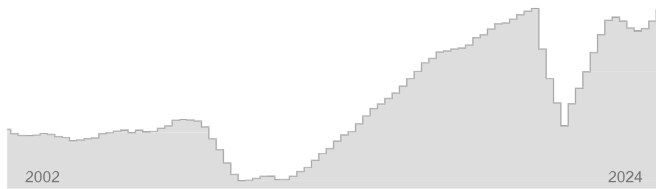
<sup>2</sup>. Wage data represent the average for all Covered Employment

<sup>3</sup>. Data represent found online ads active within the last thirty days in the selected region. Due to alternative county-assignment algorithms, ad counts in this analytic may not match that shown in RTI (nor in the popup window ad list). Ad counts for ZCTA-based regions are estimates.

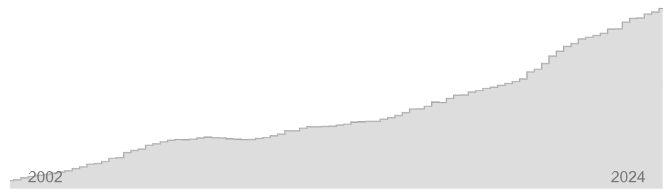
Occupation employment data are estimated via industry employment data and the estimated industry/occupation mix. Industry employment data are derived from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and currently updated through 2024Q1, imputed where necessary with preliminary estimates updated to 2024Q2. Wages by occupation are as of 2024 provided by the BLS and imputed where necessary. Forecast employment growth uses national projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics adapted for regional growth patterns.

## Occupation Snapshot, Cont'd

### EMPLOYMENT



### WAGES

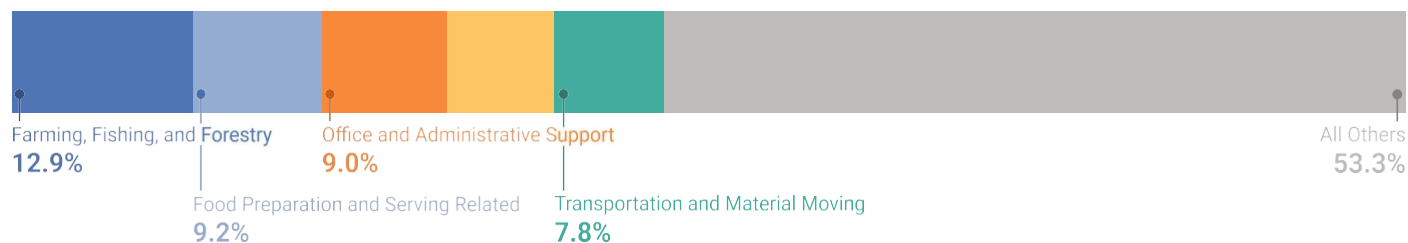


2-Digit Industry	Empl	Avg Ann Wages	LQ	5yr History	Annual Demand	Forecast Ann Growth
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	65,219	\$52,752	15.57		7,862	-0.2%
Health Care and Social Assistance	44,556	\$73,376	0.87		4,610	0.6%
Accommodation and Food Services	36,738	\$35,583	1.23		6,467	-0.1%
Educational Services	31,234	\$71,628	1.13		2,619	-0.9%
Retail Trade	29,975	\$42,746	0.89		3,791	-1.0%
Public Administration	19,827	\$91,254	1.24		1,743	-0.3%
Construction	17,255	\$70,178	0.85		1,451	-0.1%
Manufacturing	16,769	\$82,103	0.62		1,669	-0.1%
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	14,412	\$48,499	0.69		1,610	-0.2%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	13,092	\$44,449	0.90		1,466	-0.1%
Remaining Component Industries	53,329	\$93,663	0.52		5,236	-0.3%
<b>Total - All Industries</b>	<b>342,404</b>	<b>\$62,980</b>	<b>1.00</b>		<b>36,423</b>	<b>-0.2%</b>

Employment is one of the broadest and most timely measures of a region's economy. Fluctuations in the number of jobs shed light on the health of an industry. A growing employment base creates more opportunities for regional residents and helps a region grow its population.

Since wages and salaries generally compose most of a household's income, the annual average wages of a region affect its average household income, housing market, quality of life, and other socioeconomic indicators.

## Staffing Pattern

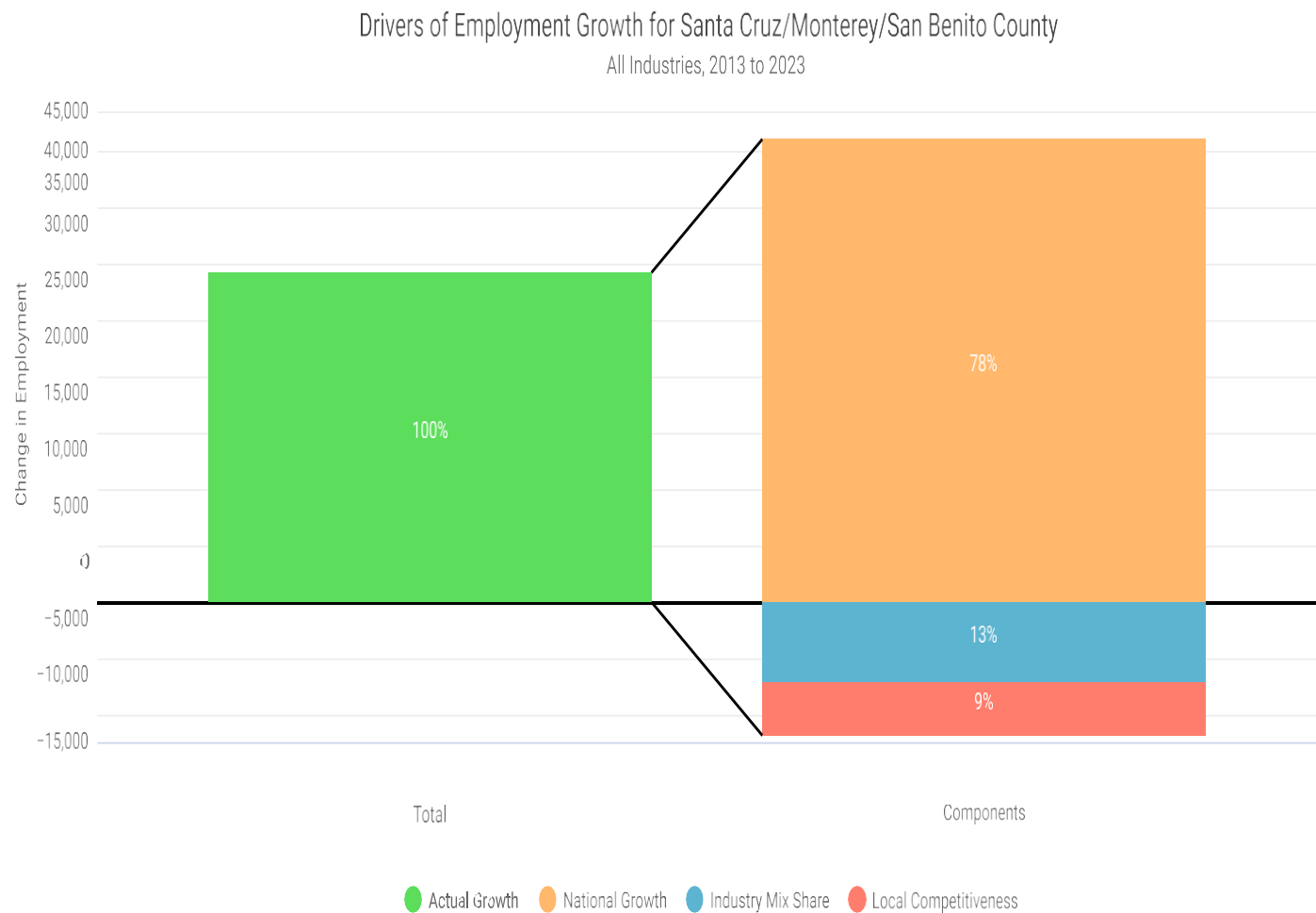


6-digit Occupation	Empl	Avg Ann Wages	Annual Demand
Farmworkers and Laborers, Crop, Nursery, and Greenhouse	37,730	\$39,600	5,534
Fast Food and Counter Workers	7,949	\$38,000	1,860
Personal Care Aides	7,792	\$35,900	1,267
Cashiers	6,776	\$38,500	1,099
Farmers, Ranchers, and Other Agricultural Managers	6,303	\$123,400	673
Retail Salespersons	5,990	\$42,400	812
Registered Nurses	5,101	\$143,600	262
Waiters and Waitresses	5,014	\$49,200	991
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	4,964	\$42,700	640
Office Clerks, General	4,883	\$49,800	492
Remaining Component Occupations	249,901	\$86,600	25,705
<b>Total</b>	<b>342,404</b>		

The mix of occupations points to the ability of a region to support an industry and its flexibility to adapt to future demand. Industry wages are a component of the cost of labor for regional employers.

# Drivers of Employment Growth

Over the ten years ending 2023, employment in Total - All Industries for the Santa Cruz/Monterey/San Benito County region added 29,219 jobs. After adjusting for national growth during this period and industry mix share, the part of this employment change due to local competitiveness was a loss of 4,710 jobs—meaning this industry was less competitive than its national counterpart during this period.



Source: JobsEQ®  
Data as of 2023Q4

Shift-share analysis sheds light on the factors that drive regional employment growth in an industry. A positive change in local competitiveness indicates advantages that may be due to factors such as superior technology, management, and labor pool, etc.

National growth is due to the overall growth or contraction in the national economy. Industry mix share is the growth attributable to the specific industries examined (based on national industry growth patterns and the industry mix of the region).

## Employment Distribution by Type

The table below shows the employment mix by ownership type for Total - All Industries for the Santa Cruz/Monterey/San Benito County region. Four of these ownership types — federal, state, and local government and the private sector — together constitute “Covered Employment” (employment covered by the Unemployment Insurance programs of the United States and reported via the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages). “Self-Employment” refers to unincorporated self-employment and represents workers whose primary job is self-employment (that is, these data do not include workers whose primary job is a wage-and-salary position that is supplemented with self-employment).



		Empl	%
<div></div>	Private	266,877	77.9%
<div></div>	Self-Employment	18,004	5.3%
<div></div>	Local Government	39,835	11.6%
<div></div>	State Government	10,676	3.1%
<div></div>	Federal Government	5,837	1.7%
<div></div>	Other non-covered	1,176	0.3%

Source: JobsEQ®

Strong entrepreneurial activity is indicative of growing industries. Using self-employment as a proxy for entrepreneurs, a higher share of self-employed individuals within a regional industry points to future growth.

## Establishments

In 2023, there were 26,710 Total - All Industries establishments in the Santa Cruz/Monterey/San Benito County region (per covered employment establishment counts), an increase from 22,795 establishments ten years earlier in 2013. New business formations are an important source of job creation in a regional economy, spurring innovation and competition and driving productivity growth. Establishment data can provide an indicator of growth in businesses by counting each single location (such as a factory or a store) where business activity takes place with at least one employee.

## Gross Domestic Product & Productivity

In 2023, Total - All Industries produced \$49 billion in GDP for the region. Gross domestic product (GDP) is the most comprehensive measure of regional economic activity, and an industry’s contribution to GDP is an important indicator of regional industry strength. It is a measure of total value- added to a regional economy in the form of labor income, proprietor’s income, and business profits, among others. Growth in productivity (output per worker) leads to increases in wealth and higher average standards of living in a region.

## Regional Indicators

A key objective of Regional Planning efforts for San Benito, Sant Cruz, and Monterey Counties Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) is to connect AJCC services to a regional skills infrastructure that aligns with regional labor market needs. To further refine how progress is evaluated in the region, the indicators below are used to assess progress in the region and focus on the following:

### **The region has a process to communicate industry workforce needs to supply-side partners**

The region is measuring progress against our metrics through collaborations with industry partners and sector champions on how the training needs that were identified by the region's industry partners are subsequently developed into training programs by staff and Board members in conjunction with supply-side partners such as training providers and higher education.

### **The region has policies supporting equity and strives to improve job quality**

Measurement of this indicator includes development of benchmarks and methods to track workforce partner professional development training supporting equity and job quality. Equity goes beyond equality by providing varying levels of support based on a specific individual's needs or abilities. The regional WDBs have policies on Supportive Services, Nondiscrimination/Equal Opportunity, and Individual Training Accounts (ITAs) that provide varying levels of support based on an individual's actual needs and abilities. In addition to supporting equity, the NCC RPU is focused on preparing individuals for quality jobs with living wages, good benefits, legal rights, predictable scheduling, a supportive work environment, safety and security, and worker voice.

### **The region has shared target populations of emphasis**

The region has shared populations of emphasis for which it provides priority of service: veterans and their eligible spouses, recipients of public assistance, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient, including English language learners. The goal has been to consult with and convene as many community partners as possible to ensure a broad base of support for these populations, including adult schools, community colleges, industry champions, and service provider leadership. These convenings assist the region to develop the benchmarks and methods necessary to measure its progress in connecting with and serving its priority populations.

### **The region deploys shared/pooled resources to provide services, training, and education to meet the target population's needs**

The NCC RPU coordinates with the Central Coast Business Engagement Roundtable that meets quarterly to discuss regional needs for Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion Activities and includes Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura counties. The Business Engagement Roundtable was established to support businesses in the region with their layoff and/or hiring needs along with incumbent worker training opportunities. At the quarterly meetings, the team hears from State EDD, the California Workforce Development Board, the California Labor Federation, the DOL and the Employment Training Panel for services and grant opportunities.

The quarterly roundtable is a useful resource for the broad region to provide services, training and education to meet the needs of both business and job seekers, with a focus on shared target populations. Based on information from these meetings, a survey goes out to the region's workforce development board directors to learn what each of the entities is looking for in training opportunities for their staff and partner staff. The Lead

Agency Training Coordinator then obtains contracts with training providers to meet those needs and offers several training opportunities to the teams on a quarterly basis.

The NCC RPU and broader region have found this to be an excellent resource to provide the appropriate services, training and education based on our employer's needs.

## State which two of the four regional indicators the RPU selected, and the objective metrics established for each indicator chosen.

The objectives the region chose early on and still remain are:

1. The region has shared target populations of emphasis; and
2. The region deploys shared/pooled resources to provide services, training, and education to meet the target population's needs.

## Provide an assessment of the impacts, lessons learned, and progress on tracking and evaluating the regionally agreed metrics

Measuring and achieving the goals associated with the chosen regional indicators are approached through several strategies:

1. **Baseline Assessment:** Initially conducting a comprehensive assessment of the current knowledge levels, practices, and outcomes related to workforce development among WDB and partner staff. This served as a baseline against which progress could be measured.
2. **Training Programs:** once surveys were developed to share with all WDB and Partner staff, the region implemented targeted training programs designed to enhance the knowledge and skills of WDB and partner staff in various aspects of workforce development, including but not limited to:
  - Strategies for effective engagement with businesses, colleges, and job seekers.
  - Understanding and promoting living wage job opportunities.
  - Equity-focused approaches to workforce development.
  - Skills training and career pathways development.
3. **Performance Metrics:** Establishing specific performance metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) to track progress towards the goals. These metrics have included:
  - Increase in the number of living wage jobs created in the region.
  - Improvement in job quality indicators (e.g., wages, benefits, job stability).
  - Increase in income mobility among job seekers and workers.
  - Participation rates in skills training programs.
  - Feedback from businesses, colleges, and job seekers on the effectiveness of WDB and partner services (surveys upon completion of training offered)
4. **Partnership and Collaboration:** Facilitating collaboration and partnerships between WDB, partners, businesses, colleges, and other stakeholders to leverage resources, share best practices, and develop innovative solutions for workforce development. Although this remains a goal in the collaboration efforts, it can be a challenge in delivery. We continue to work on this aspect of partnership and collaboration.
5. **Continuous Evaluation and Adjustment:** Regularly evaluating the effectiveness of training programs and initiatives implemented and making necessary adjustments based on feedback from those participating in the training programs. This involves conducting surveys and performance reviews to gather insights and identify areas for improvement.
6. **Documentation and Reporting:** Maintaining thorough documentation of activities, outcomes, and lessons learned. Regular reporting to funding agencies and stakeholders helps to ensure transparency and accountability while also providing opportunities to celebrate successes and address challenges when appropriate.

By employing these strategies, the region's progress is being measured and achieved by systematically improving the knowledge, skills, and practices of the three WDBs and partner staff, ultimately leading to the desired outcomes of increased equity, job quality, income mobility, and industry-led partnerships focused on skills training for workforce development.

## Fostering Demand-Driven Skills Attainment

The NCC RPU frequently catalyzes conversations between regional employers and regional education providers. The RPU knows that direct connections and communications between the supply and demand side of the talent economy can alleviate inefficiencies and increase the effectiveness of education and training programs available. Besides serving as the connector between these two groups, the RPU works to sponsor events like career fairs to help students get face—or screen time—with regional employers.

Focusing on opportunities that will provide workers with sustainable wages and upward career mobility in established and growing sectors in the region is a top priority of the RPU. The RPU also recognizes that connecting jobseekers and High Road employers will play a crucial role in the North Central Coast region's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. This section of the Regional Plan identifies key industry clusters and sustainable-wage occupational pathways within those industry clusters. This data will serve as guidance for the RPU and partners in the region.

### **Identify the In-demand industry sectors or occupations for the region**

The highest in-demand industry sectors for the region include:

- Healthcare
- Construction
- Information Technology/Cyber Security
- Hospitality/Tourism
- Agriculture

## Regional Sector Pathways

Industry clusters are important because they provide a coherent picture of the local economy and opportunities for development or growth. Industry clusters can also have multiplier effects, as firms within clusters attract similar workforces, attracting more employers and creating a feedback loop that strengthens the local labor market. Focusing on specific industry clusters allows the RPU and other workforce development stakeholders to leverage the region's economic comparative advantages and develop robust education and training programs to support a qualified workforce. The NCC RPU uses the data below to help inform, develop, and revise regional programs and initiatives.

Two of the five highest-earning industry clusters in the North Central Coast region declined in size between 2014 and 2019. These high-earning clusters, where workers earn between \$83,500 and \$184,400 per year (including benefits) on average, include Healthcare, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and Finance, Insurance, Banking, and Real Estate (FIRE), and often require highly educated and technologically skilled workers.

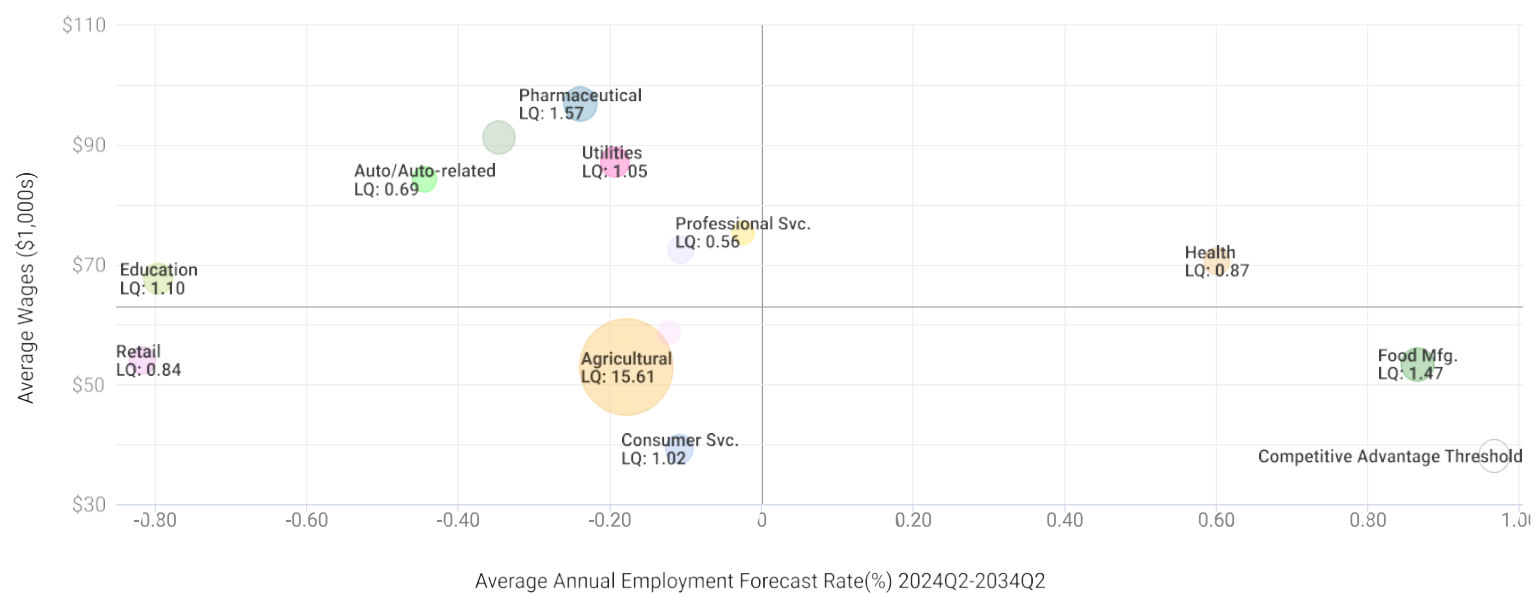
### **In-demand Industry Clusters**

A cluster is a geographic concentration of interrelated industries or occupations. The industry cluster in the Santa Cruz/Monterey/San Benito County region with the highest relative concentration is Agricultural with a location quotient of 15.61. This cluster employs 65,333 workers in the region with an average wage of \$52,987.



Employment in the Agricultural cluster is projected to contract in the region about 0.2% per year over the next ten years.

Industry Clusters for Santa Cruz/Monterey/San Benito County as of 2024Q2



Location quotient and average wage data are derived from the Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, imputed where necessary, and updated through 2024Q1 with preliminary estimates updated to 2024Q2. Forecast employment growth uses national projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics adapted for regional growth patterns.

Source: Jobs EQ Data as of 2024Q2

Please note that the size of the location quotient “bubble” reflects the relative number employed in the industry.

## Development and implementation of current and new sector-based initiatives planned for the next four years that address the needs of regionally in-demand industries or occupations

As the North NCC RPU advances its workforce development strategy, local leadership shares a unified vision for sector-specific initiatives in regionally in-demand industries. The primary objectives are to:

- Assess and expand existing local programs to maximize their impact across the region.
  - Align workforce development efforts with employer and industry needs.
  - Enhance collaboration with regional and state partners to drive innovation and talent development.
- 

### Priority Industry Sectors

The NCC RPU is focused on identifying high-growth, high-demand industries that offer sustainable wages and career advancement opportunities. Key sectors targeted for regional expansion include:

**Healthcare** – Continued growth in healthcare occupations requires expanded training and career pathways.

**Construction** – Increased demand for skilled labor and apprenticeship opportunities supports workforce development.

**Cybersecurity** – The rise in digital threats and demand for IT security professionals drives the need for specialized training.

**Advanced Manufacturing** – Technological advancements in automation and precision engineering create new job opportunities.

Healthcare, Information & Communications Technology (ICT), and Biotechnology/Biomedical Devices were identified as key sectors in the previous four-year regional plan, and continued employer and educational demand necessitates further investment and program expansion in these clusters.

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### Regional Collaboration and Strategic Partnerships

The NCC RPU recognizes its strategic proximity to the Bay Area, a hub for economic growth and technological innovation. To strengthen regional alignment and workforce development efforts, the NCC RPU continues to collaborate with:

- ◆ Bay Area Community College Consortium (BACCC) – Facilitating a broader understanding of talent needs across the region.
- ◆ Regional Equity and Recovery Partnerships (RERP) Grant – Fostering cooperation between tri-county WDBs, community colleges, and employers, and breaking down geographical and programmatic silos.
- ◆ State and Local Industry Partners – Engaging with employers, training providers, and educational institutions to enhance program development and accessibility.

This collaborative approach ensures that regional workforce programs remain responsive, aligned, and scalable beyond the term of the RERP grant.

## **Addressing Challenges in Low-Wage Industries**

Despite these efforts, the NCC region continues to experience high employment rates in consumer services and agriculture—both of which are traditionally low-wage sectors. To address this, the RPU is exploring strategies to:

- Support workforce mobility by providing upskilling and reskilling opportunities.
- Increase career pathways that lead to higher-wage, sustainable employment.
- Enhance employer engagement to identify opportunities for wage growth and career advancement.

By prioritizing high-demand industries, fostering regional collaboration, and addressing persistent workforce challenges, the NCC RPU aims to drive economic mobility and create a more resilient workforce.

## **Describe the RPU processes or strategies used to communicate effectively and cohesively with regional employers**

The region's long term strategy to communicate effectively and cohesively with regional employers is to do the following:

- 1) WDBs to act as the conduit to hold quarterly meetings with partners, including WDBs, employers, and community colleges, and invite guest speakers so all gain knowledge of how the parts of the system can work together to generate informed and trained job seekers.
- 2) Continue to move workers to the next level (occupational tier) by helping them develop the skills and knowledge to move up the career ladder.
- 3) Remain committed, as a region, to developing programs that connect current employers and workers with the training and educational providers that will allow them the flexibility to complete a certificate, a degree, or specialized training while they work.

## **Enabling Upward Mobility for All Californians**

Improving job quality and the ability for upward career progression for those in entry-level roles will be essential determinants of the North Central Coast region's continued recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic. This section of the Regional Plan focuses on how the North Central Coast region can improve the economic security for its residents through support and collaboration with High Road employers and improving accessibility to High Road jobs for historically underserved populations.

Throughout this plan, several industry clusters and career pathways are highlighted. The North Central Coast RPU prioritizes training programs within these select industry clusters and career pathways so that the result of the programs is often a High Road job, regardless of the employer. In cases where a High Road job may not be a typical outcome for that occupation, the RPU aims to collaborate specifically with employers who support the tenets of High Road employment: living wages, benefits, good working conditions, and adequate hours with predictable scheduling.

### **The region's policies for supporting equity and improving job quality**

The region has conducted several research efforts to understand where High Road jobs are and the pathways to provide entry into these occupations. This knowledge is the first step in prioritizing job quality. The research allows the RPU to collaborate deliberately with employers and community colleges to help fill gaps in training and skills that lead to these High Road jobs.

The region also recognizes in the context of the post-Covid-19 economy that the data, including some of the data in this plan, reflects losses among many lower-paid and lower-quality employment opportunities. The RPU sees this as a call to action and an opportunity to help workers transition to entry points among in-

demand and higher-quality positions. With the research in hand, the RPU and partners lead the development and support of specific programs that lead to high-quality jobs, such as Advanced Manufacturing, Drone Technology, Aviation, and others that are growing clusters in the region.

Survey data from regional employers also suggests that many businesses are looking to reshore their supply chains, increasingly looking for suppliers within the state and the North Central Coast region. Amazon's large warehouses are an example of the North Central Coast region seeing an increase in demand for the production and distribution of materials and goods, bolstering demand for typically well-paying manufacturing and distribution roles. The region will continue to collaborate with employers, monitor the situation, and act proactively with employers, community colleges, adult education, the Department of Rehabilitation and others to proactively ensure that there is a workforce prepared to meet these new demands.

## **Advancing economic prosperity of shared target populations**

The North Central Coast RPU believes in decent wages, working conditions, and economic growth. The RPU promotes inclusive, sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and quality jobs for all.

## **High Road Workforce System**

Under the leadership of the State of California's Workforce Development Board, the vision for the future of workforce development is centered on the establishment and growth of a High Road Workforce system. The High Road Workforce system is focused on meaningful industry engagement and placement in quality jobs that provide economic security.

### **How the RPU promotes job quality and commits to working with employers to improve job quality and access to jobs**

The High Road Workforce system and job quality are important measures of a region's labor market. The RPU and its local partners believe that High Road jobs offering living wages, benefits, and support for quality of life are an essential component of workforce development. The RPU works to enhance the awareness and availability of high-quality jobs and is working to develop strategies, including the work with our four regional community colleges to drive High Road jobs forward. The RPU strives to support and promote opportunities that lead to high-quality jobs and formalize these commitments into the future. Thus far, the RPU has conducted several research efforts – largely through the development of special grants – to understand where High Road jobs are and the pathways that provide entry into these occupations, which is the first step in prioritizing job quality. The research allows the RPU to collaborate with employers and community colleges to help fill gaps in training and skills that lead to these High Road jobs.

### **How the RPU integrates targeted service strategies (education, workforce training and family resources) for the region's unserved and underserved communities**

The RPU currently provides education, workforce training, and family resources through its partner organizations, including the AJCCs' One Stop services for Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth. The RPU integrates targeted service strategies through the One-Stop partners in each local area, offering surveys regularly to participants seeking assistance from WIOA programs so the partners can learn and implement solutions and mitigations to the problems faced by unserved and underserved communities.

# Climate and Environmental Sustainability

## **How the RPU is working towards meeting industry and workforce needs to support a climate-neutral transition**

As California moves toward a carbon-neutral economy, entire industries are changing, along with the jobs, skills, and knowledge necessary to perform those jobs. The North Central Coast region is also experiencing these changes. One large employer, the Moss Landing Power Plant, has changed in that it is now a natural gas-fired power station as well as a battery energy storage facility. The changes require added skill sets to keep the plant up and running 24/7, and the RPU works to understand the training and skill sets needed to ensure a climate-neutral transition.

California and the region have been at the forefront of zero-emission vehicles and charging stations, along with offshore wind turbines being discussed for the north central coast. Solar power has developed exponentially in the last 10 years in the region, providing climate change mitigation and management. All of these changes require the RPU to learn and understand the environmental impacts to the industry sectors, job loss, job growth, and new skill demands, as well as how to address the disproportionate impacts of climate change on regional target populations of emphasis.

The RPU meets regularly with employers, partners, community colleges, CBOs, and others to ensure the new skill demands of a climate-neutral environment are being developed to meet the new demands of Industry.

## Equity and Economic Justice

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed some of the existing racial and economic inequalities in the North Central Coast that continue today. The pandemic and regional wildfires and severe storm events have added greater importance to the RPU's role in ensuring access and equal opportunities are available to all interested individuals, regardless of their race, ethnicity, or economic status. The North Central Coast RPU has prioritized formalizing a policy around ensuring equal access to opportunities.

The RPU relies upon demographic and census data to identify and target outreach efforts to specific populations in need throughout the North Central Coast region. North Central Coast One Stops are intentionally located in areas closest to populations most likely to use them and are the RPU's primary point of contact with in-need populations. This makes One Stops and their work crucial to ensuring programs and opportunities are available to all who seek them. This includes providing services or referring customers to other providers so that an individual with multiple needs can receive support for each of their needs. The RPU will support the One Stop operators throughout the region to hold regular meetings and communicate openly, sharing best practices, challenges, and partnership opportunities.

The RPU offers outreach and support through regular monthly meetings between community-based organizations (CBOs), One Stops, and other stakeholders. CBOs and their grassroots-level work within communities are often the RPU's greatest asset in accessing its target populations. Many of these CBOs provide a range of support services to these individuals, who often face multiple employment barriers. Removal of all the barriers facing a job seeker provides the individual with the best chances of success. Removing these barriers also requires cooperation and coordination across several entities, including CBOs, One Stops, educational institutions, and support services like childcare and transportation. The RPU helps foster communication and connections between these stakeholders to mitigate barriers and maximize job seekers' chances of completing their programs and entering the workforce.

The North Central Coast RPU also continues to support the “Prison to Employment 2.0” or “P2E 2.0” program, which assists formerly incarcerated individuals in navigating the array of barriers to the re-entry process. P2E 2.0 helps formerly incarcerated individuals access support services, earn and learn opportunities, career pathways, and braided resources. This program is made possible through the collaboration and coordination of dozens of regional stakeholders. Many of these stakeholders are CBOs and non-profits, such as the Goodwill Central Coast, the 5Cities Homeless Coalition, Community Solutions, MILPA Collective, and Veteran’s Transition Center, among others. The RPU also works with several local Department of Corrections offices, state agencies, educators, and employer champions. The North Central Coast aims to carry this extensive collaboration into other initiatives around the region going forward.

## **The region’s strategy to achieve equity and commitments to ensure equitable access to regional sector pathways earn-and-learn opportunities, supportive services, and other effective service strategies identified by the RPU**

The RPU shares information regularly through WIOA partner meetings to ensure all partners have access to demographic and census data so that service strategies are designed around all partners’ input. Additionally, needs surveys are provided to potential program participants. Customer and partner inputs are collected and analyzed to create and implement programs that address the training and upskilling needs of regional industries.

The region’s commitments to ensure equitable access to regional sector pathways earn-and-learn opportunities and supportive services include an ongoing discussion among the directors of the regional WDBs regarding a regional Priority of Service policy and implementing the same caps on supportive services across the region such that all individuals in the region receive the same maximum level of support.

Along with WIOA training and employment opportunities, the region seeks regionwide grants to offer specialized training opportunities, including the High Road Construction Careers: SB1 grant provided through the Monterey Bay Collaborative; the High Road Construction Careers: Resilient Workforce Funds grant, also provided through the Monterey Bay Collaborative; the Regional Equity and Recovery Partnerships grant; and the Prison to Employment (P2E) 2.0 grant led by the San Benito County WDB.

## **Aligning, Coordinating, and Integrating Programs and Services**

This section of the Regional Plan discusses the current state and future aspirations for cooperation and collaboration by regional partners to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of resources and to serve target populations better. As a region containing parts of old systems, the North Central Coast RPU is in a position to build off of the collaborative efforts that worked well in the past while also building new systems with new partners.

As discussed above, the RPU offers outreach and support through regular monthly meetings between community-based organizations (CBOs), One Stops, and other stakeholders. CBOs and their grassroots-level work within communities are often the RPU’s greatest asset in accessing its target populations. Many of these CBOs provide a range of support services to these individuals, who often face multiple employment barriers. Removal of all the barriers facing a job seeker provides the individual with the best chances of success. Removing these barriers also requires cooperation and coordination across several entities, including CBOs, One Stops, educational institutions, and support services like childcare and transportation. The RPU helps foster communication and connections between these stakeholders to mitigate barriers and maximize job seekers’ chances of completing their programs and entering the workforce.

## System Alignment

The NCC RPU continues discussions around identifying and aligning the priorities of the RPU. While some of these discussions are around creating a new MOU, cost referrals, and training referrals, the RPU is also discussing opportunities to expand collaboration around joint rapid response and employer engagement. One area of interest is the introduction of a regionwide virtual job fair. When all traditional job fairs were canceled due to public health concerns, a regionwide virtual job fair had the opportunity to connect residents from all three counties to a wide range of hiring employers. The RPU is also discussing re-energizing the regional website for all partners to the NCC RPU. The regional website provides a list of regionwide services, programs, and initiatives that business and job seekers can access.

### **Regional Service Strategies, including the use of cooperative service delivery agreements or Memorandums of understanding (MOU), devised to support a more responsive system**

While formal details of administrative cost-sharing agreements continue to be discussed, the RPU has developed a regional procurement structure for consultants, which has saved the local partners time and effort, eliminating the need to re-procure services for each RPU member.

### **How the region establishes administrative cost arrangements, including the pooling of funds for administrative costs for the region**

Although the region has not established an arrangement for the pooling of funds for administrative costs, the region has developed procurement procedures to allow the regional WDBs access to the same information and processes, allowing for regionwide administrative cost savings.



## Appendices

### Appendix A: Stakeholder and Community Engagement Summary

Development of comprehensive plans entails building broad and inclusive partnerships with regional and local entities in a variety of sectors. This includes engaging with employers, labor organizations, and community-based organizations as well as WIOA core, required, and strategic program partners to ensure the inclusion of person-centered approaches to addressing multifaceted barriers to employment by utilizing input from the communities themselves.

Stakeholders participating in the planning processes include, but are not limited to, employers, labor organizations, education partners, human services, and housing partners as well as community-based organizations that provide services to shared target populations such as the following: justice-involved, English language learners, refugees, immigrants, youth, older adults, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and any other entities supporting historically unserved or underserved communities.

Using the template below, Regional Planning Units and Local Workforce Development Boards provide a detailed description of how meaningful stakeholder involvement and community engagement was achieved when developing the 2025-28 WIOA Regional and Local Plans.

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**Mode of Outreach:** January 15, 2025, public meeting from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m.

**Target of Outreach:** Public, Community Partners, and Business.

**Summary of Attendance:** Representatives from the State of California Employment Development Department; California's Department of Rehabilitation; staff from Santa Cruz County, Monterey County, and San Benito County workforce development boards.

**Comments:**

- Establishing data sharing agreements may help with collaboration.
- There should be regional events for employers to be educated about disabilities and the resources available to assist this population.
- Another way to learn about viable alternative priority industry sectors would be to research what conferences are happening in each local area.
- Finance, Banking, Insurance, and Real Estate are difficult industries for participants due to licensing requirements. Those who pursue those careers are also typically self-sufficient and get there on their own.
- Another profession that is emerging is dentistry.
- We should partner with school districts to educate youth on various career paths and available resources so that they are better prepared to enter the workforce.
- The referral form should be uploaded onto the website for use with a feature to track overall progress.
- A regional referral process and network list should be established.



- A large barrier that prevents partners from making referrals is the legal status requirement for participants.
- Concerns were expressed regarding limited language and translation information for the Indigenous community in Monterey County. One idea would be to reach out to Behavioral Health Interpreting Services that use LanguageLine Solutions and Binational Center for the Development of Caxcan Indigenous Communities, also known as Centro Binacional para el Desarrollo Indigena Oaxaqueno, which provides interpretation services to the Indigenous population of Monterey County.

**Mode of Outreach:** January 16, 2025, Zoom meeting from 1:30 to 3:00 p.m.

**Target of Outreach:** Public, Community Partners, CBOs, Education, Business.

**Summary of Attendance:** Child Support Services, State of California Employment Development Department, Small Business Development Council, staff to the Monterey County Workforce Development Board.

**Comments:**

**Child Support Services:**

- There are challenges relating to getting clients' authorization signatures to be referred out to the MC Works programs, including other partners' programs.
- Clients are not willing to take extra steps to meet with WDBs to find employment.
- Legal status is a barrier for some entities which are unable to refer their clients for services because they are not eligible due to State or federal eligibility requirements.
- If clients have a disability, they do not want to disclose it.
- Partnering with WIOA providers is different compared to other partners – more stringent.

**Employment Development Department:**

- The region needs a process where there is a point of contact for the partners when making referrals would be beneficial.
- Working to get disabled veterans back to the workforce – and facing transportation barriers.

**Small Business Development Council:**

- Language and technology barriers exist and should be addressed.
- Pathways are needed for clients and to be able to refer them to different resources for client needs.
- Assistance with retention is highly needed for family services applicants to keep them in a program.
- Some customers are forced into the program; otherwise, they will lose benefits, meaning they are not willing participants, making it challenging for them to reach success.
- Language barriers are based on different nationalities and languages.
- In need of home-based businesses in the region, such as home childcare services, cottage restaurants, food trucks.

Staff to the Monterey County Workforce Development Board:

- Possibility of a regional referral process. Everyone is housed in the same building to meet individual needs. Regional networking list, TEAMS Channel, regional meetings with Santa Cruz, San Benito, and Monterey counties.

**Mode of Outreach:** January 23, 2025, Zoom meeting from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. and Zoom follow-up meeting on February 10, 2025, 3:30 to 5:00 p.m.

**Target of Outreach:** Education, community colleges.

**Summary of Attendance:** Cabrillo Community College, Hartnell Community College, Monterey Peninsula College, Gavilan Community College, Bay Area Community College Consortium (BACCC) Regional Director for Workforce Partnerships.

**Comments:**

- Idea of co-locating services at the AJCC with Gavilan College leadership.
- Idea of submitting formal written comments on Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) recommendations, with WDBs continuing to advocate for ETPL system reform.
- Community colleges and WDBs to consider formalizing agreements beyond the Regional Equity and Recovery Partnerships (RERP) grant.
- Community colleges and WDBs to explore opportunities for regional cross-training.
- Idea of helping to organize an in-person regional meeting or conference for all stakeholders, including Business.
- The Monterey, Santa Cruz, and San Benito County WDBs have invested extensive time and resources to build cross-system collaboration with their local community colleges well beyond the RERP grant. This work is not easy and is often faced with systemic barriers.
- The ETPL is one of those large intersection points where the WDBs and community colleges alike face significant challenges. A statewide workgroup has convened over the past year to address the ETPL reform necessary for true, cross-system collaboration. For the first time in California's history, a unified voice across community colleges, WDBs, adult schools, and regional occupational programs is calling for SYSTEM CHANGE. As the WDBs outline their strategic focus moving forward, it is recommended that they consider supporting the ETPL recommendations below, when possible:
  1. Request a waiver for initial eligibility for State and public accredited programs.
  2. Eliminate additional State requirements imposed on the local ETPL.
  3. Reduce continued eligibility review requirements from annually to every 2 years.
  4. Require State agencies to provide existing wage data.
  5. Streamline CalJOBS enrollment for training providers.
  6. Allow private providers to come within 10% of meeting any three of the five WIOA training provider goals.

## **Appendix B: Public Comments received that disagree with the Regional Plan**

No comments were received that disagreed with the North Central Coast Regional Planning Unit's 2025-28 Regional Plan.

WIOA Regional Plan  
PYs 2025-2028

North Central Coast Regional Planning Unit  
April 11, 2025


Appendix C: Signature Page

By signing below, the Local Board Chairs request approval of the North Central Coast’s 2025-28 Regional Plan.

Local Board Chairs

Local Board Chairs

Local Board Chairs

Signed by:  
  
Signature

DocuSigned by:  
  
Signature

  
Signature

Erik Cushman  
Name

Rob Morse  
Name

Chuck Frowein  
Name

Monterey County  
Workforce  
Development Board  
Chair  
Title

Santa Cruz County  
Workforce  
Development Board  
Chair  
Title

San Benito County  
Workforce  
Development Board  
Chair  
Title

4/11/2025 | 9:43 AM PDT  
Date

4/10/2025 | 6:55 PM PDT  
Date

4/9/25  
Date