

CALIFORNIA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD AD HOC COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

June 10, 2026

Full meeting documents, public comments, agenda, and future meeting dates may also be found on the [CWDB website](#).

Members in Attendance:

- Board Chair Joanna Rees*
- Chancellor Sonya Christian, represented by designee Vice Chancellor Anthony Cordova*
- Hala Hijazi*
- Secretary Stewart Knox, represented by designee Abby Snay
- Magda Menendez*
- Robert Redlo*
- Nicole Rice*
- Director Kimberly Rutledge, represented by designee Carol Asch*
- Senator Lola Smallwood-Cuevas, represented by designee Jessica Zaragoza*

* indicates member participated in the meeting remotely via Zoom

CWDB Staff Participants:

- Kaina Pereira, Executive Director
- Adriana Cruz, Regional Engagement Specialist
- Sandee Nieves, Branch Manager, Statewide Partnerships Team
- Michael Wiafe, Assistant Deputy Director, Workforce Policy and External Affairs

Regional and State Partner Presenters:

- Deborah Sanchez, Director, Santa Ana Workforce Development Board
- Nancy Cook, Executive Director, Orange County Workforce Development Board
- Marco Lucero, Executive Director, Anaheim Workforce Development Board
- Sebastian Sanchez, Deputy Secretary for Agriculture and Immigrant Workforce, Labor & Workforce Development Agency (LWDA)

Agenda

1. Orange County Regional Update
 - a. Overview of Regional Tour
 - b. CWDB Staff Report
 - c. Regional Leader Report
 - d. Board Member Discussion
 - e. Public Comment

2. LWDA's Agriculture Workforce Development Strategy
 - a. Presentation
 - b. Board Member Discussion
 - c. Public Comment

3. General Public Comments

4. Adjournment

1. Orange County Regional Update

CWDB Executive Director opened the meeting, welcoming the group and expressing a personal connection to Orange County, which added significance to the regional tour. He highlighted visits to outstanding culinary training institutions and urban revitalization projects showcasing regional workforce innovations.

CWDB Branch Manager Sandee Nieves delivered a [report](#) showcasing Orange County as a unique region where the Regional Planning Unit and the California Jobs First region match county boundaries, resulting in especially streamlined, consistent workforce policy. Orange County has approximately 3.2 million residents, a median household income of \$110,000, and per capita income of \$47,000. Educational attainment is generally high, but lower in areas such as Santa Ana, Westminster, and Garden Grove, representing both a workforce and outreach opportunity. Major employers include Disney, UC Irvine, County of Orange, St. Joseph's Healthcare, and Kaiser. Unemployment rates are lower than the state average (3.7% vs 5.3%). Nieves emphasized the significance of Prison to Employment (P2E) funding for justice-involved individuals and noted the funding was not being renewed, highlighting this as a regional concern due to the high return on investment for participants. She also noted upcoming federal work requirements and general capacity issues facing the regional boards.

The [Regional Leader Report](#) featured a joint overview of Orange County's workforce system delivered by Marco Lucero, Executive Director of the Anaheim Workforce Development Board; Deborah Sanchez, Director of the Santa Ana Workforce Development Board; and Nancy Cook, Executive Director of the Orange County

Workforce Development Board. Lucero explained the region's unique structure: while Anaheim and Santa Ana operate their own boards to serve distinct populations, they collaborated closely with Cook's countywide board to implement unified local and regional plans. Lucero emphasized that these boards share labor markets, employer relationships, educational partners, and workforce challenges, resulting in a dynamic and integrated approach to servicing the region.

Cook described the four American Job Centers (AJCCs) located throughout the county as well as a network of affiliate and service locations, including libraries, family resource centers, and community colleges. She detailed efforts to align core workforce policies, such as training standards and data-sharing, across all three boards, ensuring businesses and jobseekers receive consistent support no matter where they access services.

D. Sanchez added regional context, describing Orange County's dense population and economic diversity, but also highlighting the acute challenge of housing affordability and its impact on workforce participation and mobility. She noted that while Orange County generates \$348 billion annually and is sustained by more than 96% small businesses, these economic strengths are paired with significant barriers for first-time homebuyers and renters. According to D. Sanchez, wages have been unable to keep pace with the high cost of living, making supportive services, earn-and-learn models, and long-term career pathways essential features of the region's workforce strategy.

The leaders underscored the importance of collaborative sector strategies, targeting healthcare, advanced manufacturing, information/communication technology, and hospitality/tourism as priority industries. They highlighted the value of innovative partnerships, such as the California Volunteers Youth Service Corps and new flexible apprenticeships, grant-supported training for supply chain, cybersecurity, and health pathway careers, and [the OC Works employer mapping platform](#). The trio closed by emphasizing commitment to regional solutions, stressing that collaboration and alignment is key to meeting both current and future workforce challenges in Orange County.

Board members engaged around housing challenges and workforce housing models, UC Irvine employee housing, densification strategies, employer engagement in providing housing, and [the OCVibe project](#) near the Honda Center as an example of housing's intersection with workforce issues. Board members asked about healthcare workforce strategies, with Cook and D. Sanchez describing both persistent experience gaps for new healthcare workers and programmatic efforts using Governor's Discretionary grant funds to braid work experience with healthcare credentials. Recent hospital alliances and stronger partnerships with K-12 CTE were also noted.

No public comment was received.

2. LWDA's Agriculture Workforce Development Strategy

Sebastian Sanchez, Deputy Secretary for Agriculture and Immigrant Workforce at LWDA, [presented](#) the state's evolving strategy for farm worker advancement. He described the workforce as largely undocumented, aging, with minimal formal education, and noted that existing programs have generally reached the children or second generation of farm worker families rather than frontline farmworkers currently in the fields.

Sanchez discussed employer feedback emphasizing the need for workforce flexibility, basic skills such as English language and digital literacy, soft skills, leadership development, and adaptation to emerging agricultural technologies. Climate change impacts including drought, fire, flooding, and rising temperatures were presented as central concerns affecting farmworker livelihoods and rural community stability.

Administrative burdens and pay mandates were identified as discouraging small farm employers from participating in funded programs. Sanchez described the Farm Work Advancement Program (FAP), structured as two tracks focused on upskilling and program planning, which allows stipend use but has primarily served farmworker children rather than frontline agricultural laborers. He also explained the Employment Training Panel (ETP) Ag Initiative, which set aside \$10 million for employer-led training but saw limited participation, with only \$6.5 million distributed.

To address fragmentation, Sanchez described the Agency's focus on coordination, including convening state staff and grantees from multiple agencies. He highlighted the Central Valley Mother Lode community colleges' Ag Step program, which offers asynchronous, remote skill-building for farmworkers. He closed by emphasizing the importance of building connections, reducing silos, and creating coordinated workforce resources across California's agricultural regions.

No public comment was received.

4. General Public Comments

No general public comments were received.

5. Adjournment

CWDB Executive Director reminded the board of the next ad hoc committee meeting on August 5, 2026, and the upcoming in-person full board meeting on July 8, 2026. All CWDB business having concluded, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:02 p.m.