



Joanna Rees, Chair

Kaina Pereira, Executive Director

Gavin Newsom, Governor

## CALIFORNIA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD AD HOC COMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

**August 5, 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\*
- Director Nancy Farias\*
- Hala Hijazi\*
- Magda Menendez\*
- Robert Redlo\*
- Nicole Rice\*
- Director Kimberly Rutledge, represented by designee Nancy Wentling\*
- Senator Lola Smallwood-Cuevas, represented by designee Jessica Zaragoza\*
- Jeremy Smith\*
- Brendalynn Goodall\*\*

\* indicates member participated in the meeting remotely via Zoom

\*\* Brendalynn Goodall joined but was not yet officially sworn in as a CWDB member

### CWDB Staff Participants:

- Kaina Pereira, Executive Director
- Sandee Nieves, Supervisor II

### Regional and State Partner Presenters:

- Brandon Evans, Chief Workforce Development Officer, Kern County
- Kenny Spratt, Talent Base USA (Veterans Career Bridge in Kern)

- Norma Rojas, Associate Vice Chancellor of Public Affairs and Development, Kern Community College District
- Teddy Martinez, Vice President of Strategic & Policy Initiatives, San Diego Workforce Partnership
- Rachel Bereza, President and CEO, San Diego Workforce Partnership

## Agenda

1. Kern County Regional Update
  - a. Overview of Regional Tour
  - b. CWDB Staff Report
  - c. Regional Leader Report
  - d. Board Member Discussion
  - e. Public Comment
2. Artificial Intelligence, Work, Human Value: Findings from San Diego
  - a. Presentation
  - b. Board Member Discussion
  - c. Public Comment
3. General Public Comments
4. Adjournment

## 1. Kern County Regional Update

CWDB Executive Director Kaina Pereira opened the meeting and provided an overview of his regional visit to Kern County. He noted the significant economic and environmental transformation underway as the region transitions from a historical focus on oil and gas exploration toward climate-smart technologies.

CWDB Supervisor II Sandee Nieves delivered a staff report on the region, highlighting that Kern is the third-largest county in California with a diverse landscape that includes the San Joaquin Valley and the Mojave Desert. The county has a young population with a median age of 32, an unemployment rate of 8.3%, and a large Hispanic community. The economy is anchored by agriculture, energy, manufacturing, and distribution, with Kern County ranking as the top renewable energy-producing county in the United States, accounting for over 70% of California's renewable energy. The region also hosts the Mojave Air and Space Port, the first inland spaceport in the country. Ms. Nieves identified regional strengths, including land and natural resources; vulnerabilities such as climate impacts and a younger population that contributes to higher unemployment; and opportunities related to its business-friendly environment and focus on sustainable job growth.

The Regional Leader Report featured presentations from three local leaders. Brandon Evans, Chief Workforce Development Officer for Kern County, described his department's business-friendly approach, emphasizing the "stackability" of employer incentives like Paid Work Experience, On-the-Job Training (OJT), and Incumbent Worker Training. He highlighted a local best practice that allows his department to expedite OJT agreements, enabling them to operate at the "pace of business." Mr. Evans also discussed a \$11.3M grant for displaced oil and gas workers, explaining that the immediate need for a paycheck among this population led to a strategic pivot toward earn-and-learn models.

Kenny Spratt, Founder and CEO of Talent Base USA, presented on the Veterans Career Bridge program. The program focuses on helping veterans translate their existing military skills for civilian employers rather than focusing solely on retraining. Serving veterans from nearby military installations, the program begins with a two-week professional development phase and partners with Bakersfield College to offer credit for prior learning. Participants then move into flexible, guided pathways toward employment. Mr. Spratt shared a success story of a program graduate who secured a high-paying IT Manager position.

Norma Rojas, Associate Vice Chancellor of Public Affairs and Development for the Kern Community College District, discussed the Kern Coalition's work under the California Jobs First initiative. The coalition developed a regional roadmap focused on priority sectors like clean energy, agriculture, and manufacturing. With \$14M in funding, the initiative awarded \$9M to 16 innovative projects. Ms. Rojas highlighted two grant recipients: the Women's Small Business Center, which provides targeted support for entrepreneurs in rural areas, and a startup project that converts abandoned oil wells into energy storage systems, which is partnering with Bakersfield College to develop a training program for displaced oil and gas workers.

Board member discussion during the presentations touched on the region's unemployment data, the potential for scaling Kern's expedited OJT process as a statewide best practice, and opportunities for applying credit for prior learning for displaced workers. Executive Director noted that while local control complicates a statewide mandate for expedited OJT agreements, the process could be shared with other local boards as a best practice to accelerate services to businesses. Board members also engaged in a detailed exchange regarding how to better incorporate credit for prior learning for incumbent and displaced workers, with a focus on making the process easier for workers who may be hesitant to engage with educational systems and instead are focused on securing immediate employment.

No public comment was received.

## 2. Artificial Intelligence, Work, and Human Value: Findings from San Diego

Teddy Martinez, Vice President of Strategic & Policy Initiatives at the San Diego Workforce Partnership, presented findings from the organization's report on the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on San Diego's workforce. He reported that while job postings demanding AI skills have tripled since 2019, AI is currently augmenting tasks rather than causing broad job elimination. A key finding was the vulnerability of young job seekers, who face a shrinking number of entry-level roles.

Mr. Martinez introduced a four-quadrant framework that analyzes occupations based on both "AI Exposure" and "Adaptive Capacity"—a worker's ability to pivot based on factors like financial resources and transferable skills. The most vulnerable workers are those in "Quadrant D," which includes roles with high AI exposure and low adaptive capacity, such as clerical and customer service positions. The research revealed significant equity implications, with women disproportionately represented in Quadrant D and people of color overrepresented in low-adaptive-capacity occupations. The report also noted that San Diego's high cost of living makes supportive services a critical component of any workforce strategy. Report recommendations included improving the state's WARN Act system for layoffs, expanding geographic access to services, designing a "youth-first" approach, and co-designing AI-relevant curricula with employers.

During the discussion, board members inquired about the inflection point for AI's impact, the need for a statewide strategy for AI-related training, and the importance of engaging directly with AI development companies. Mr. Martinez noted that while the timeline is uncertain, the high-exposure, high-adaptive-capacity roles (Quadrant B) would likely see the most immediate skills demand changes. Board members also discussed the challenge of serving workers in these often higher-earning roles who may not be eligible for traditional WIOA services. The need for a coordinated statewide approach to changing training curricula to incorporate AI was emphasized, as was the importance of engaging with AI developers to better understand the technology's trajectory and align workforce initiatives accordingly.

No public comment was received.

## 4. General Public Comments

No general public comments were received.

## 5. Adjournment

Executive Director thanked the attendees and presenters. He announced the next ad hoc committee meeting for October 14, 2026, and the next full board meeting for September 2, 2026. Having concluded all CWDB business, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 11:53 a.m.