



Program Year 2025-2028

REGIONAL PLAN

ORANGE REGIONAL PLANNING UNIT



ORANGE
WORKFORCE
ALLIANCE





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I. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 redefined how the workforce system addresses economic and labor market demands. It emphasizes collaboration across local areas to develop strategies that align with regional economies' realities. WIOA recognizes that economic activity often transcends local political boundaries, so it encourages regional planning to drive economic growth and workforce development. In response, California established Regional Planning Units (RPUs), which bring together local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) to collaboratively address workforce challenges and opportunities within shared regional economies.

The PY 2025-2028 Orange Workforce Alliance (OWA) Regional Plan represents the Orange RPU's strategic vision for addressing the region's workforce needs over the next four years. It is a roadmap for developing a skilled and resilient workforce, enhancing equity, and supporting economic growth across Orange County's diverse communities. Developed by federal and state guidance, this plan builds on a foundation of regional collaboration and stakeholder engagement to deliver innovative solutions that meet the needs of both businesses and job seekers.

The Orange Regional Planning Unit

The Orange RPU encompasses three local Workforce Development Boards: the Anaheim Workforce Development Board, the Santa Ana Workforce Development Board, and the Orange County Workforce Development Board. Together, these boards serve Orange County's 34 cities and unincorporated areas, which are home to over 3.1 million residents and have one of the most dynamic regional economies in the nation.

As the sixth-most populous county in the United States, Orange County plays a critical role in California's economic success. The region is home to thriving industries such as healthcare, advanced manufacturing, information technology, and tourism. However, the county also faces significant challenges, including a high cost of living, housing affordability issues, and disparities in access to education and training resources. These factors have contributed to outmigration and a shifting demographic composition, making it essential to implement workforce strategies that address the diverse needs of residents and employers.

Regional Plan Content

The PY 2025-2028 Regional Plan provides a comprehensive framework for workforce development in Orange County. It addresses key areas such as labor market trends, economic conditions, and emerging industries. The plan also highlights strategies to strengthen sector-based career pathways and ensure job seekers can access high-quality employment opportunities. The plan aligns workforce development efforts with the region's economic priorities and evolving workforce needs by focusing on these areas. In addition to meeting federal requirements under WIOA, the Regional Plan incorporates California-specific priorities to ensure a holistic approach. Job quality is a central focus, emphasizing creating sustainable jobs that offer pathways to economic mobility. The plan also prioritizes equity and inclusion, aiming to reduce disparities and expand opportunities

for underserved communities. Regional collaboration across workforce partners further ensures the plan delivers coordinated and impactful workforce solutions that benefit businesses, workers, and the broader community.

Development of the PY 2025-2028 Regional Plan

The development of the PY 2025-2028 Regional Plan was guided by a commitment to data-driven decision-making, regional collaboration, and broad stakeholder engagement. Representatives from the Anaheim, Santa Ana, and Orange County Workforce Development Boards worked collaboratively to analyze labor market trends, assess economic conditions, and identify strategic priorities for workforce development. This process drew upon robust regional planning efforts and resources, including the Strong Workforce Program Regional Plan, the Orange County Jobs First Regional Plan, and comprehensive economic studies conducted by the Orange County Center of Excellence (COE). These reports provided critical insights into emerging industries, skill gaps, and workforce needs that informed the plan's direction.

In addition to leveraging these regional studies, input was gathered from diverse stakeholders, including employers, educators, community-based organizations, and economic development leaders. Their perspectives ensured the plan addressed Orange County's unique challenges and opportunities while reflecting a shared commitment to creating a resilient and inclusive workforce system. By combining localized insights with findings from regional initiatives, the PY 2025-2028 Regional Plan presents a comprehensive strategy that aligns workforce development efforts with the region's economic priorities and future growth opportunities.

Regional Vision for Workforce Development

The Orange RPU's vision for workforce development centers on building a system that is equitable, inclusive, and responsive to the region's evolving economic landscape. The PY 2025-2028 Regional Plan emphasizes the importance of preparing workers to adapt to emerging technologies and shifting economic conditions. Expanding access to workforce resources for underserved populations, including youth, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and communities of color, is a key component of this vision.

Equally important is the collaboration with employers to align workforce development initiatives with industry needs and ensure the creation of high-quality jobs that provide pathways to economic mobility. The plan also highlights the importance of supporting industries that drive regional growth, particularly those adopting sustainable practices and advancing green job opportunities, to foster a resilient and future-ready economy.

The PY 2025-2028 Regional Plan positions the Orange RPU to meet the workforce challenges and opportunities of the next four years through innovation and collaboration. By fostering partnerships across public and private sectors, aligning workforce strategies with industry demands, and addressing barriers to access, the Orange RPU aims to build a vibrant economy where businesses thrive, communities are empowered, and every resident can succeed.

II. ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW OF THE REGION

Orange County, California, is a dynamic economic powerhouse in which innovation, diversity, and opportunity converge to fuel growth. Strategically located between Los Angeles and San Diego, it benefits from its proximity to major ports, entertainment hubs, and research institutions, making it a key player in California's economy. With over 3.1 million residents, it is the third-most populous county in the state and the sixth-most populous in the United States¹.

The county's reputation for a high quality of life, characterized by suburban comfort, coastal beauty, and thriving business districts, has historically attracted families and professionals alike. Cities like Irvine, Anaheim, and Costa Mesa are economic engines, hosting major corporations, vibrant small business ecosystems, and innovation hubs. At the same time, areas such as Santa Ana and Garden Grove face systemic barriers to economic mobility, with lower median incomes and higher unemployment rates, underscoring the need for targeted workforce development strategies that bridge economic divides.

As the county navigates a post-pandemic recovery period, it faces challenges and opportunities reshaping its workforce and economic trajectory. Structural shifts, demographic changes, and rising living costs are straining the region's ability to sustain its historic growth and attract new talent. An aging population, often called the "silver tsunami," is driving significant shifts in workforce needs. This growing demographic has increased demand for healthcare and social services while presenting opportunities for innovation in healthcare technology and service delivery. The expanding "silver economy" is creating jobs and spurring adaptive business models to meet the unique needs of an older population.

At the same time, Orange County struggles to retain and attract young professionals. Rising housing costs, which now require nearly five times the median annual income of U.S. households to qualify for a home, make it increasingly difficult for younger workers and families to establish roots in the region.² These challenges prompt employers to reevaluate workplace strategies, emphasizing flexibility, competitive compensation, and robust career development pathways to remain competitive in the labor market.

In addition to the growing silver economy, the county's transition toward sustainability unlocks opportunities in emerging industries such as renewable energy, clean technology, and green construction. These sectors are poised to generate high-quality jobs while addressing environmental challenges. California's ambitious climate goals, including achieving carbon neutrality and expanding clean energy infrastructure, drive demand for skilled workers in these fields. By investing in education and training programs aligned with these industries, Orange County has the potential to position itself as a leader in building a greener, more sustainable economy.

Orange County's rich linguistic and cultural diversity adds another layer of complexity and opportunity to its economic fabric. A substantial portion of the population speaks a

¹ Lightcast. *Economic Overview Tool*. Accessed December 2024. <https://analyst.lightcast.io/>

² California Association of Realtors. *Housing Affordability Index – First Quarter 2024*. Accessed January 2025. <https://www.car.org/aboutus/mediacenter/newsreleases/2024-News-Releases/1qtr2024hai>.

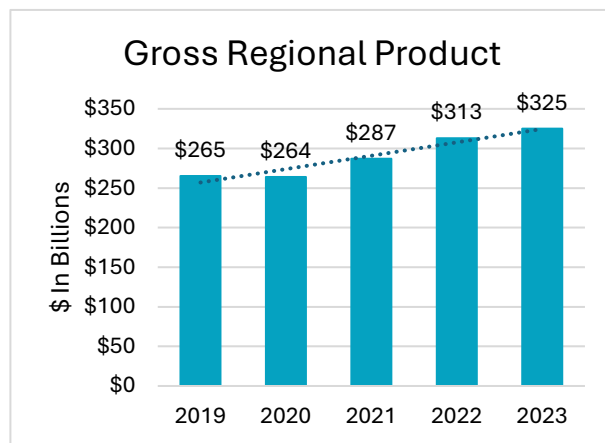
language other than English at home, reflecting the county’s vibrant cultural mosaic. This diversity enriches the region’s cultural and economic landscape and underscores the need for workforce programs, such as vocational English as a Second Language (ESL), to empower all residents to participate in and contribute to the local economy fully.

The county’s economic vitality is further bolstered by its key industries, including advanced manufacturing, healthcare, technology, and tourism. However, persistent skill gaps and an aging workforce pose risks to the sustainability of these sectors. Addressing these challenges requires collaboration among businesses, government agencies, and educational institutions to develop inclusive workforce strategies, create pathways to high-quality employment, and ensure that economic opportunities are equitably distributed across all communities.

Amid these complexities, Orange County remains a region of resilience and promise. By leveraging its diverse talent pool, fostering innovation, and addressing systemic barriers, the county is well-positioned to adapt to evolving economic realities and continue driving growth for future generations.

Orange County’s Gross Regional Product (GRP)

Orange County’s economic vitality is reflected as a major driver of growth for the Southern California region and the state. Representing 8.1 percent of California’s population, 9.2 percent of its total taxable sales, and 8.8 percent of its Gross Regional Product (GRP), the county demonstrates high economic activity³. In 2023, Orange County’s GRP grew from \$313 billion to \$325 billion, a 3.9 percent increase, surpassing the GDP of 26 U.S. states⁴. Additionally, its GRP per capita of \$98,979 significantly exceeds the state average of \$90,982, further highlighting its robust economic performance⁵. This strength is fueled by a diversified industry base, including technology, manufacturing, real estate, healthcare, and professional services, which contribute significantly to regional economic activity.



Data source: Lightcast

Industry Contributions to GRP

Orange County’s economy is highly diversified, with specific industries contributing significantly to its Gross Regional Product (GRP) relative to its share of employment. Healthcare and social assistance lead to employment, while sectors like manufacturing and finance contribute disproportionately to GRP, reflecting the high-value nature of their outputs. Professional, scientific, and technical services also showcase the county’s expertise in knowledge-driven industries.

³ County of Orange. Orange County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2024-2029. Santa Ana, CA: County of Orange, 2024. <https://workforce.ocgov.com/sites/cid/files/2024-10/OC%20CEDS%20%282024-2029%29%20Approved.pdf>.

⁴ Lightcast. *Gross Regional Product Report*. January 2025. <https://analyst.lightcast.io/>

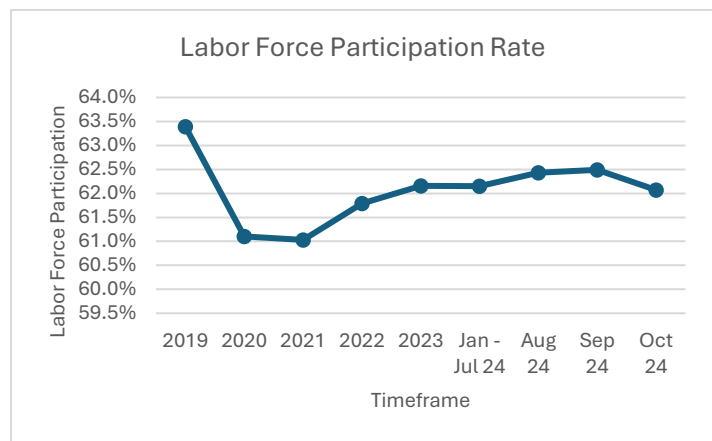
⁵ County of Orange. *Orange County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2024-2029*.

- Healthcare and Social Assistance:** This sector had the highest employment, at 232,792 jobs in 2023 (a 4% increase from 2022). It contributed \$21.7 billion to GRP, highlighting its essential role in meeting the needs of a growing population.
- Manufacturing:** Employing 160,014 workers, this sector remains the most significant contributor to GRP, generating \$38.5 billion through high-value outputs like medical devices and aerospace technology.
- Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services:** With 162,188 jobs, this sector contributed \$29.6 billion to GRP. Its contribution was driven by consulting, engineering, and legal services, reinforcing its role as a critical economic engine.
- Finance and Insurance:** Despite a 12% drop in employment to 72,711 jobs, this sector maintained its status as a significant economic driver, contributing \$31.5 billion to GRP, benefiting from Orange County’s proximity to major business hubs.
- Accommodation and Food Services:** Employing 177,783 workers (a 4% increase from 2022), this sector contributed \$12.1 billion to GRP, reflecting the county's recovery in tourism and hospitality, supported by attractions like Disneyland and coastal destinations⁶.

Orange County’s economic resilience is rooted in its ability to balance high-value industries with a diverse employment base, positioning it as a forward-looking region. By leveraging its mix of innovation, a skilled workforce, and a strategic location, the county sustains growth and adapts to evolving industry trends. Continued investments in workforce development, technological advancements, and strategic infrastructure will be essential to maintaining its economic momentum and competitiveness in the future.

Labor Force Participation and Workforce Shifts in Orange County

Labor force participation is a vital indicator of economic vitality, measuring the percentage of the working-age population employed or actively seeking work. It is influenced by various social, economic, and demographic factors such as population aging, economic conditions, access to education and training, caregiving responsibilities, and migration patterns. These dynamics have caused notable fluctuations in Orange County’s labor force participation rate (LFPR) over the past five years.



Data source: Lightcast

In 2019, Orange County's LFPR stood at 63.39%, but the COVID-19 pandemic caused it to drop to 61.10% in 2020 due to widespread job losses and business closures. Although

⁶ Lightcast, *Gross Regional Product*

recovery efforts have bolstered the economy, the LFPR remains below pre-pandemic levels, reaching 62.07% as of October 2024⁷. This lingering gap reflects the challenges of re-engaging specific population segments, including those who retired early, face skill mismatches, or encounter caregiving responsibilities. Housing affordability and the high cost of living have also driven some workers to relocate to more affordable areas, further impacting labor participation⁸.

Community feedback from the *Jobs First Regional Plan* survey highlights several barriers to workforce engagement. Affordable childcare remains a significant challenge, especially for working mothers balancing caregiving with professional responsibilities. Transportation limitations, particularly for youth, restrict access to job opportunities, while language barriers prevent many non-English speakers from fully integrating into the workforce. Skills gaps and a misalignment between training programs and employer needs further hinder labor force engagement.⁹

The rise of the gig economy adds another layer of complexity to labor force trends. While gig work offers flexibility and income opportunities, it can obscure traditional labor participation metrics, as many gig workers do not classify themselves as part of the conventional workforce. This dual effect highlights the intricate interplay between caregiving, transportation, skills gaps, and other factors shaping labor force participation rates.

To address these challenges, policymakers and community leaders must prioritize initiatives that enhance workforce engagement. Expanding access to affordable childcare, reliable transportation, language support, and training programs aligned with employer needs will be critical to fostering an inclusive and resilient labor market.

Demographic Shifts

Demographic changes are reshaping Orange County's workforce and economic demands. Between 2023 and 2030, the county's population

Area	2023 Population	2030 Population	Change	% Change
Orange County	3,135,755	3,051,981	(83,774)	(3%)
California	38,965,193	38,053,224	(911,969)	(2%)
Nation	334,914,895	345,788,131	10,873,236	3%

Data source: Lightcast

is projected to decline by 3%, decreasing from 3,135,755 to 3,051,981¹⁰. This contraction reflects broader state-level trends but contrasts with national growth during the same period.

⁷ Lightcast. *Economy Overview*. January 2025. <https://analyst.lightcast.io/>

⁸ Orange County Business Council. *CERF OC Regional Plan Part 1*. Irvine, CA: Orange County Business Council, 2024. <https://ocbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CERF-OC-Regional-Plan-Part-1.pdf>

⁹ Orange County Business Council, *CERF OC Regional Plan Part 1*.

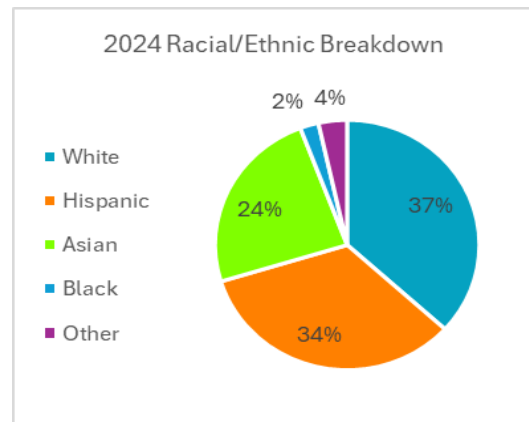
¹⁰ Lightcast. *Populations Demographic Report*. January 2025. <https://analyst.lightcast.io/>

Aging is one of the most significant factors influencing workforce dynamics. The population aged 65 and over is expected to grow substantially, with the 70–84 age group increasing by 19% to 31%. This trend underscores the rising demand for healthcare and social assistance services. Conversely, younger age cohorts are shrinking, with notable declines in children aged 5–9 (-20%) and young adults aged 30–34 (-14%)¹¹. These shifts pose challenges for maintaining a strong workforce pipeline in industries such as construction, manufacturing, and technical services, which are already grappling with labor shortages.

Age Cohort	2023 Population	2030 Population	Change	% Change
Under 5 years	157,073	147,763	(9,310)	(6%)
5 to 9 years	179,543	142,988	(36,555)	(20%)
10 to 14 years	186,005	166,990	(19,015)	(10%)
15 to 19 years	207,549	187,952	(19,597)	(9%)
20 to 24 years	196,093	196,490	397	0%
25 to 29 years	213,661	200,135	(13,526)	(6%)
30 to 34 years	226,242	195,460	(30,782)	(14%)
35 to 39 years	209,435	210,704	1,269	1%
40 to 44 years	205,463	206,084	621	0%
45 to 49 years	196,434	201,334	4,900	2%
50 to 54 years	216,198	191,164	(25,034)	(12%)
55 to 59 years	210,708	194,601	(16,107)	(8%)
60 to 64 years	201,430	194,522	(6,908)	(3%)
65 to 69 years	169,714	181,962	12,248	7%
70 to 74 years	132,206	156,979	24,773	19%
75 to 79 years	101,036	121,333	20,297	20%
80 to 84 years	65,505	85,514	20,009	31%
85 years and over	61,460	70,005	8,545	14%
Total	3,135,755	3,051,981	(83,774)	(3%)

Data source: Lightcast

Racial and ethnic demographics also reveal significant shifts between 2023 and 2030. The White, non-Hispanic population is projected to experience the largest decline, decreasing by 152,753 individuals (13%) and accounting for 33.42% of the total population in 2030. Similarly, the White Hispanic population is anticipated to decline by 17,386 individuals (2%), representing 31.54% of the population¹². These groups remain the largest racial and ethnic cohorts, though they highlight significant changes in Orange County’s demographic makeup.



Data source: Lightcast

In contrast, the Asian, non-Hispanic population is projected to grow significantly, increasing by 69,331 individuals (10%) and comprising 26.05% of the population in 2030. Other smaller groups, such as those identifying as Two or More Races (Non-Hispanic and Hispanic), are also expected to grow, with 10% and 9% increases, respectively. The Black, non-Hispanic population is projected to increase modestly by 5%. At the same time, more minor shifts are noted in other groups, including declines in Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander and American Indian or Alaskan Native populations¹³.

Linguistic diversity adds another layer of complexity to Orange County's workforce dynamics. While 53.1% of residents speak only English, 46.9% speak a language other than English at home. Spanish is the most commonly spoken non-English language,

¹¹ Lightcast. *Populations Demographic Report*.
¹² Lightcast. *Populations Demographic Report*.
¹³ Lightcast. *Populations Demographic Report*.

Accounting for 24.4% of the population, followed by Asian and Pacific Islander languages at 16.1% and other Indo-European languages at 5.1%. A smaller percentage (1.4%) speaks different languages¹⁴. These figures highlight the critical need for vocational English as a Second Language (ESL) programs to address language barriers, ensure educational success, and foster economic inclusion.

Gender demographics are balanced, with a slight majority of females (50.54%) projected in 2030. However, male and female populations are expected to decrease by approximately 3%, emphasizing the importance of addressing labor market participation across all groups¹⁵. As demographic shifts reshape the labor market, inclusive workforce strategies become increasingly essential to meet the needs of a diverse and linguistically complex population. Addressing disparities, fostering equitable opportunities for underrepresented groups, and investing in education, training, and retention strategies will be vital to sustaining economic growth and competitiveness in the region.

Overall Industry Employment Trends

Orange County's labor market continues to expand, with total nonfarm employment reaching 1.72 million by November 2024, reflecting a year-over-year gain of 14,600 jobs (0.9%)¹⁶. Healthcare and social assistance have led this growth, adding 11,900 jobs year over year, driven by the rising demand for health services. Other expanding industries included professional and business services, which added 3,300 jobs year over year, and leisure and hospitality, which gained 2,800 jobs during the same period.

Trade, transportation, and utilities also experienced growth, adding 3,200 jobs year over year, with the retail trade sector accounting for a significant portion of this increase. Government employment rose modestly, gaining 1,200 jobs year over year, while smaller increases were observed in other services and manufacturing, which added 400 and 500 jobs, respectively¹⁷.

Despite these gains, specific industries experienced year-over-year declines. Construction faced the steepest losses, shedding 2,600 jobs compared to November 2023, while manufacturing also reported a decline of 2,600 jobs over the same period. The information sector saw a decrease of 900 jobs year-over-year, reflecting ongoing challenges faced by industries heavily influenced by economic shifts, automation, and fluctuating demand¹⁸. Retail and administrative services also continued to adjust to long-term disruptions caused by automation and e-commerce, leading to slower job growth or reductions in these areas. These trends emphasize the need for targeted workforce strategies to support vulnerable industries while fostering growth in robust sectors.

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau. *Orange County, California Profile*. Accessed January 2025. https://data.census.gov/profile/Orange_County_California?q=050XX00US06059.

¹⁵ Lightcast. *Populations Demographic Report*.

¹⁶ California Employment Development Department. *Monthly Labor Force Data for Orange County*. Accessed January 2025. <https://labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/file/1/month/oranSpds.pdf>.

¹⁷ California Employment Development Department. *Monthly Labor Force Data for Orange County*.

¹⁸ California Employment Development Department. *Monthly Labor Force Data for Orange County*.

Building on these trends, industries like healthcare, professional services, and logistics are expected to drive growth through 2030. Healthcare and social assistance remain at the forefront of growth,

2020-2030 Industry Sector Employment Projections

Industry Title	Base Year Employment Estimate 2020	Projected Year Employment Estimate 2030	Numeric Change 2020-2030	Percentage Change 2020-2030
Self Employment	104,800	113,300	8,500	8.1%
Private Household Workers	1,800	1,900	100	5.6%
Total Farm	1,900	2,000	100	5.3%
Mining and Logging	400	300	-100	-25.0%
Construction	101,300	118,100	16,800	16.6%
Manufacturing	149,100	153,400	4,300	2.9%
Trade, Transportation, and Utilities	242,300	279,000	36,700	15.1%
Information	24,100	27,800	3,700	15.4%
Financial Activities	115,900	129,100	13,200	11.4%
Professional and Business Services	310,100	373,800	63,700	20.5%
Educational Services (Private), Health Care, and Social Assistance	225,800	272,100	46,300	20.5%
Leisure and Hospitality	161,800	243,800	82,000	50.7%
Other Services (excludes 814-Private Household Workers)	44,100	55,500	11,400	25.9%
Government	156,100	169,000	12,900	8.3%

Data Source: EDD Industry Employment Projections

reflecting an aging population's ongoing demand for services. This sector, which has already demonstrated significant year-over-year gains, is projected to lead all industries in numeric and percentage growth by the decade's end, reinforcing its critical role in the region's economic and social stability.

Professional and business services are similarly positioned for steady expansion, driven by the country's shift toward a knowledge-based economy and increasing demand for specialized expertise in consulting, technical support, and legal services. Trade, transportation, and utilities, bolstered by the rise of e-commerce and advancements in logistics infrastructure, are expected to remain essential contributors to the labor market.

However, challenges persist for traditional labor-intensive sectors. Manufacturing and construction, which experienced year-over-year declines in 2024, are projected to grow at a slower pace or face potential declines through 2030 due to automation, technological disruptions, and shifting economic priorities. Retail, already heavily impacted by e-commerce trends, is expected to continue adjusting to changing consumer behaviors and increased reliance on automated solutions. Traditional labor-intensive sectors may face slower growth or further declines, necessitating targeted workforce investments in reskilling and upskilling initiatives.

Self-Employment and Private Household Workers

Self-employment and gig work continue to play a pivotal role in Orange County's economy, reflecting national trends and the region's unique economic landscape. As of 2022, Orange County reported approximately 319,630 nonemployer establishments, representing businesses with no paid employees other than the proprietor¹⁹. These establishments reflect the strong presence of self-employed individuals and sole proprietors who drive innovation and flexibility in the local labor market. Nonemployer establishments are common in industries such as professional and business services, trade, transportation, and utilities and in sectors that benefit from gig and freelance work models.

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. *QuickFacts: Orange County, California*. Accessed January 2025. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/orangecountycalifornia/POP060220>.

Professional and business services represent the largest share of self-employed individuals in Orange County, aligning with national patterns highlighting the prominence of knowledge-based industries in independent contracting. Locally, self-employment is also significant in trade, transportation, and utilities, supported by the flexibility offered by gig platforms and app-based work. The Orange County Jobs First Regional Plan also highlights the prevalence of self-employed workers than traditional payroll employees in the natural resources sector, which relies heavily on independent contractors for seasonal and project-based work²⁰.

Additionally, post-pandemic trends have contributed to a rise in gig work and entrepreneurial ventures, with an increasing number of individuals registering new businesses or seeking flexible employment opportunities. This expansion is particularly evident in transportation, personal care services, and consulting, which have seen accelerated growth as part of the broader gig economy.²¹ Nationally, the gig economy is projected to generate \$455 billion in 2023, reflecting a 53% increase since 2020²² Orange County mirrors these trends with a growing share of its workforce engaging in independent or gig-based employment.

Industry Specialization

Understanding how Orange County's economy stands out starts with the location quotient (LQ) concept. This metric compares the concentration of employment in a particular industry within the county to the national average. An LQ of 1.0 indicates that the industry's local employment share equals the national average. An LQ above 1.0 means the industry is more concentrated in Orange County, suggesting it plays a larger role in the local economy than it does nationally. For example, an LQ of 1.5 indicates that employment in that industry is 50% higher locally than across the U.S. This analysis helps identify areas where Orange County has a competitive advantage or specialization, providing insight into economic strengths and opportunities.

Orange County's economy reflects a high degree of specialization in certain industries, with location quotient (LQ) data highlighting sectors where the region has a notably higher concentration of employment than national averages. These specialization areas showcase the county's labor market's unique strengths and alignment with regional and global economic trends.

The professional and business services sector stands out as a key area of specialization, particularly in architectural and engineering services (LQ: 1.5) and management and technical consulting services (LQ: 1.4). These industries are critical drivers of Orange County's economy, fueled by the region's demand for innovative design, engineering expertise, and strategic advisory services. Employment in these sectors is projected to grow by 8.8% and 11.2% over the decade, underscoring their significance in maintaining the county's competitive edge²³.

²⁰ Orange County Business Council, *CERF OC Regional Plan Part 1*.

²¹ McKinsey & Company. *What Is the Gig Economy?* 2023.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/mckinsey%20explainers/what%20is%20the%20gig%20economy/what-is-the-gig-economy.pdf>.

²² Statista. *Projected Gross Volume of the Gig Economy Worldwide from 2018 to 2023*. Accessed January 2025. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1034564/gig-economy-projected-gross-volume/>.

²³ California Employment Development Department. *Detailed Industry Data*. Accessed January 2025. [https://labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/Publications/REA-Reports/Detailed-Industry-Data-\(ADA%20Compliant\).xlsx](https://labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/Publications/REA-Reports/Detailed-Industry-Data-(ADA%20Compliant).xlsx).

Manufacturing also plays a central role in Orange County's economic identity, with notable concentrations in medical equipment and supplies manufacturing (LQ: 4.0), reflecting the county's position as a hub for advanced medical technology. This sector is projected to grow by 10.8% as demand for cutting-edge medical devices expands globally. Similarly, coating, engraving, and heat-treating metals (LQ: 2.3) is another highly specialized manufacturing subsector, emphasizing its role in the county's advanced manufacturing ecosystem despite facing employment challenges²⁴.

The financial activities sector also demonstrates unique strengths, particularly in activities related to credit intermediation (LQ: 2.0) and real estate services (LQ: 1.7). These industries are vital to Orange County's economic stability, reflecting the robust financial infrastructure and thriving real estate market²⁵.

In health services, offices of other health practitioners (LQ: 1.8) exemplify the growing demand for specialized healthcare services. Employment in this sector is projected to grow by 14.5%, driven by demographic changes and advancements in healthcare delivery²⁶.

While many specialized industries are thriving, some sectors face challenges. Aerospace product and parts manufacturing (LQ: 1.4) is projected to decline by 19.1%, reflecting reduced demand for traditional manufacturing. Similarly, travel arrangement and reservation services (LQ: 1.2) and other tourism-related industries are experiencing declines as consumer behavior shifts and technology transforms the sector²⁷.

These patterns of specialization reveal opportunities to strengthen workforce development efforts in Orange County. Sectors such as advanced manufacturing, professional services, and healthcare offer pathways for sustainable growth, while retraining and upskilling initiatives can support workers in declining industries. By leveraging its unique strengths, Orange County can remain competitive and resilient in a dynamic economic landscape.

A. Analysis of Employment and Unemployment Data

As of November 2024, Orange County's unemployment rate stood at 4.0%, reflecting a slight decrease from 4.2% in October 2024 but an increase from 3.8% in November 2023. This rate aligns with the national unemployment rate of 4.0% and remains significantly below California's state rate of 5.3%, emphasizing the county's relative economic strength²⁸.

Unemployment Trends

From 2019 to 2024, unemployment trends in Orange County highlight the economic challenges and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The unemployment rate reached a peak of 8.98% in 2020 before gradually declining to 4.14% in October 2024. While these

²⁴ California Employment Development Department, *Detailed Industry Data*.

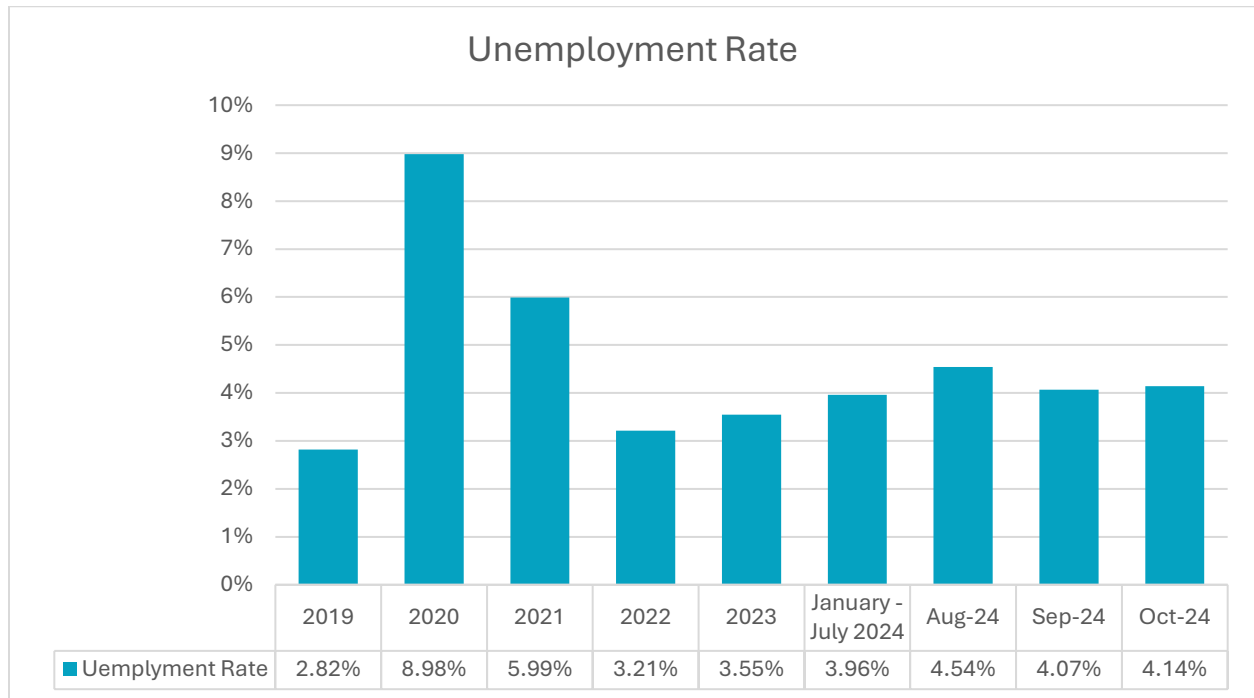
²⁵ California Employment Development Department, *Detailed Industry Data*.

²⁶ California Employment Development Department, *Detailed Industry Data*.

²⁷ California Employment Development Department, *Detailed Industry Data*.

²⁸ California Employment Development Department. Orange County Labor Force and Industry Employment Summary. Anaheim-Santa Ana-Irvine Metropolitan Division, December 2024. <https://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov>.

numbers reflect recovery, they underscore the need to address structural unemployment and labor force participation challenges, which remain below pre-pandemic levels at 62.07%²⁹.



Data Source: Lightcast

Industry Unemployment

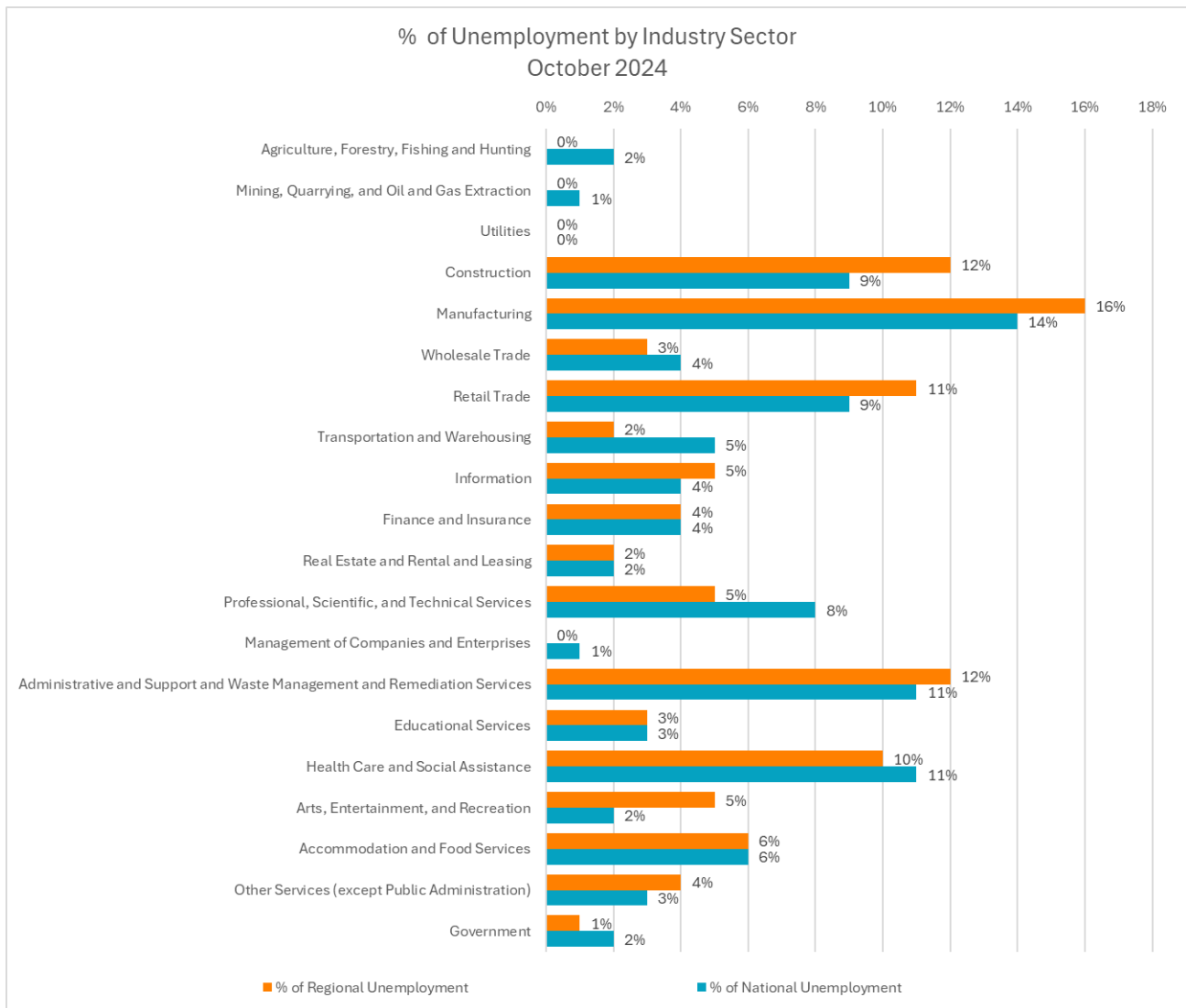
Unemployment in Orange County continues to vary significantly across industries, highlighting an uneven recovery and ongoing structural challenges within the labor market. As of October 2024, the construction and manufacturing sectors are among the hardest hit, with 9% and 14% unemployment rates, respectively. These rates exceed the national averages of 12% for construction and 16% for manufacturing, underscoring vulnerabilities tied to fluctuating demand, supply chain disruptions, and seasonal dependencies³⁰.

Retail trade remains a notable area of concern, reporting a regional unemployment rate of 9%, driven by ongoing shifts in consumer behavior and the growing influence of e-commerce. While this figure is slightly below the national average of 11%, it signals continued challenges in the sector. Accommodation and food services, heavily impacted during the pandemic, have shown some stabilization but still face a regional unemployment rate of 6%, which aligns with the national average. This sector continues

²⁹ Lightcast. *Economy Overview*.

³⁰ Lightcast. *Unemployment by Industry Sector*. January 2025. <https://analyst.lightcast.io/>

to grapple with rising labor costs and evolving consumer dining preferences.³¹ Meanwhile, health care and social assistance report a moderate unemployment rate of 10%, while educational services stand at 3%, reflecting trends consistent with national averages. Despite steady demand, these sectors face workforce shortages and mismatches between labor supply and market needs. Professional, scientific, and technical services, a critical driver of the regional economy, maintains relative stability with an unemployment rate of 5%, lower than the national average of 8%.³²



Data Source: Lightcast

Occupational Unemployment

As of October 2024, Orange County recorded 65,727 unemployed individuals, with unemployment rates varying significantly across occupational sectors³³. The disparities

³¹ Lightcast. *Unemployment by Industry Sector*.
³² Lightcast. *Unemployment by Industry Sector*.
³³ Lightcast. *Unemployment by Occupation Sector*. January 2025. <https://analyst.lightcast.io/>

reflect structural challenges, skill mismatches, and broader economic trends impacting specific occupational groups.

Management and office and administrative support occupations report some of the highest unemployment rates at 13%, aligning with the national average for these sectors. These figures underscore challenges within roles that are often subject to organizational restructuring or automation. Similarly, production occupations face an unemployment rate of 13%, equal to the national rate, reflecting vulnerabilities in manufacturing and supply chain-related roles.³⁴

Sales and related occupations, with an unemployment rate of 8%, slightly outperform the national average of 9%, demonstrating some resilience despite changes in consumer behavior and retail industry dynamics. Meanwhile, construction and extraction occupations report an 8% unemployment rate, just below the national average of 9%, suggesting a mixed recovery in the construction sector, influenced by seasonal factors and fluctuating demand.³⁵

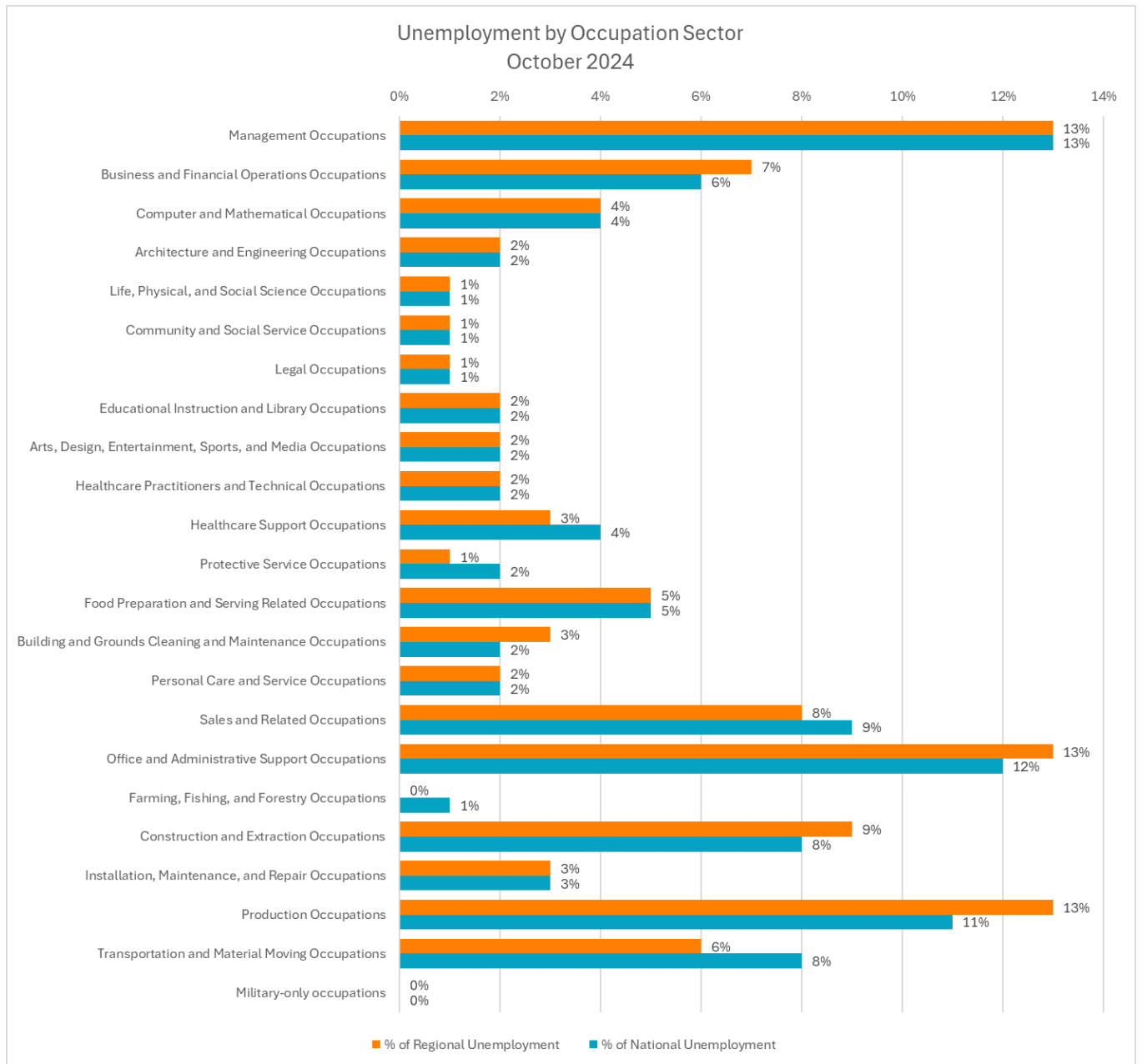
In contrast, lower unemployment rates are observed in technical and specialized fields such as healthcare practitioners and technical occupations (2%), community and social service occupations (1%), and legal occupations (1%). These roles benefit from steady or increasing demand, particularly in health care and legal services. Meanwhile, occupations tied to lower-wage service roles, such as food preparation and serving-related occupations (5%) and building and grounds cleaning and maintenance occupations (3%), reflect consistent demand for essential services.³⁶

Overall, occupational unemployment in Orange County illustrates a dual narrative of resilience in high-demand technical roles and ongoing challenges in industries impacted by automation, economic fluctuations, or shifting consumer preferences. These patterns emphasize the importance of workforce development initiatives tailored to bridge skill gaps and support individuals in vulnerable occupational sectors.

³⁴ Lightcast. *Unemployment by Occupation Sector*.

³⁵ Lightcast. *Unemployment by Occupation Sector*.

³⁶ Lightcast. *Unemployment by Occupation Sector*.

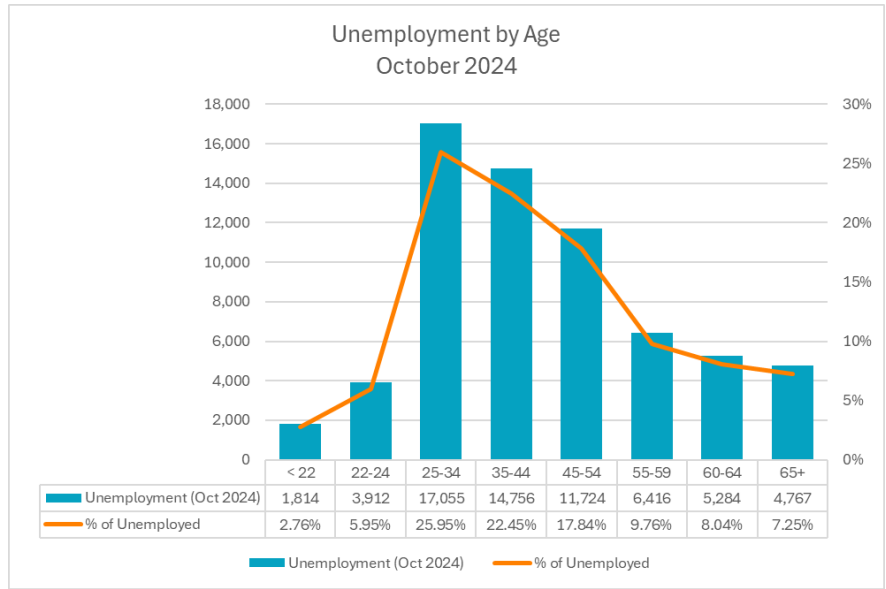


Data Source: Lightcast

Demographic Insights

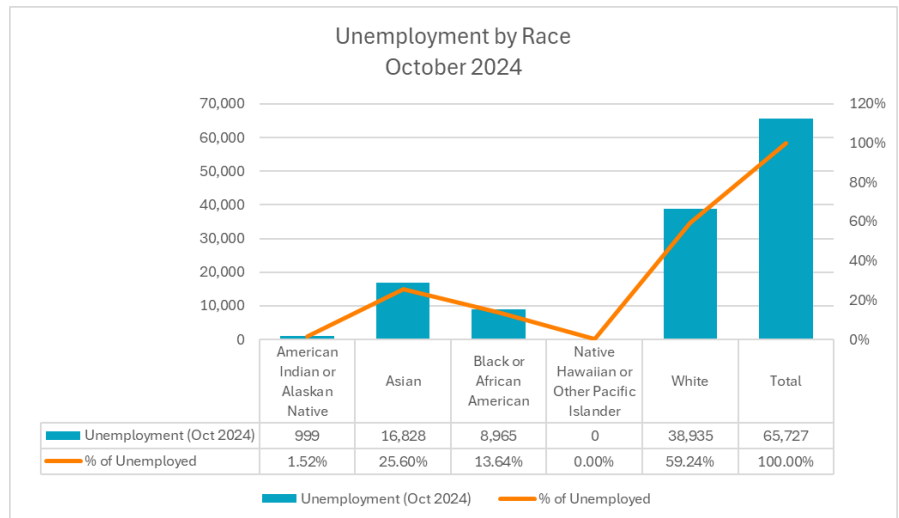
Unemployment in Orange County disproportionately affects specific demographic groups, with notable disparities by age, race, and ethnicity. These trends highlight inequities in labor market outcomes and the need for targeted workforce strategies.

Workers aged 25–34 accounted for the largest share of the unemployed population, comprising 25.95% (17,055 individuals). This age group reflects a critical segment of the labor force, often in transitional career stages or impacted by skill mismatches. Following this, workers aged 35–44 represented 22.45% of the unemployed (14,756 individuals), while the 45–54 age group made up 17.84% (11,724 individuals). Older workers, aged 55–59 and 60–64, accounted for 9.76% and 8.04%, respectively, indicating challenges for those nearing retirement. The youngest group, under 22, comprised 2.76% of the unemployed, reflecting limited labor market exposure, while those aged 65 and older represented 7.25% of unemployment (4,767 individuals)³⁷.



Data Source: Lightcast

Racial disparities in unemployment remain significant. White workers constituted the largest share of unemployed individuals at 59.24% (38,935 individuals), reflecting their overall representation in the workforce. Asian workers accounted for 25.60% (16,828 individuals), while Black or African American workers made up 13.64% (8,965 individuals). American Indian or Alaskan Native workers experienced the smallest share, representing 1.52% (999 individuals). No unemployment was recorded for Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander workers during this period³⁸.

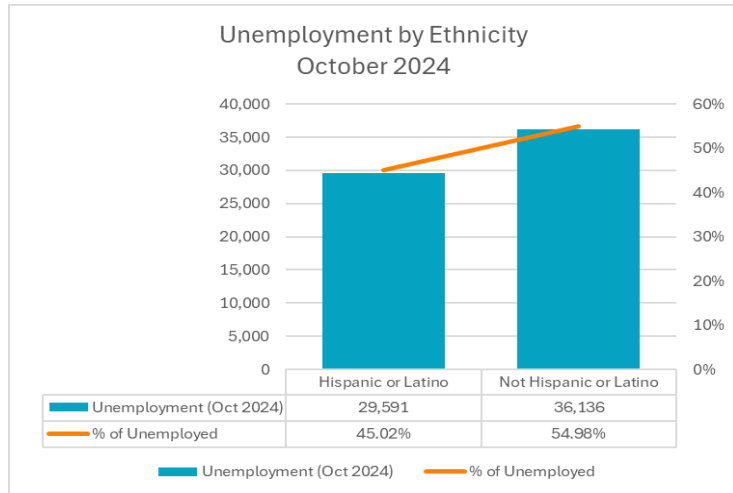


Data Source: Lightcast

³⁷ Lightcast. *Economy Overview*.

³⁸ Lightcast. *Economy Overview*.

Ethnic disparities are also evident, with Hispanic or Latino workers representing 45.02% (29,591 individuals) of the unemployed population. Those identifying as not Hispanic or Latino comprised a slightly larger share at 54.98% (36,136 individuals)³⁹. These figures suggest potential barriers for Hispanic or Latino workers to access stable employment opportunities.



Data Source: Lightcast

Orange County's unemployment analysis underscores the need for targeted workforce development strategies to address industry-specific challenges and occupational skill gaps. Collaborative efforts between workforce boards, educational institutions, and employers can help mitigate unemployment disparities while preparing the labor force for future opportunities.

B. Analysis of the Educational and Skill Levels of the Workforce, the Current Needs of Employers in the Region, and Relevant Skill Gaps

The county's extensive public educational infrastructure includes nine California Community Colleges (CCC), one California State University (CSU), and one University of California (UC) campus. In 2023, these institutions collectively supported over 84,491 graduates, with a significant concentration in liberal arts and business administration.⁴⁰

Orange County Regional Institutions Top Program Completions

CIP Code	Program	Completions 2023
24.0101	Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies	17,925
52.0201	Business Administration and Management, General	7,199
42.0101	Psychology, General	3,161
51.3801	Registered Nursing/Registered Nurse	2,419
24.0103	Humanities/Humanistic Studies	1,861
30.0101	Biological and Physical Sciences	1,548
11.0701	Computer Science	1,387
30.9999	Multi-/Interdisciplinary Studies, Other	1,369
26.0101	Biology/Biological Sciences, General	1,367
09.0101	Speech Communication and Rhetoric	1,339

Data Source: Lightcast

This data underscores a potential disconnect between the fields in which students are graduating and the region's growing demand for technical skills, suggesting opportunities for stronger alignment between educational programs and workforce needs.

Orange County's residents demonstrate above-average educational attainment compared to national benchmarks. In 2023, approximately 87% of the population aged 25 or older have earned at least a high school diploma, and 51% hold an associate degree or higher. However, these averages mask significant disparities across racial and ethnic

³⁹ Lightcast. *Economy Overview*.
⁴⁰ Lightcast. *Economy Overview*.

groups. While Orange County boasts impressive overall educational attainment, the disparities across racial and ethnic groups reveal a more complex story. In 2023, White Non-Hispanic individuals earned the highest number of college degrees, with 558,561 graduates, followed by Asian Non-Hispanic individuals, who earned 335,536 degrees. In contrast, Black and Non-Hispanic individuals earned 19,521 degrees, highlighting a significant gap in representation. Among Hispanic populations, White Hispanic individuals earned 165,339 degrees, while other Hispanic subgroups, such as Black Hispanic (2,673), Asian Hispanic (2,606), and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Hispanic (568), reported far lower numbers.⁴¹

Indigenous populations also faced significant disparities, with American Indian or Alaskan Native, non-Hispanic individuals earning only 1,376 degrees and their Hispanic counterparts earning 4,727. Similarly, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic individuals earned 2,148 degrees, and those identifying as Two or More Races, non-Hispanic, earned 18,277. The disparities become even more apparent among Hispanic individuals in these categories, with only 568 degrees earned by Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander Hispanic individuals and 3,657 by Two or More Races, Hispanic individuals.⁴²

These disparities are reflected in the composition of the workforce, particularly in access to middle- and high-skill roles that require postsecondary education or technical certifications. The most popular academic programs in the region, such as Liberal Arts and Sciences (17,925 completions in 2023), Business Administration and Management (7,199 completions), and Psychology (3,161 completions), provide broad-based skills but often do not align directly with specific employer needs in fields like healthcare, logistics, or technology.⁴³

Current Employer Needs

Orange County employers benefit from a highly educated workforce, yet many struggle to find candidates with the right mix of technical and soft skills to meet labor market demands. Skill gaps persist across key sectors, including healthcare, business, technology, and manufacturing, limiting the region's ability to fully capitalize on its economic potential.

Employers across Orange County consistently highlight significant skill gaps that hinder their ability to meet business demands, as identified through regional plan stakeholder meetings, business services engagements, and the Jobs First Regional Plan. While job posting data provides critical insights into workforce needs, employer feedback underscores that gaps exist in both technical and soft skills. Industries such as healthcare, technology, and finance report challenges finding candidates proficient in digital literacy, AI-related skills, and industry-specific certifications, such as those required for nursing assistants, bookkeeping, and auditing clerks. Additionally, employers emphasize the growing importance of interpersonal competencies, including communication, problem-solving, and customer service skills, which are often insufficiently addressed in traditional educational programs. This feedback highlights the need for a more holistic approach to

⁴¹ Lightcast. *Educational Capital Attainment Snapshot*. Accessed January 2025. <https://analyst.lightcast.io>.

⁴² Lightcast. *Educational Capital Attainment Snapshot*

⁴³ Lightcast. *Educational Capital Attainment Snapshot*

workforce development that integrates technical expertise with interpersonal skills to prepare candidates for a rapidly evolving labor market.

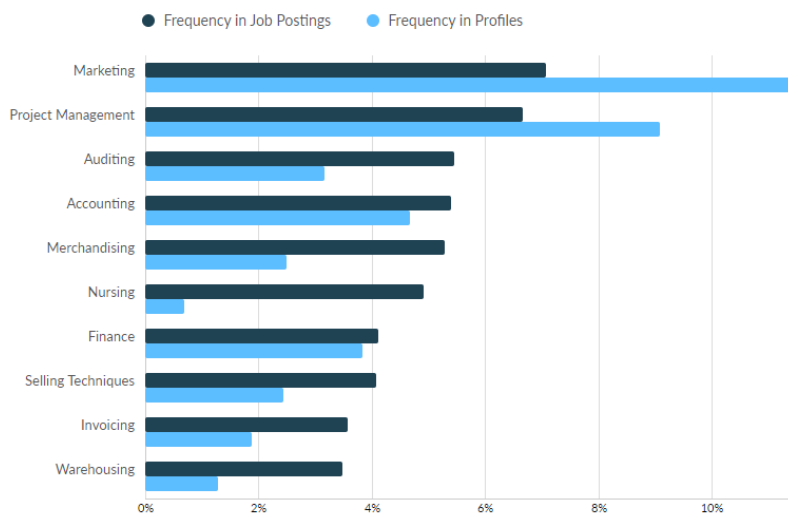
Orange County's workforce faces both opportunities and challenges in aligning the skills of job seekers with employer demands. Analyzing the demand for specialized, common, and software skills reveals critical insights into the region's labor market dynamics. While certain skills show a strong alignment between employer needs and job seeker offerings, others highlight significant gaps that could hinder workforce development and economic growth. Addressing these disparities is essential for closing skill gaps and maintaining the region's competitiveness.

Specialized Skills

Specialized skills refer to specific technical or professional abilities required for particular roles or industries, such as accounting, nursing, or project management.

These skills are distinct from general competencies like communication or teamwork and are critical for performing specialized tasks effectively. There is a noticeable mismatch in areas like marketing and project management in the specialized skills category. Marketing is highly represented in job seeker profiles, far exceeding its demand in job postings, while project management shows a more balanced alignment. In contrast, auditing, accounting, and nursing skills appear more frequently in job postings than job seekers' profiles, indicating potential gaps in the workforce supply for these fields. Similarly, warehousing and invoicing are underrepresented in job seekers' profiles despite notable demand in job postings, further highlighting this misalignment.

Top Specialized Skills

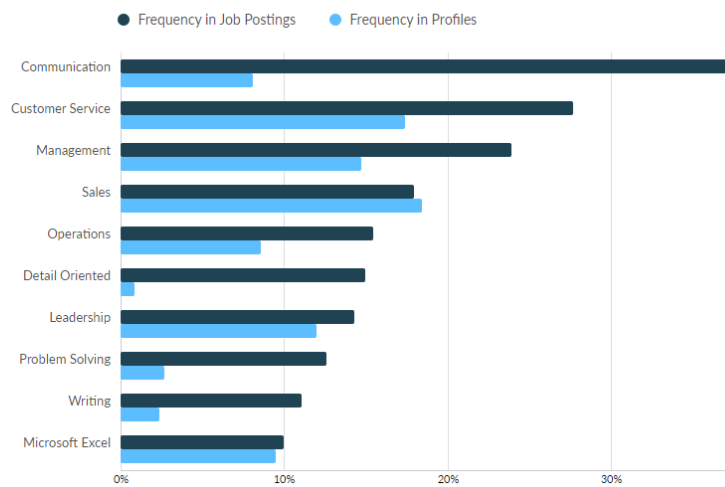


Common Skills

Common skills refer to general, transferable abilities that are valuable across a wide range of roles and industries, such as communication, leadership, and problem-solving.

These skills are essential for workplace success and are often universally sought by employers. For common skills, communication is overwhelmingly the most requested by employers, appearing in over 30% of job postings, yet it is underrepresented in job seeker profiles.

Top Common Skills

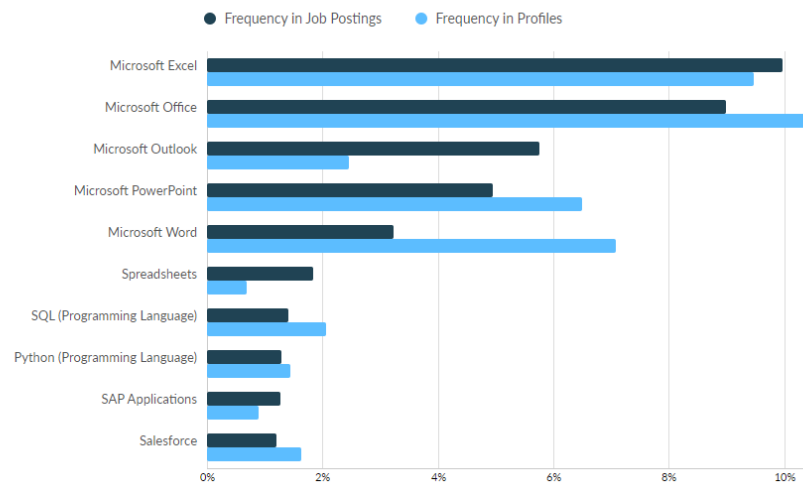


Customer service and management show better alignment between employer demand and job seeker supply, while leadership and problem-solving skills are more frequently requested in job postings than emphasized in profiles. This suggests opportunities for job seekers to better highlight these competencies. Conversely, skills like writing and Microsoft Excel exhibit relatively balanced representation between job postings and profiles, reflecting areas of alignment.

Software Skills

Software skills refer to the ability to use specific computer programs or applications required for various tasks across industries, from general productivity tools to specialized technical platforms. In this category, Microsoft Excel is the most frequently cited skill in both job postings and job seeker profiles, demonstrating strong alignment.

Top Software Skills



Other widely used software, such as Microsoft Office, Word, and PowerPoint, also show similar trends. However, specialized tools such as SQL, Python, SAP applications, and Salesforce are more commonly requested in job postings than reflected in job seeker profiles. This indicates a potential skills gap in these technical areas that could hinder workforce readiness for roles requiring advanced software expertise.

Skills Gap Projections

Using machine learning to analyze job postings, employment trends, and historical data, Skill Projections in Analyst by Lightcast offers a two-year outlook on workforce needs, providing valuable insights into the skills employers require most. Identifying rapidly growing and growing projections helps illuminate areas where workforce readiness and employer demands are misaligned. When combined with direct feedback from employers, these projections highlight critical opportunities for targeted workforce development.

Specialized Skills Gaps

Projections show significant growth in specialized skills like automation (30.5%), finance (27.3%), and data analysis (25.8%)⁴⁴ Specialized Skills. These trends align with employer feedback, which emphasizes the increasing importance of these skills in sectors such as technology, finance, and business operations. However, job seeker profiles often lag behind the demand, creating a challenge for industries that rely heavily on these competencies.

Other high-growth areas, including accounting (24% growth) and nursing (20.1% growth), reflect persistent needs in healthcare and finance.⁴⁵ Employers have consistently highlighted the difficulty of filling roles requiring these skills, especially as technological and operational demands continue to evolve. Addressing these shortages through targeted training and certification programs will be crucial for aligning the workforce with industry needs.

Specialized Skills Gap	Postings	% of Total Postings	Profiles	Projected Skill Growth	Skill Growth Relative to Market
Automation	6,823	2%	16,101	31%	Rapidly Growing
Restaurant Operation	11,793	3%	12,788	28%	Rapidly Growing
Finance	15,212	4%	44,097	27%	Rapidly Growing
Process Improvement	9,098	2%	35,339	27%	Rapidly Growing
Computer Science	9,746	3%	5,205	27%	Rapidly Growing
Data Analysis	9,546	3%	35,589	26%	Rapidly Growing
New Product Development	8,135	2%	42,107	24%	Rapidly Growing
Accounting	19,918	5%	53,715	24%	Rapidly Growing
Continuous Improvement Process	8,487	2%	14,142	23%	Rapidly Growing
Caregiving	5,907	2%	4,292	23%	Rapidly Growing
Marketing	26,097	7%	130,872	23%	Rapidly Growing
Customer Relationship Management	10,842	3%	36,736	22%	Rapidly Growing
Auditing	20,133	5%	36,308	22%	Rapidly Growing
Cash Register	6,099	2%	5,793	21%	Rapidly Growing
Accounts Receivable	5,917	2%	19,179	21%	Rapidly Growing
Nursing	18,115	5%	7,941	20%	Rapidly Growing
Financial Statements	8,238	2%	22,338	20%	Rapidly Growing
Billing	12,222	3%	17,115	20%	Rapidly Growing

⁴⁴ Lightcast. *Job Postings Analysis Tool*. Accessed January 15, 2025. <https://analyst.lightcast.io>

⁴⁵ Lightcast. *Job Postings Analysis Tool*.

Project Management	24,577	7%	104,633	20%	Rapidly Growing
Purchasing	9,653	3%	31,286	20%	Rapidly Growing
Nursing Care	6,140	2%	-	19%	Growing
Sales Prospecting	8,351	2%	10,335	19%	Growing
Administrative Support	7,217	2%	10,875	19%	Growing
Workflow Management	11,018	3%	15,903	18%	Growing
Product Knowledge	9,071	2%	6,192	18%	Growing
Infection Control	5,493	1%	-	17%	Growing
Office Equipment	7,961	2%	2,012	17%	Growing
Invoicing	13,228	4%	21,731	16%	Growing
Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)	8,228	2%	9,343	16%	Growing
Merchandising	19,515	5%	28,804	15%	Growing
General Mathematics	8,122	2%	-	15%	Growing
Procurement	5,871	2%	14,412	14%	Growing
Front Office	5,432	1%	6,600	14%	Growing
Housekeeping	8,759	2%	2,174	13%	Growing
Warehousing	12,849	3%	14,836	13%	Growing
Inventory Management	9,863	3%	26,648	13%	Growing
Medical Records	9,110	2%	8,339	13%	Growing
Food Safety And Sanitation	6,051	2%	4,374	12%	Growing
Medical Terminology	7,153	2%	4,198	11%	Growing
Construction	8,359	2%	20,587	11%	Growing
Standard Operating Procedure	5,986	2%	3,509	10%	Growing
Cash Handling	6,597	2%	4,035	9%	Growing

Data Source: Lightcast

Common Skills Gaps

The demand for common skills is projected to grow significantly, particularly for critical thinking (23.4%), innovation (25.8%), and self-motivation (22.7%). Despite being frequently mentioned by employers as essential, these skills remain underrepresented in job seeker profiles. Employers have emphasized that these competencies are critical for adaptability and problem-solving in dynamic work environments, yet they are often insufficiently integrated into traditional education and training programs.

The projected growth of skills like prioritization and troubleshooting, exceeding 20%, reinforces the importance of developing workforce training programs that prepare candidates to meet these demands. Employer feedback has consistently underscored the need for candidates who can combine technical expertise with these essential workplace competencies.

Common Skills Gap	Postings	% of Total Postings	Profiles	% of Total Profil	Projected Skill Growth	Skill Growth Relative to Market
Microsoft PowerPoint	18,299	5%	74,729	6%	26.10%	Rapidly
Innovation	13,539	4%	37,661	3%	25.80%	Rapidly
Microsoft Outlook	21,253	6%	28,244	2%	25.00%	Rapidly
Critical Thinking	11,643	3%	10,148	1%	23.40%	Rapidly

Common Skills Gap	Postings	% of Total Postings	Profiles	% of Total Profil	Projected Skill Growth	Skill Growth Relative to Market
Together Presentations	21,176	6%	29,192	3%	23.00%	Rapidly
Self-Motivation	24,089	7%	2,885	0%	22.70%	Rapidly
Prioritization	20,759	6%	4,389	0%	20.50%	Rapidly
Mathematics	15,463	4%	10,139	1%	20.20%	Rapidly
Filing	11,649	3%	14,342	1%	20.20%	Rapidly
Troubleshooting (Problem Solving)	18,612		24,582			
Teaching	16,168	5%		2%	19.00%	Growing
Accountability	11,178	4%	44,891	4%	18.80%	Growing
Microsoft Office	33,168	3%	7,726	1%	18.70%	Growing
Multitasking	30,833	9%	120,839	11%	18.50%	Growing
Positivity	12,348	8%	10,831	1%	18.40%	Growing
Ethical Standards And Conduct	13,624	3%	1,705	0%	18.40%	Growing
Microsoft Excel	36,798	4%	6,042	1%	18.30%	Growing
Good Driving Record	11,020	10%	108,987	9%	17.70%	Growing
Research	11,020	3%	56	0%	17.30%	Growing
Teamwork	26,200	7%	100,271	9%	17.20%	Growing
Mentorship	18,632	5%	40,833	4%	16.50%	Growing
Budgeting	11,375	3%	16,229	1%	16.50%	Growing
Scheduling	10,555	3%	32,106	3%	16.50%	Growing
Coaching	24,058	7%	26,315	2%	16.40%	Growing
English Language	14,118	4%	30,337	3%	16.40%	Growing
Professionalism	32,707	9%	23,820	2%	15.30%	Growing
Coordinating	24,296	7%	5,467	0%	15.10%	Growing
Time Management	28,149	8%	27,803	2%	14.70%	Growing
Organizational Skills	25,606	7%	42,538	4%	14.50%	Growing
Administrative Functions	30,271	8%	10,981	1%	14.30%	Growing
Decision Making	12,385	3%	7,916	1%	13.60%	Growing
Ability To Meet Deadlines	13,522	4%	7,747	1%	13.50%	Growing
Interpersonal Communications	11,932	3%	2,783	0%	12.80%	Growing
Multilingualism	33,066	9%	12,349	1%	12.50%	Growing
Writing	16,387	4%	7,080	1%	12.00%	Growing
Problem Solving	40,915	11%	26,986	2%	11.80%	Growing
Cleanliness	46,519	13%	30,567	3%	11.30%	Growing
Planning	15,242	4%	4,214	0%	11.10%	Growing
Lifting Ability	35,105	10%	47,976	4%	10.90%	Growing
	24,826	7%	262	0%	10.60%	Growing

Data Source: Lightcast

Software Skills Gaps

Software skills continue to show rapid growth, with tools like Microsoft Azure (28.9%), Salesforce (24.7%), and Python (24.5%) leading the way in Software Skills. Employers have identified a gap in advanced technical proficiencies, particularly in emerging technologies critical to data management, project coordination, and business intelligence. While foundational tools like Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook show strong alignment with job seeker profiles, newer platforms such as JIRA (24.1%), Tableau

(20.8%), and SAP applications (21.6%) highlight evolving workforce needs. The increasing demand for these specialized tools underscores the importance of upskilling programs and industry partnerships to ensure workers are equipped for roles in rapidly changing technological environments.

Software Skills	Postings	% of Total Postings	Profiles	% of Total Profiles	Projected Skill Growth	Skill Growth Relative to Market
Microsoft Azure	2,262	1%	3,534	0%	28.90%	Rapidly Growing
Microsoft PowerPoint	18,299	5%	74,729	6%	26.10%	Rapidly Growing
Dashboard	2,509	1%	5,229	0%	25.30%	Rapidly Growing
Microsoft Outlook	21,253	6%	28,244	2%	25.00%	Rapidly Growing
Salesforce	4,428	1%	18,841	2%	24.70%	Rapidly Growing
Python (Programming Language)	4,756	1%	16,593	1%	24.50%	Rapidly Growing
Microsoft Office 365	1,295	0%	2,511	0%	24.20%	Rapidly Growing
JIRA	2,252	1%	5,860	1%	24.10%	Rapidly Growing
SolidWorks (CAD)	1,411	0%	8,542	1%	24.10%	Rapidly Growing
Amazon Web Services	3,125	1%	6,947	1%	24.00%	Rapidly Growing
Operating Systems	3,302	1%	7,463	1%	22.60%	Rapidly Growing
Spreadsheets	6,760	2%	7,842	1%	22.20%	Rapidly Growing
SAP Applications	4,700	1%	10,302	1%	21.60%	Rapidly Growing
Cascading Style Sheets (CSS)	1,292	0%	10,568	1%	21.40%	Rapidly Growing
Tableau (Business Intelligence Software)	1,719	0%	4,951	0%	20.80%	Rapidly Growing
Accounting Software	2,496	1%	2,769	0%	20.50%	Rapidly Growing
Power BI	1,995	1%	2,826	0%	20.40%	Rapidly Growing
R (Programming Language)	1,400	0%	4,785	0%	20.30%	Rapidly Growing
Google Workspace	2,385	1%	2,430	0%	18.80%	Growing
JavaScript (Programming Language)	2,299	1%	14,713	1%	18.60%	Growing
Microsoft Office	33,168	9%	120,839	11%	18.50%	Growing
Autodesk Revit	1,295	0%	2,868	0%	18.30%	Growing
Microsoft Excel	36,798	10%	108,987	9%	17.70%	Growing
Java (Programming Language)	2,156	1%	15,648	1%	17.40%	Growing
AutoCAD	3,064	1%	13,176	1%	16.90%	Growing
Microsoft Teams	1,253	0%	1,288	0%	16.80%	Growing
Epic EMR	2,089	1%	2,059	0%	16.40%	Growing
C# (Programming Language)	1,569	0%	8,833	1%	16.10%	Growing
Human Resources Information System (HRIS)	1,740	0%	4,422	0%	14.60%	Growing
Database Systems	1,247	0%	1,209	0%	13.60%	Growing
Zoom (Video Conferencing Tool)	1,596	0%	2,146	0%	13.10%	Growing
Inventory Management System	1,395	0%	1,377	0%	12.00%	Growing
Software Systems	1,816	0%	1,272	0%	11.90%	Growing
Adobe Illustrator	1,771	0%	14,598	1%	11.50%	Growing

Skills	Postings	% of Total Postings	17,801	% of Total Profiles	Projected Skill Growth	Skill Growth Relative to Market
HyperText Markup Language (HTML)	1,655	0%	4,960	2%	11.40%	Growing
Git (Version Control System)	1,350	0%	12,201	0%	11.40%	Growing
QuickBooks (Accounting Software)	2,392	1%	11,768	1%	10.90%	Growing
C (Programming Language)	1,647	0%	14,819	1%	10.10%	Growing
C++ (Programming Language)	2,219	1%	31,629	1%	10.00%	Growing
Adobe Photoshop	2,155	1%	7,206	3%	9.60%	Growing
Application Programming Interface (API)	2,421	1%	1,288	1%	9.50%	Growing
Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Software	1,563	0%	10,770	0%	9.50%	Growing
Linux	1,985	1%	3,534	1%	8.90%	Growing

Data Source: Lightcast

The insights from Skills Projections and employer feedback highlight the need for a coordinated approach to workforce development. Expanding access to training in high-growth skills while integrating critical workplace competencies into education and professional development programs will be key to addressing these gaps. By aligning workforce strategies with projected demands, Orange County can ensure its labor market remains competitive and prepared for future challenges.

C. Analysis of Industries and Occupations with Existing and Emerging Demand

Emerging industries and occupations represent dynamic opportunities within Orange County’s economic landscape. These sectors are driven by technological advancements, changes in consumer behavior, and evolving regulatory environments. While some industries are at the forefront of innovation, others are experiencing steady growth fueled by regional competitiveness and rising demand. Together, they highlight areas where workforce development and strategic investments can help build a stronger, more resilient economy.

To identify these high-potential industries and occupations, we employed a comprehensive, data-driven approach:

- Emerging Innovation-Driven Industries (Future Growth Sectors):** These industries are projected to define the next decade of economic expansion. Though their current presence in Orange County may be limited, they are poised for rapid growth due to advancements in technology, global trends, and policy incentives.
- Emerging Data-Driven Industries (Growing in Orange County Now):** These industries are experiencing strong job growth and increasing regional specialization, as evidenced by upward trends in metrics like location quotient (LQ) and competitive effect. These trends underscore their importance to the region’s future economic success.

Through this lens, we analyze both current and future opportunities, focusing on sectors poised to reshape the workforce landscape. By combining location quotient analysis with job growth rates and competitive effect, we provide a forward-looking perspective that bridges today’s growth trends with tomorrow’s opportunities.

1. Emerging Innovation-Driven Industries (Future Growth Sectors)

Innovation-driven industries are expected to shape the next wave of economic growth. Technological breakthroughs, policy shifts, and rising national and global demand propel these sectors. Examples include renewable energy, cybersecurity, and biotechnology, which offer substantial potential for workforce development.

Industry	Growth Drivers	Workforce Implications
Renewable Energy & Green Technologies	Government incentives, clean energy mandates, climate policy	Increased demand for solar PV installers, wind turbine technicians, energy analysts
Cybersecurity & AI-Driven Technologies	Rising cyber threats, AI adoption, regulatory compliance	High demand for cybersecurity engineers, AI strategists, cloud security specialists
Biotech & Life Sciences	Advances in genomics, pharmaceutical R&D, personalized medicine	Growth in biomedical engineering, genetic counseling, clinical research data analysis
Smart Infrastructure & Urban Mobility	Smart cities, IoT-connected urban systems, green construction	Demand for smart grid engineers, urban mobility planners, EV infrastructure specialists
Autonomous Transportation & Electric Vehicles	Expansion of EV technology, state emissions mandates	Demand for EV mechanics, automation engineers, battery specialists

Key Insights:

- Investment in STEM education and technical certifications is essential to prepare workers for biotech, AI, and cybersecurity careers.
- Public-private partnerships in renewable energy and smart infrastructure will help build career pathways in sustainability-focused industries.
- Increased digital literacy and automation training will be needed to support the transition to AI-integrated workplaces.

2. Emerging Data-Driven Industries (Growing in Orange County Now)

Emerging industries and occupations represent dynamic opportunities within Orange County’s economic landscape. These sectors are driven by technological advancements, changes in consumer behavior, and evolving regulatory environments. While some industries are at the forefront of innovation, others are experiencing steady growth fueled by regional competitiveness and rising demand. Together, they highlight areas where workforce development and strategic investments can help build a stronger, more resilient economy.

These industries were identified as emerging using a thorough analysis of 3-digit NAICS codes. The selection criteria focused on industries with a location quotient (LQ) that increased between 2019 and 2024 but remained below 1.2, signaling growing regional specialization. Additionally, industries were filtered to include those with a competitive effect greater than 1, meaning they outperformed national trends due to regional strengths. To ensure significant economic impact, the analysis also considered industries with job growth exceeding 10% and total employment of more than 1,000 jobs in 2024.⁴⁶

Key highlights include:

- **Ambulatory Health Care Services** experienced significant job growth, adding 14,792 jobs (15% growth) from 2019 to 2024, driven by the rising demand for outpatient care. This industry’s competitive effect of 1,254 underscores its regional strength in meeting healthcare needs.⁴⁷
- **Transportation Equipment Manufacturing** grew by 25%, adding 3,751 jobs, with a notable competitive effect of 3,011. This growth reflects Orange County’s advancements in manufacturing capabilities and its ability to respond to regional and national transportation needs.⁴⁸
- **Couriers and Messengers** saw remarkable growth, increasing by 64% and adding 4,688 jobs. This expansion was fueled by the growth of e-commerce and showed a competitive effect of 1,450, highlighting the region’s adaptability in logistics.⁴⁹
- **Nursing and Residential Care Facilities** demonstrated steady growth, with a 5% increase in jobs (1,340 new positions) and a competitive effect of 2,634. This reflects the rising demand for long-term care services in an aging population.⁵⁰

Additional industries driving growth include Beverage and Tobacco Product Manufacturing (+30% job growth), Utilities (+14%), and Air Transportation (+24%). These industries collectively illustrate Orange County’s evolving economic landscape, where regional strengths align with emerging national trends.⁵¹

NAICS	Description	2019 Jobs	2024 Jobs	2019 - 2024 Change	2019 - 2024 % Change	Competitive Effect	2019 LQ	2024 LQ
621	Ambulatory Health Care Services	98,777	113,569	14,792	15%	1,254	1.09	1.15
624	Social Assistance	50,344	61,598	11,253	22%	5,058	1.00	1.14
336	Transportation Equipment Manufacturing	15,054	18,805	3,751	25%	3,011	0.77	0.96
611	Educational Services	40,189	43,531	3,342	8%	1,659	0.85	0.93
492	Couriers and Messengers	7,285	11,973	4,688	64%	1,450	0.73	0.87
485	Transit and Ground Passenger Transportation	6,177	6,273	96	2%	607	0.75	0.87
623	Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	28,177	29,516	1,340	5%	2,634	0.74	0.86

⁴⁶ Lightcast, *Industry Analysis Tool*. Accessed January 2025. <https://analyst.lightcast.io>

⁴⁷ Lightcast, *Industry Analysis Tool*.

⁴⁸ Lightcast, *Industry Analysis Tool*.

⁴⁹ Lightcast, *Industry Analysis Tool*.

⁵⁰ Lightcast, *Industry Analysis Tool*.

⁵¹ Lightcast, *Industry Analysis Tool*.

NAICS	Description	2019 Jobs	2024 Jobs	2019 - 2024 Change	2019 - 2024 % Change	Competitive Effect	2019 LQ	2024 LQ
519	Web Search Portals, Libraries, Archives, and Other Information Services	1,025	1,634	610	59%	360	0.55	0.74
312	Beverage and Tobacco Product Manufacturing	2,124	2,758	634	30%	163	0.65	0.72
622	Hospitals	33,389	36,355	2,966	9%	1,421	0.58	0.63
221	Utilities	2,980	3,392	412	14%	202	0.48	0.54
457	Gasoline Stations and Fuel Dealers	5,033	5,828	795	16%	593	0.44	0.51
481	Air Transportation	1,114	1,386	273	24%	136	0.19	0.22
484	Truck Transportation	6,490	7,330	840	13%	483	0.33	0.37

Data Source: Lightcast

Emerging Occupations with Regional Demand

Emerging occupations are closely tied to the industries experiencing rapid growth in Orange County. These roles address key workforce needs in healthcare, logistics, and transportation, reflecting the impact of technological advancements, demographic changes, and regional economic strengths.

Key highlights include:

- **Home Health and Personal Care Aides** added 12,921 jobs, representing 22% growth from 2019 to 2024. This occupation has a competitive effect of 6,873, with an LQ increase from 0.96 to 1.11, signaling rising regional demand driven by an aging population.⁵²
- **Healthcare Diagnosing or Treating Practitioners** grew by 17%, adding 9,386 jobs. With a competitive effect of 3,208, this occupation supports the expanding need for specialized medical services, reflecting Orange County’s emphasis on healthcare access.⁵³
- **Supervisors of Transportation and Material Moving Workers** added 1,936 jobs, growing by 49%. Its competitive effect of 710 and LQ increase from 0.74 to 0.88 highlight the growing importance of logistics and supply chain management in the region.⁵⁴

SOC	Description	2019 Jobs	2024 Jobs	2019 - 2024 % Change	Median Hourly Earnings	Competitive Effect	2019 LQ	2024 LQ
31-1100	Home Health and Personal Care Aides; and Nursing Assistants, Orderlies, and Psychiatric Aides	57,941	70,862	22%	\$15.57	6,873	0.96	1.11
29-1000	Healthcare Diagnosing or Treating Practitioners	54,875	64,261	17%	\$62.72	3,208	0.81	0.89
53-3000	Motor Vehicle Operators	34,768	40,304	16%	\$22.72	3,496	0.65	0.74

⁵² Lightcast. *Occupational Analysis Tool*. Accessed January 2025. <https://analyst.lightcast.io>

⁵³ Lightcast. *Occupational Analysis Tool*.

⁵⁴ Lightcast. *Occupational Analysis Tool*.

SOC	Description	2019 Jobs	2024 Jobs	2019 - 2024 % Change	Median Hourly Earnings	Competitive Effect	2019 LQ	2024 LQ
21-1000	Counselors, Social Workers, and Other Community and Social Service Specialists	26,568	31,422	18%	\$27.30	1,974	1.01	1.12
29-2000	Health Technologists and Technicians	26,431	30,547	16%	\$30.96	2,587	0.78	0.89
33-9000	Other Protective Service Workers	19,357	22,510	16%	\$18.61	1,916	1.03	1.18
53-1000	Supervisors of Transportation and Material Moving Workers	3,926	5,862	49%	\$28.95	710	0.74	0.88
49-1000	Supervisors of Installation, Maintenance, and Repair Workers	3,832	5,373	40%	\$40.65	695	0.66	0.80
37-1000	Supervisors of Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance Workers	4,045	4,875	21%	\$24.68	315	1.01	1.13
19-3000	Social Scientists and Related Workers	3,763	4,599	22%	\$50.32	273	1.02	1.14
39-2000	Animal Care and Service Workers	2,832	3,746	32%	\$15.81	130	0.75	0.81
33-1000	Supervisors of Protective Service Workers	1,449	2,185	51%	\$46.81	552	0.39	0.54
19-5000	Occupational Health and Safety Specialists and Technicians	1,408	1,943	38%	\$53.73	45	1.10	1.18
53-2000	Air Transportation Workers	1,103	1,373	24%	\$60.32	119	0.28	0.32
39-4000	Funeral Service Workers	269	441	64%	\$18.89	170	0.35	0.59
53-4000	Rail Transportation Workers	268	322	20%	\$27.18	13	0.20	0.22

Data Source: Lightcast

Key Insights:

- Investment in caregiving, logistics, and healthcare training programs is critical to meet workforce demand in these growing occupations.
- Aligning educational resources and partnerships with employer needs will support sustained job growth in these sectors.

III. REGIONAL INDICATORS

The California Workforce Development Board has established Regional Indicators to assess coordination and measure progress within California’s 15 Regional Planning Units (RPUs). These indicators track processes and activities that support regional workforce alignment with industry needs.

Each RPU must establish objective metrics associated with at least two or more of the following four Regional Indicators:

- **Indicator A:** The region has a process to communicate industry workforce needs to supply-side partners.
- **Indicator B:** The region has policies supporting equity and strives to improve job quality.

- **Indicator C:** The region has shared target populations of emphasis.
- **Indicator D:** The region deploys shared/pooled resources to provide services, training, and education to meet target population needs.

A. Regional Indicator and Associated Outcomes and Metrics

Indicator A: The Region Has a Process to Communicate Industry Workforce Needs to Supply-Side Partners

Members of the three Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) that comprise the Orange RPU have retained Indicator A, which focuses on aligning supply and demand in key regional sectors and occupations. This requires workforce boards to understand employer demands such as skills, competencies, and the number of available positions. Aligning industry workforce needs with supply-side training and education ensures a strong talent pipeline and promotes economic growth in the region.

In alignment with Regional Plan Implementation (RPI) grants, the following outcomes, strategies, and metrics have been established.

Outcomes and Metrics

Outcome 1: Region has developed benchmarks and measurements to track improvement in the number of individuals placed in jobs that align with the sectors and occupations emphasized in the Regional Plan.

Strategies

1. Identify at least two high-demand job classifications per target sector.
2. Capture and document job openings in these classifications.
3. Broadcast job openings via a regional website and direct engagement.
4. Track enrollments in training for demand occupations in CalJOBS.
5. Monitor placements made by system partners using CalJOBS.
6. Measure year-over-year increases in placements, incorporating data from non-CalJOBS users over time.

Metrics

1. Job Classifications Tracked for Supply-Side Partners: The region will track at least two in-demand job classifications per target sector to assess workforce needs, ensuring alignment with industry demand.
2. Demand Job Openings Tracked: The annual count of job openings in selected classifications to measure workforce demand.
3. Demand Jobs Communicated to Supply-Side Partners: The number of job openings shared to measure effective communication with partners.
4. Individuals Trained for Demand Jobs: The number of individuals enrolled in sector-specific training as reported in CalJOBS.
5. Individuals Placed in Target Sector Jobs: The number of individuals secured in demand jobs within target sectors, as reported in CalJOBS.

Outcome 2: Region has developed benchmarks and methods to track workforce partner professional development training on priority sectors and industry workforce needs.

Strategies

1. Distribute monthly labor market updates from EDD to workforce partners.
2. Conduct professional development sessions on priority sector workforce needs.
3. Develop regional training reports on target industry trends.
4. Track workforce partner participation in professional development.
5. Survey training effectiveness and knowledge retention among workforce partners.

Metrics

1. Information Sharing: 100% of scheduled monthly labor market updates are distributed to partners.
2. Training Sessions: Number of professional development sessions conducted annually.
3. Training Participation: Total number of WIOA-funded staff and workforce system representatives attending training.
4. Knowledge Application: At least 80% of training participants report the ability to apply information learned in their work.

Indicator C: The Region Has Shared Target Populations of Emphasis

This indicator supports the prioritization of specific populations to ensure equitable access to workforce services and tailored support that addresses their unique challenges. The Orange RPU has chosen to focus on the reentry population—individuals transitioning from incarceration—to promote their successful reintegration into the workforce and economic stability.

Outcome 1: Develop Benchmarks and Systems to Support Equitable Access for the Reentry Population

Strategies to be used to achieve this outcome will include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Identify specific barriers the reentry population faces and design targeted interventions to address them.
- Establish partnerships with correctional facilities, community-based organizations, and employers to provide a coordinated support network.
- Work with education partners to develop and implement training programs tailored to the reentry population, focusing on skill-building for high-demand sectors.

Metrics:

- Percentage of reentry population participants enrolled in workforce programs.
- Retention rate of reentry population participants in training programs.

- Number of partnerships established to support reentry population workforce integration.
- Job placement rate for reentry population participants in high-demand occupations.

Outcome 2: Ensure Pathways to Sustainable Employment for the Reentry Population

Strategies to be used to achieve this outcome will include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Work with employers to develop and promote fair hiring practices for the reentry population.
- Identify and support work-based learning opportunities.
- Track wage progression for reentry population participants to ensure economic mobility.

Metrics:

- Percentage of reentry population participants placed in jobs paying self-sufficient wages.
- Number of employers engaged in fair hiring practices for the reentry population.
- Retention rate of reentry population participants in employment.

B. Assessment of Impacts, Lessons Learned, and Progress on Tracking and Evaluating Indicator A

A core focus of Indicator A has been to improve how industry workforce needs are communicated to supply-side partners, ensuring that training programs remain aligned with employer demands. Over the past planning cycle, workforce system partners have enhanced professional development, employer engagement, and data-sharing efforts to support this goal. While progress has been made, ongoing challenges remain in fully integrating sector strategies across K-12 and community college systems and establishing seamless data-sharing agreements.

Workforce staff, particularly those at America's Job Centers of California (AJCCs), have deepened their understanding of regional priority sectors through ongoing labor market information updates and targeted industry training sessions. This increased knowledge has allowed staff to provide more informed career guidance, improve job seeker referrals, and better align training recommendations with industry demand.

Collaboration with K-12 and community colleges remains an area of focus, as aligning curriculum with workforce needs requires continuous coordination across multiple education and industry partners. While efforts have been made to define pathways into high-demand industries, bridging the gap between education and employment remains a complex process requiring sustained engagement.

Efforts to strengthen information sharing have included discussions on data-sharing agreements with community college partners, which would enable a more comprehensive understanding of training outcomes and employment placements. However, navigating legal and logistical challenges associated with these agreements requires continued exploration.

Employers have been more engaged in workforce planning efforts, providing insights into hiring trends, skill gaps, and emerging industry needs. This input has helped refine training priorities and job placement strategies, ensuring that workforce services remain responsive to regional labor demands. Additionally, workforce boards have focused on improving employer outreach, making it easier for businesses to connect with job seekers and access workforce resources.

Although there are still areas for improvement, these efforts have laid the foundation for a more data-driven and industry-aligned workforce system. Continued collaboration with education partners, enhanced employer engagement, and progress in data-sharing initiatives will be key to further strengthening the region’s ability to meet workforce needs.

IV. FOSTERING DEMAND-DRIVEN SKILLS ATTAINMENT

As Orange County evolves, equipping job seekers with the right skills to meet the needs of growing industries is more important than ever. The region’s workforce development strategy is designed to adapt to historical economic trends and respond to emerging labor market shifts by aligning education and training programs with real-time industry demands. To achieve this, workforce boards and education partners must collaborate closely with employers to ensure workers acquire the skills needed for sustainable, well-paying careers while supporting the region’s key economic drivers.

A critical mechanism for aligning workforce training with industry needs is the identification of in-demand industry sectors and occupations. Orange County boasts a strong economic foundation, with industries such as healthcare, technology, manufacturing, and tourism playing central roles in employment and regional growth. However, shifting labor trends, rapid technological advancements, and evolving workforce demands require reevaluating the region’s priorities to ensure continued economic vitality over the next four years.

A. In-Demand Industry Sectors for the Region

The Orange County Center of Excellence (OC COE), through its work on the Orange County Sector Analysis Project, identified eight priority industry sectors based on a comprehensive analysis of labor market data, including job growth projections, wage levels, and alignment with local

Sectors	Community Colleges	Orange RPU
Advanced Manufacturing	✓	✓
Advanced Transportation & Logistics	✓	
Life Sciences/Biotech	✓	
Business and Entrepreneurship	✓	
Energy, Construction, and Utilities	✓	✓
Healthcare	✓	✓
ICT/Digital Media	✓	✓
Retail, Hospitality, & Tourism	✓	✓

education and workforce initiatives. While recognizing the importance of all eight sectors, the region's workforce boards will continue to focus on four key sectors—Advanced Manufacturing, Health, ICT/Digital Media, and Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism—while expanding efforts to include Energy, Construction, and Utilities as a fifth priority sector. This expanded focus reflects the increasing demand and opportunities within the green economy and infrastructure-related fields.

Although these five sectors will serve as the primary focus, the workforce boards will continue to support initiatives in the remaining sectors to ensure the workforce system addresses the diverse needs of Orange County's economy. The following sections will explore the economic significance and workforce potential of Advanced Manufacturing, Advanced Transportation and Logistics, Energy, Construction, and Utilities, Health, and ICT/Digital Media, providing insights into their current landscape and future opportunities.

Healthcare

The Healthcare sector is one of Orange County's most vital and rapidly expanding industries, driven by an aging population, increased healthcare access, and advancements in medical technology. As of 2022, this sector accounted for 213,359 jobs, representing 12% of total employment in the region. By 2027, healthcare employment is projected to grow by 15%, adding 32,605 new jobs and generating 30,724 annual openings.⁵⁵

- **Key Occupations:** Home Health and Personal Care Aides, Registered Nurses, and Medical Assistants are among the most in-demand roles in the sector.⁵⁶
- **Median Wages:** Key roles offer competitive compensation, with Registered Nurses earning a median hourly wage of \$60.39 and Medical Assistants earning \$19.26.⁵⁷
- **Growth Drivers:** Increased demand for eldercare services, technological innovations like telehealth, and expanded healthcare facilities are fueling sector growth.⁵⁸

Approximately 85% of annual job openings in the Healthcare sector are for middle-skill occupations, such as Medical Assistants and Nursing Assistants, which typically require certifications or short-term training programs. Above-middle-skill roles, including Registered Nurses and Clinical Laboratory Technologists, account for 13% of openings and often require bachelor's degrees or higher. Below-middle-skill roles make up the remaining 2%, offering entry-level opportunities in the sector. These diverse career pathways ensure that the Healthcare sector provides accessible options for a wide range of job seekers, from those entering the workforce to highly specialized professionals.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. Orange County Sector Profile: Health. July 2024. <https://coecc.net/orange-county/2024/07/oc-sector-profile-health/>.

⁵⁶ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. Orange County Sector Profile: Supplemental Appendices – Health. July 2024. <https://coecc.net/orange-county/2024/07/oc-sector-profile-supplemental-appendices-health/>.

⁵⁷ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. Orange County Sector Profile: Supplemental Appendices – Health.

⁵⁸ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. Orange County Sector Profile: Health.

⁵⁹ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. Orange County Sector Profile: Health.

The sector's workforce initiatives prioritize addressing skill gaps and expanding opportunities for underrepresented populations. Training programs focus on creating pathways from entry-level positions to advanced healthcare careers.

Advanced Manufacturing

Advanced Manufacturing plays a pivotal role in Orange County's economy, leveraging cutting-edge technology to produce high-value goods across industries such as aerospace, medical devices, and automotive. In 2022, the sector accounted for 111,821 jobs, representing 6% of total regional employment. While projected growth is modest at 1% through 2027, this sector remains vital, generating over 13,000 annual job openings.⁶⁰

- **Key Occupations:** Industrial Engineers, CNC Machinists, and Electrical Engineers.⁶¹
- **Median Wages:** Ranges from \$30.10 to \$45.85 per hour for core roles.⁶²
- **Growth Drivers:** Innovation in advanced materials, robotics, and automation.⁶³

Approximately 57% of annual openings in the Advanced Manufacturing sector are for below-middle-skill occupations, such as Assemblers and Machine Operators, which require limited training. 35% of openings are for middle-skill roles, including CNC Machinists and Maintenance Workers, requiring certifications or associate degrees. 8% of openings are for above-middle-skill roles, such as Industrial Engineers and Mechanical Engineers, which demand advanced education and technical expertise.⁶⁴

The sector's workforce development efforts focus on aligning training programs with employer needs, particularly in automation, robotics, and advanced materials. Partnerships with community colleges and apprenticeship programs are critical in developing a pipeline of skilled workers.

Information and Communication Technologies and Digital Media

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and Digital Media sector is a key driver of innovation and economic activity in Orange County. In 2022, this sector accounted for 89,656 jobs, representing 5% of all employment in the region. By 2027, employment in this sector is projected to grow by 6%, adding an additional 5,681 jobs and creating approximately 8,544 annual openings, including new and replacement positions.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. *Orange County Sector Profile: Advanced Manufacturing*. October 2024. <https://coecc.net/orange-county/2024/10/oc-sector-profile-advanced-manufacturing/>.

⁶¹ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. *Orange County Sector Profile: Supplemental Appendices – Advanced Manufacturing*. October 2024. <https://coecc.net/orange-county/2024/10/oc-sector-profile-supplemental-appendices-advanced-manufacturing/>.

⁶² Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. *Orange County Sector Profile: Supplemental Appendices – Advanced Manufacturing*.

⁶³ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. *Orange County Sector Profile: Advanced Manufacturing*.

⁶⁴ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. *Orange County Sector Profile: Advanced Manufacturing*.

⁶⁵ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. *Orange County Sector Profile: Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)/Digital Media*. July 2024. <https://coecc.net/orange-county/2024/07/oc-sector-profile-information-and-communication-technologies-ict-digital-media/>.

- **Key Occupations:** Software Developers, Computer User Support Specialists, and Information Security Analysts are among the most in-demand roles, reflecting the sector's reliance on a highly skilled workforce.⁶⁶
- **Median Wages:** Wages in the sector range widely depending on the skill level. Software Developers, a high-demand role, earn a median hourly wage of \$64.14, while Computer User Support Specialists earn a median of \$31.11.⁶⁷
- **Growth Drivers:** The sector's growth is fueled by advancements in cybersecurity, cloud computing, and digital media technologies, as well as the increasing integration of technology across industries.⁶⁸

Approximately 65% of annual job openings in this sector are for above-middle-skill occupations requiring advanced education and technical expertise. Middle-skill jobs, such as Computer User Support Specialists, make up 27% of annual openings, highlighting opportunities for workers with associate degrees or certifications.⁶⁹

Efforts to align workforce training with industry needs include expanding programming, data analytics, and cybersecurity programs through partnerships with community colleges and industry stakeholders. These initiatives ensure that job seekers are equipped to meet the evolving demands of the ICT and Digital Media sector. At the same time, businesses have access to the skilled workforce they need to remain competitive.

Energy, Construction, and Utilities

The Energy, Construction, and Utilities (ECU) sector is pivotal in building and maintaining Orange County's infrastructure while addressing the region's energy and environmental needs. In 2022, this sector employed 143,448 workers, representing 8% of all jobs in the region. By 2027, employment in the sector is projected to grow by 6%, adding 15,488 annual openings, including new positions and replacement needs.⁷⁰

- **Key Occupations:** Electricians, Construction Managers, and Plumbers are among the most in-demand roles within the sector. Middle-skill roles such as HVAC Mechanics and Installers also represent significant growth opportunities.⁷¹
- **Median Wages:** Wages in this sector are competitive, with roles such as Electricians earning a median hourly wage of \$35.18, while Construction Managers earn a median hourly wage of \$52.02.⁷²
- **Growth Drivers:** The growth of this sector is driven by investments in renewable energy, decarbonization efforts, and increased infrastructure development through federal and state initiatives such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and

⁶⁶ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. *Orange County Sector Profile: Supplemental Appendices – Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)/Digital Media*. July 2024. <https://coecc.net/orange-county/2024/07/oc-sector-profile-supplemental-appendices-information-and-communication-technologies-ict-digital-media/>.

⁶⁷ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. *Orange County Sector Profile: Supplemental Appendices – Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)/Digital Media*.

⁶⁸ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. *Orange County Sector Profile: Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)/Digital Media*.

⁶⁹ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. *Orange County Sector Profile: Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)/Digital Media*.

⁷⁰ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. *Orange County Sector Profile: Energy, Construction, and Utilities*. August 2024. <https://coecc.net/orange-county/2024/08/oc-sector-profile-energy-construction-and-utilities/>.

⁷¹ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. *Orange County Sector Profile: Supplemental Appendices – Energy, Construction, and Utilities*. August 2024.

<https://coecc.net/orange-county/2024/08/oc-sector-profile-supplemental-appendices-energy-construction-and-utilities/>.

⁷² Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research. *Orange County Sector Profile: Supplemental Appendices – Energy, Construction, and Utilities*.

Senate Bill 1 (SB 1), which fund major construction and energy efficiency projects

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Approximately 39% of annual openings in the Energy, Construction, and Utilities sector are for below-middle-skill occupations, such as Construction Laborers and Maintenance Workers, which typically require on-the-job training and minimal formal education. 49% of openings are for middle-skill roles, including Electricians and HVAC Mechanics, which require certifications or associate degrees. The remaining 12% of openings are for above-middle-skill roles, such as Civil Engineers and Construction Managers, which demand advanced education and technical expertise. This distribution highlights the sector's diverse career opportunities, offering pathways for workers at all skill levels to contribute to the region's infrastructure and energy systems.⁷⁴

Efforts to align workforce training with industry needs in the Energy, Construction, and Utilities sectors focus on expanding apprenticeship programs, technical certifications, and hands-on training opportunities in fields like electrical work, HVAC systems, and renewable energy. Partnerships with community colleges, trade associations, industry leaders, and unions play a vital role in developing and scaling apprenticeship programs that provide job seekers with the skills to meet the sector's evolving demands. These initiatives ensure a robust talent pipeline that supports regional infrastructure development and energy sustainability while enabling businesses to access the skilled workforce required to remain competitive in this rapidly changing industry.

Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism

Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism is a cornerstone of Orange County's economy, benefiting from its status as a premier destination for shopping, dining, and entertainment. In 2022, the sector employed 229,397 individuals, with an 11% projected growth rate through 2027, creating 46,249 annual job openings.⁷⁵

- **Key Occupations:** Food Service Managers, Retail Salespersons, and Cooks.⁷⁶
- **Median Wages:** Ranges from \$14.01 for entry-level roles to \$40.72 for managerial positions.⁷⁷
- **Growth Drivers:** Increased tourism, expanding dining and retail experiences, and recovery from pandemic-related disruptions.⁷⁸

Approximately 85% of annual openings in the Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism sector are for below-middle-skill occupations, such as Fast Food and Counter Workers, Waiters and Waitresses, and Bartenders, which typically require short-term on-the-job training and minimal formal education. 14% of openings are for middle-skill roles, such as Food Service Managers and First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers, requiring a high school diploma, some work experience, or certifications. The remaining 1% of openings

⁷³ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research, *Orange County Sector Profile: Energy, Construction, and Utilities*.

⁷⁴ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research, *Orange County Sector Profile: Energy, Construction, and Utilities*.

⁷⁵ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research, *Orange County Sector Profile: Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism*. October 2024. <https://coeccc.net/orange-county/2024/10/oc-sector-profile-retail-hospitality-and-tourism/>.

⁷⁶ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research, *Orange County Sector Profile: Supplemental Appendices – Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism*. October 2024. <https://coeccc.net/orange-county/2024/10/oc-sector-profile-supplemental-appendices-retail-hospitality-and-tourism/>.

⁷⁷ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research, *Orange County Sector Profile: Supplemental Appendices – Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism*.

⁷⁸ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research, *Orange County Sector Profile: Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism*.

are for above-middle-skill roles, such as Meeting, Convention, and Event Planners, which demand advanced education and specialized expertise. This distribution highlights the sector's heavy reliance on entry-level and middle-skill jobs.⁷⁹

Efforts to enhance career pathways for underrepresented populations in the Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism sector focus on expanding access to training that builds transferable skills and prepares workers for advancement into middle-skill roles or transitions to higher-paying industries. While businesses increasingly adopt automated scheduling and mobile ordering technologies, workforce strategies must emphasize equipping workers with the skills to manage and complement these tools. These initiatives aim to provide workers with sustainable employment opportunities, improve job quality, and create pathways for long-term economic mobility.

By focusing on these five in-demand industry sectors, Orange County's workforce system will ensure job seekers receive the training to enter high-wage, sustainable careers. At the same time, employers benefit from a highly skilled workforce that supports regional economic growth. The region's ability to connect training programs with employer needs, provide real-time labor market insights, and foster career pathways will be crucial in building an equitable and competitive workforce for years.

B. Sector Strategies and Other Industry-Focused Initiatives

The Orange RPU has a strong foundation in sector partnership work, initiated under the "Slingshot" grant funded by the California Workforce Development Board. This early work established the region's adoption of the Next Gen Sector Partnership model, launching industry sector partnerships in four priority sectors. Initial industry collaboration meetings were held just before the COVID-19 pandemic, with participation from employers, chambers of commerce, unions, and other partners. While progress stalled during the pandemic, the RPU has been working to engage ecosystem partners to lay the foundation for re-engaging employers in industry sector partnerships and advancing these efforts over the next four years.

The RPU's goal is to work with the Orange County Department of Education (OCDE) and the Orange County Regional Consortium (OCRC) to improve industry sector partnerships and advisory meetings. By strengthening coordination with these organizations, which also engage businesses directly, the RPU seeks to streamline engagement efforts, reduce duplication, and ensure these meetings are impactful for employers and workforce partners.

As part of these collaborative efforts, workforce boards will partner with OCRC and trade associations on a Strong Workforce project that utilizes the Business & Industry Leadership Team (BILT) Model to convene regional advisories. Initial efforts will focus on the automotive and restaurant industries while exploring opportunities to pilot Next Gen Sector Partnership elements in manufacturing, healthcare, or information technology. Insights from these efforts will help shape ongoing strategies, guiding the expansion and strengthening of sector partnerships to meet regional workforce needs.

⁷⁹ Centers of Excellence for Labor Market Research, *Orange County Sector Profile: Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism*.

The RPU's sector-based initiatives will focus on three key goals:

1. **Employer Engagement:** Convene regular sector partnership meetings to identify industry priorities, address shared challenges, and align training efforts with hiring needs.
2. **Workforce Development Strategies:** Collaborate with educational partners, including community colleges and adult education providers, to expand career pathways, work-based learning opportunities, and upskilling programs for in-demand occupations.
3. **Unified Business Engagement:** Coordinate outreach efforts among workforce and education partners to minimize duplication, streamline communication, and provide a clear pathway for businesses to engage with the workforce system.

The RPU will continue to engage chambers of commerce and other key stakeholders as integral partners in industry sector partnerships. These efforts are part of the RPU's overarching strategy to develop actionable solutions that address workforce challenges, provide targeted support to help employers meet their hiring needs, and drive systemic changes that benefit both industries and job seekers. These initiatives ensure that training programs align with employer needs while equipping job seekers with the skills and opportunities to succeed in high-demand occupations.

C. Strategies to Communicate with Regional Employers

The Orange RPU collaborates to ensure effective and cohesive communication with regional employers. A foundational effort in this strategy has been the development of the Orange Workforce Alliance (OWA) website, a collaborative initiative among the three workforce boards in Orange County. The OWA website (orangeworkforcealliance.com) is a centralized platform for employers to connect with workforce resources. It provides a streamlined access point for workforce recruitment, training, upskilling opportunities, labor market data, and human resources support. This shared resource reflects the RPU's commitment to cohesive messaging and reducing redundancy across the region.

Recognizing the importance of clear communication and simplified access points, the workforce boards will convene quarterly meetings with representatives responsible for business services or employer engagement across partner organizations. These meetings will bring together stakeholders from the OCDE, the OCRC, the EDD, the Department of Rehabilitation, and other workforce partners to align efforts and develop unified outreach strategies.

As part of the quarterly meetings, this collaborative effort will focus on:

- **Creating Common Language and Streamlined Approaches:** Ensuring businesses can easily navigate the workforce system, reducing redundancy while maximizing impact.
- **Enhancing Coordination:** Strengthening collaboration among workforce and education partners to unify employer engagement efforts.

- **Refining Strategies:** Developing innovative approaches to employer outreach that align with regional workforce goals.
- **Maximizing Accessibility:** Ensuring employers can effectively connect with workforce development services and initiatives.

The OC Works platform, led by the OCRC in partnership with the workforce boards, serves as a regional hub connecting workforce partners, job seekers, and employers. Accessible at oc-works.org, the site provides a comprehensive overview of resources designed to meet the needs of employers, including tools to support hiring, access labor market information, and connect with training and workforce development programs.

For employers, the platform offers a dedicated page (oc-works.org/pages/employers) that highlights key services such as:

- Workforce recruitment and hiring support.
- Access to regional labor market data and insights.
- Connections to training providers and apprenticeship programs.
- Resources for upskilling and workforce planning.

Built on the ArcGIS Hub platform, OC Works has significant potential for expansion, serving as a central communication hub for regional workforce activities. The platform's flexible and data-driven architecture allows for future enhancements, such as integrating new tools and features to support employer engagement and data sharing.

As the platform evolves, OCRC and its partners, including the workforce boards, will adopt strategies to maximize its use as a central place of communication. These strategies will include:

- **Partner Engagement:** Encouraging workforce partners to actively utilize and promote the site as a go-to resource for employers and job seekers.
- **Employer Outreach:** Connecting businesses to the platform and demonstrating its value as a streamlined resource for accessing workforce development services.
- **Platform Expansion:** Identifying opportunities to enhance the site's functionality, such as integrating new tools and features to support employer engagement and data sharing.

Under OCRC's leadership, the OC Works platform represents a significant step toward creating a cohesive, user-friendly system for workforce engagement in Orange County. By positioning it as a central hub for communication and collaboration, the RPU supports OCRC's efforts to strengthen regional connections and provide businesses with the tools and resources they need to succeed.

Through a combination of tools like the OWA website, the OC Works platform, and quarterly coordination meetings, the RPU is building an integrated framework for

employer outreach. These efforts ensure that businesses have clear and streamlined channels for communication, aligning workforce solutions with business needs, strengthening partnerships, and supporting sustained economic growth across the region.

V. ENABLING UPWARD MOBILITY FOR ALL CALIFORNIANS

The Orange RPU aligns with California’s vision of a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforce system, ensuring that all individuals, especially those facing systemic barriers, have access to quality jobs that provide long-term economic stability and self-sufficiency. Recognizing that economic mobility is a cornerstone of shared prosperity, the region is committed to implementing policies, partnerships, and programs that advance job quality, skill development, and access to economic opportunity.

In alignment with the CWDB’s emphasis on job quality, worker-centered policies, and employer engagement, the Orange RPU will continue to remove barriers to employment, support wraparound services, and cultivate pathways into sustainable, well-paying careers.

A. Promoting and Improving Job Quality and Access

The Orange RPU recognizes that quality jobs are essential for economic mobility. High-road jobs provide family-sustaining wages, benefits, predictable scheduling, career advancement opportunities, worker input, and safe work environments. The RPU promotes job quality by fostering strong employer partnerships, aligning workforce development strategies with industry needs, and ensuring that all workers, particularly those facing systemic barriers, have access to sustainable, high-quality employment.

Recognizing that Orange County’s economy is shaped by industries with a high concentration of low-wage jobs, it is crucial to create sustainable pathways for workers to advance into family-sustaining employment. According to a recent labor market analysis, only 42% of workers in Orange County hold “good jobs”, defined as full-time, full-year employment that provides employer-sponsored healthcare and meets the MIT living wage threshold of \$23.66 per hour for a single adult. However, this figure drops to 39% when considering jobs that support a household with two working adults and one child. Notably, racial and gender disparities persist, with Latinx workers being the least likely to hold good jobs (25%) compared to White (51%) and Asian Pacific Islander workers (49%)⁸⁰.

It is important to distinguish between a good job and a high-road job. Good jobs meet baseline economic stability criteria, including a living wage, health benefits, and stable employment. High-road jobs, as defined by the State of California, go further by offering clear pathways for advancement, paid sick and vacation leave, predictable schedules, worker protections, and adherence to fair labor standards⁸¹. Given that a significant portion of jobs in Orange County still fall short of these standards, the RPU remains committed to working with industry leaders to enhance job quality, develop career

⁸⁰ Virginia Parks and Youjin Kim, *Orange County Worker Profile* (Irvine, CA: UCI Labor Center, 2023), https://socialecology.uci.edu/sites/default/files/users/mkcruz/cerf_report_by_uci_labor_center.pdf.

⁸¹ Parks and Kim, *Orange County Worker Profile*.

pathways, and promote equitable workforce development strategies that enable workers to advance into sustainable, high-quality careers.

Strategic Approaches to Advancing Job Quality

Ensuring job quality requires a targeted approach, prioritizing collaboration with high-road employers while expanding access to sustainable career opportunities. The Orange RPU is committed to partnering with businesses that embrace high-road job principles while working within industries with low-wage jobs, prioritizing employers that demonstrate a commitment to workforce investment and career progression. Given the region's high concentration of low-wage jobs, workforce development strategies must expand access to quality jobs while improving conditions in traditionally low-wage sectors.

The Aspen Institute's research on sectoral workforce development highlights two key strategies: removing barriers to good jobs for low-income individuals and improving job quality in industries with high concentrations of low-wage work⁸². These principles will continue to inform the RPU's approach as it strengthens partnerships, advances career pathways, and implements policies that support long-term economic mobility across the region.

The RPU will continue implementing support workers to obtain sustainable employment and strengthen industry competitiveness by ensuring a skilled and stable workforce. By integrating high-road employment practices into workforce planning, the RPU aligns its efforts with California's vision of a High Road Workforce System, ensuring that regional investments promote equity, economic security, and sustainability.

Employer Engagement and Job Quality Standards

Employer engagement is a critical component of this strategy. The RPU will expand its efforts to collaborate with businesses to integrate high-road employment practices. It will establish a standardized job quality assessment tool to evaluate industries, companies, and occupations, ensuring that workforce development investments prioritize employers committed to job quality. Additionally, through regional employer convenings, industry roundtables, and direct business engagement, the RPU will facilitate discussions with employers, helping them understand how workforce investments can enhance their competitive advantage while improving job quality.

Integration of Statewide Interventions

In alignment with CWDB priorities, the RPU will integrate the four key state interventions to advance job quality and worker equity:

- **Professionalizing Precarious Work:** The RPU will collaborate with employers to establish industry-recognized certifications that elevate traditionally low-wage occupations. This will ensure that workers gain the skills necessary for higher-paying positions.

⁸² Maureen Conway, Amy Blair, and Steven L. Dawson, *Sectoral Strategies for Low-Income Workers: Lessons from the Field* (Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute, 2007), <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2007/10/Sectoral-Strategies.pdf>.

- **Democratizing Access to Good-Quality Middle-Skill Jobs:** The RPU will explore opportunities to create pre-apprenticeship programs and targeted workforce interventions that increase access to high-wage careers for women, immigrants, and people of color.
- **Participatory Planning for the Low-Carbon Economy:** The RPU will continue participating in projects like the Jobs First initiative to prepare for emerging industries. This initiative engages in participatory planning efforts to assess workforce needs in clean energy, sustainability, and other green economy sectors. As part of this work, the RPU will ensure that jobs in these industries uphold job quality standards, provide equitable access to opportunities, and align with regional economic development goals.
- **Lifting All Workers to the High Road:** The RPU is committed to ensuring that justice-involved individuals, individuals with disabilities, English language learners, and those experiencing housing insecurity can access quality jobs that provide long-term economic self-sufficiency. This will be achieved through continued investment in wraparound services, digital access initiatives, and supportive workforce policies that remove employment barriers and equip job seekers with the resources needed to succeed in the labor market.

Incorporating these four complementary interventions and fostering ongoing partnerships with employers, educational institutions, and workforce development agencies, the RPU will enhance job quality, expand economic opportunities, and drive an inclusive, equitable workforce system. These efforts will support shared economic prosperity and ensure all individuals have access to high-quality jobs with long-term stability, benefiting workers and businesses across the region.

B. Targeted Service Strategies for the Region's Unserved and Underserved Communities

The Orange RPU is committed to ensuring unserved and underserved communities have equitable access to workforce training, education, and family resources that support long-term economic mobility. Recognizing that barriers to employment vary across populations, the RPU integrates targeted service strategies designed to address the unique needs of justice-involved individuals, individuals with disabilities, English language learners (ELL), Veterans, foster youth, and those experiencing housing insecurity. These efforts focus on reducing barriers, enhancing accessibility, and tailoring services to reflect the needs of a diverse workforce.

Expanding Access to Regional Sector Career Pathways

Through sector partnerships, the Orange RPU will continue to work with employers to create career pathways that help vulnerable populations overcome barriers to education and employment. These pathways provide structured, long-term opportunities for job seekers with limited skills or employment history to build competencies over time and secure family-sustaining wages.

Stakeholder feedback during the regional planning process validated the RPU's existing strategy of expanding work-based learning programs, pre-apprenticeships, and on-the-job training (OJT) as critical tools for advancing economic mobility. In response, the RPU will continue to grow these opportunities, particularly for historically underrepresented populations—people of color, immigrants, and those without traditional degrees—ensuring they have formal access to employers and career progression opportunities in the Future Workforce. Pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs in high-demand industries such as healthcare, advanced manufacturing, and construction remain a priority, and the RPU will work to increase employer participation and strengthen these pathways to support more job seekers in transitioning into stable, high-quality careers.

Addressing Hiring Barriers and Promoting Equitable Employment Practices

The RPU continues to prioritize addressing hiring barriers such as degree inflation. Jobs that previously required only a high school diploma or industry certification now mandate a college degree, disproportionately affecting minorities and low-income individuals. Through sector partnerships, the RPU will work to develop further and expand efforts with regional partners to promote skills-based hiring over unnecessary educational requirements. Similarly, the RPU will engage employers in discussions on fair hiring practices, including reducing reliance on credit and criminal background checks, which have historically created barriers for communities of color⁸³.

Enhancing Accessibility Through Wraparound Support Services

Stakeholder feedback from the regional planning process highlighted that digital literacy, transportation, and childcare remain significant barriers to workforce participation. While the workforce boards fund supportive services such as transportation and childcare, the need far exceeds available resources. As a result, the RPU must continue collaborating with partnering agencies to expand support and explore best practices that can help address these challenges.

To ensure equitable access to workforce services, the RPU integrates wraparound services that address key barriers such as:

- **Digital literacy and broadband access**—Many individuals, particularly those from low-income households, struggle with online applications and virtual training platforms. The RPU is working to expand digital literacy initiatives through community colleges, public libraries, and WIOA Core Programs.
- **Transportation and childcare assistance** – Lack of reliable transportation and affordable childcare continues to be a significant workforce barrier. While the workforce boards provide some funding for these services, additional partnerships with local agencies and non-profits are necessary to expand access to transportation stipends, rideshare partnerships, and subsidized childcare solutions.

⁸³ Morgan, Kate. "Degree Inflation: How the Four-Year Degree Became Required." *BBC Worklife*, January 26, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20210126-degree-inflation-how-the-four-year-degree-became-required>.

- **Culturally responsive outreach:** The RPU will increase multilingual outreach to English language learners and immigrant job seekers and collaborate with partner agencies that support these populations to improve access to workforce services.

Strengthening Employer Engagement for Underserved Populations

A strong employer network is critical for ensuring underserved communities access meaningful job opportunities. The RPU will continue to build partnerships with employers willing to hire justice-involved individuals, veterans, and individuals with disabilities. While stakeholder feedback emphasized the need for employer training and incentives to promote more inclusive hiring practices, the RPU is not currently implementing direct employer training programs. However, on-the-job training (OJT) dollars may serve as an incentive by subsidizing the cost of training, which may indirectly support inclusive hiring practices. Additionally, the RPU will continue to explore opportunities to engage employers in discussions about fair hiring practices to support greater access to quality jobs for historically underrepresented populations.

Co-Enrollment and System Alignment

The RPU aims to increase co-enrollment with partner agencies to streamline service delivery and enhance workforce outcomes. Co-enrollment ensures that individuals are holistically served, receiving the necessary support services to complete training and secure employment successfully. By aligning workforce development efforts with partner organizations, the RPU can help job seekers access multiple resources simultaneously, reducing barriers to employment and improving long-term economic stability.

As part of this effort, the RPU is leveraging the Regional Equity and Recovery Partnerships (RERP) grant to collaborate with community colleges to increase co-enrollment and cross-training. This initiative helps workforce and education staff better understand how to assist students in navigating workforce systems, accessing training opportunities, and connecting with support services. Strengthening these partnerships will enhance service coordination and ensure students receive comprehensive support for long-term career success.

Additionally, the RPU supports a "no wrong door" approach, ensuring that individuals can access workforce development resources through multiple entry points.

Ensuring Equity and Inclusion in Workforce Development

The Orange RPU understands that one-size-fits-all workforce solutions are ineffective. Programs must be tailored to the specific needs of diverse populations, particularly those who have historically faced systemic employment barriers. The RPU will continue working to close the skills gap, advance racial equity, and create economic opportunities for all job seekers through integrated service strategies, employer partnerships, and regional coordination.

VI. CLIMATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

As California moves toward a carbon-neutral economy, the Orange RPU recognizes the importance of aligning workforce strategies with the Orange County Climate Action Plan (CAP) and the Jobs First Regional Plan for Orange County to ensure workforce investments support climate action and equitable economic growth. These efforts ensure that the economic benefits of green jobs reach disinvested communities most impacted by climate change. Low-income communities and communities of color disproportionately experience environmental harm due to pollution, extreme heat, and other climate-related risks. Yet, they have historically been underrepresented in industries driving the clean energy transition. To address these disparities, the RPU will actively integrate workforce strategies with the CAP and Jobs First Regional Plan, ensuring these communities gain equitable access to high-quality, family-sustaining careers in clean energy and climate-resilient industries.

A. Supporting a climate-neutral transition

As emerging green sectors expand, new skills will be required in zero-emission vehicle production and maintenance, renewable energy, climate mitigation, water and waste management, and building decarbonization⁸⁴. The RPU will collaborate with regional partners to identify workforce gaps and establish career pathways in these industries, ensuring that workers, particularly those from historically marginalized communities, are prepared for high-quality jobs that align with California's climate policies. To achieve this, the RPU will integrate workforce strategies with the Orange County CAP Jobs First Regional Plan, focusing on:

- Expanding green job training programs and career pathways in renewable energy, advanced transportation, and sustainable industries.
- Ensuring workforce training supports climate resilience and sustainable business practices.
- Engaging historically underrepresented communities in clean energy job opportunities.
- Aligning workforce initiatives with state climate policies and decarbonization strategies.

Recognizing that the clean energy transition must be inclusive, the RPU will integrate equity-driven workforce development strategies, prioritizing training and job placement efforts that serve populations disproportionately affected by climate change. This includes engaging employers in clean energy sectors, advocating for workforce training investments that serve underrepresented groups, and collaborating with community-based organizations to ensure economic inclusion. Additionally, the RPU will work to integrate support services into training programs to help address non-skill-related employment barriers.

Given the scale of statewide decarbonization efforts, such as California's commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2045, the phase-out of internal combustion engine vehicles

⁸⁴ Mark Muro, Adie Tomer, Ranjitha Shivaram, and Joseph Kane, *Advancing Inclusion Through Clean Energy Jobs* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2019), https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019_04_metro_Clean-Energy-Jobs_Report_Muro-Tomer-Shivaram-Kane_updated.pdf.

by 2035, and the expansion of renewable energy infrastructure, the RPU aims to develop and expand strategies that support industry transitions while ensuring economic opportunities for workers across Orange County⁸⁵. These efforts will require cross-sector collaboration, employer engagement, and investment in workforce development initiatives to prepare the regional workforce for the changing demands of a carbon-neutral future.

The RPU will align with California's High Road Training Partnerships (H RTP) framework to promote and encourage the adoption of high-road workforce principles in clean energy jobs. The H RTP model connects industry, labor, education, and workforce stakeholders to develop training programs responsive to industry needs while ensuring job quality and equitable access to economic opportunity⁸⁶. Within clean energy, H RTP partnerships can support workforce strategies that prepare workers for high-demand occupations, such as solar panel technicians, wind turbine specialists, electric vehicle infrastructure installers, and energy efficiency experts. These programs emphasize skills training, employer collaboration, and career pathway development to create sustainable, high-quality jobs in growing green sectors⁸⁷.

While the RPU does not have direct control over job standards, it will use industry sector engagement, business outreach, and employer education to emphasize the long-term benefits of adhering to high-road workforce principles—such as offering family-sustaining wages, benefits, career advancement opportunities, and worker protections. Furthermore, as state and federal funding opportunities become available, the RPU will work toward securing additional grants to support specific regional workforce projects that align with high-road principles. By fostering an understanding of how high-road practices contribute to business success and regional economic prosperity, the RPU aims to support a more equitable and sustainable workforce.⁸⁸

Additionally, the Orange County CAP and the Jobs First Regional Plan highlight the region's strengths in green technology and clean energy employment, noting that Orange County has a 50% higher concentration in green technology jobs than the state⁸⁹. Furthermore, the CAP's Mobility and Environmental Justice sectors emphasize the expansion of sustainable transportation, EV infrastructure, and green workforce development, reinforcing the county's potential to lead in clean energy innovation⁹⁰. Given this potential, the RPU will actively explore workforce strategies that support regional strengths in clean energy infrastructure, sustainable transportation, and environmental sustainability. The CAP and Jobs First Regional Plan's workforce strategies closely align with the RPU's goals for ensuring economic inclusion in the green economy, emphasizing:

- Expanding workforce training programs for clean energy, water conservation, and green building technologies.
- Developing apprenticeship programs in emerging green industries.

⁸⁵ California Air Resources Board. *2022 Scoping Plan for Achieving Carbon Neutrality*. Sacramento, CA: California Environmental Protection Agency, 2022. <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2022-12/2022-sp.pdf>.

⁸⁶ California Workforce Development Board (CWDB). High Road Training Partnerships (H RTP) Initiative. 2023. <https://cwdb.ca.gov/initiatives/high-road-training-partnerships/>

⁸⁷ Carol Zabin, *Putting California on the High Road: A Jobs and Climate Action Plan for 2030* (Berkeley, CA: UC Berkeley Labor Center, 2020), <https://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Putting-California-on-the-High-Road.pdf>.

⁸⁸ Carol Zabin and Jane Flanagan, *California's Climate Investments and High-Road Workforce Standards* (Berkeley, CA: UC Berkeley Labor Center, 2023), <https://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Californias-Climate-Investments-and-High-Road-Workforce-Standards.pdf>.

⁸⁹ Orange County Waste & Recycling. (2024, August 1). *Draft preliminary Climate Action Plan for Orange County*. Orange County Government. https://www.ocandfills.com/sites/ocwr/files/2024-08/Draft_PreliminaryCAP_OrangeCounty_08012024.pdf

⁹⁰ Orange County Business Council, *CERF OC Regional Plan Part 1* (Irvine, CA: Orange County Business Council, 2024), <https://ocbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CERF-OC-Regional-Plan-Part-1.pdf>.

- Integrating climate resilience and sustainability into workforce development initiatives.
- Ensuring job training aligns with regional climate policies and emissions reduction goals.

By integrating workforce development with climate and sustainability planning, the RPU can ensure that the transition to a green economy is equitable and inclusive, particularly for workers from disinvested communities most impacted by climate change.

VII. EQUITY AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

A. The region's strategy to achieve equity

Equity and economic justice lie at the core of California's vision for an inclusive workforce system. Equity goes beyond merely leveling the playing field; it requires deliberate actions to dismantle barriers and create pathways that ensure historically underserved communities have the resources and opportunities they need to thrive. The Orange RPU is committed to embedding equity as a guiding principle in workforce development, recognizing that achieving this vision requires systemic reforms, targeted interventions, and sustained partnerships.

California's approach emphasizes that addressing workforce inequities is both an economic and moral necessity. According to the Workforce Development Equity Framework, equity is about fairness and actively fostering an environment where all individuals, regardless of background, can access high-quality, living-wage employment⁹¹. For the Orange RPU, this means centering its strategies on addressing structural inequities and ensuring equitable access to career pathways, earn-and-learn opportunities, supportive services, and job placement programs.

Key Strategies for Equity and Inclusion

- **Expanding Career Pathways**—We will partner with employers and organizations to create accessible career pathways in advanced manufacturing, construction, and healthcare industries, addressing systemic barriers and hiring biases.
- **Promoting Skills-Based Hiring** - We will advocate for skills-based hiring and job quality standards, including fair wages, benefits, and worker protections.
- **Addressing Barriers** - We will collaborate with community partners to expand support for digital literacy, broadband, transportation, and childcare, using innovative solutions like mobile workforce units.
- **Embedding Equity** - We will expand pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and co-enrollment strategies to support underrepresented groups with holistic workforce services.
- **Leveraging Data**—We will use data on workforce participants to identify disparities, set equity goals, and ensure accountability through regular evaluations.

⁹¹ American Institutes for Research. *Workforce Development Equity Framework*. Washington, D.C.: American Institutes for Research, 2024. <https://www.air.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/Workforce-Development-Equity-Framework-June-2024-508.pdf>.

- **Building Inclusive Partnerships** - We will work with employers to close skills gaps, promote diversity in hiring, and provide OJT incentives for inclusive practices.

By operationalizing equity through targeted workforce strategies and fostering an inclusive ecosystem, the Orange RPU ensures that the economic benefits of workforce development are equitably distributed. This approach aligns with California's broader goals to advance equity, reduce systemic barriers, and promote economic justice. Through its ongoing efforts, the RPU aims to build a workforce system where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, contributing to a stronger and more equitable regional economy.

I. ALIGNING, COORDINATING, AND INTEGRATING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Aligning workforce, education, and industry resources is critical for maximizing the region's ability to meet diverse population needs effectively. This section of the Regional Plan highlights the Regional Planning Unit's (RPU) collaborative approach to deploying shared resources, economizing limited funding, and delivering impactful client services. The RPU seeks to foster regional resilience and adaptability through system alignment and leveraging collective strengths while addressing workforce development challenges.

The three workforce boards in the RPU, Anaheim, Santa Ana, and Orange County Workforce Development Boards, maintain a strong working relationship supported by regular standing meetings. Given the small geographic footprint of the county, the boards share many of the same partners and work diligently to align policies and strategies. This ensures that both partners and job seekers experience a seamless system. The boards co-host the Orange Workforce Alliance (OWA) Leadership Council meetings and actively collaborate on branding under the Orange Workforce Alliance identity. This branding effort is designed to strengthen recognition among partners and employers while enhancing the visibility of the region's workforce development initiatives.

The RPU's collaboration extends to practical activities such as co-hosting job fairs, conducting joint staff training, and collectively addressing system challenges. The RPU ensures alignment across workforce programs and promotes an integrated system by fostering a shared vision and commitment to problem-solving.

A. Regional Service Strategies

The RPU's collaborative approach is reflected in its regional service strategies. Central to these strategies is the commitment to aligning service delivery systems, integrating program design, and reducing duplication of efforts. Key regional service strategies include:

- **Enhancing Customer Experience:** The RPU prioritizes professional development and cross-training for staff to ensure consistent, high-quality service delivery. These efforts enhance customer interactions and improve outcomes for job seekers and employers.

- **Implementing Career Pathways:** To meet the needs of regional employers, the RPU has focused on working with regional partners to scale career pathways that align with in-demand sectors and provide clear progression opportunities for workers.
- **Strengthening Partnerships:** The RPU improves the quality of workforce services by fostering connections among workforce boards, educational institutions, and community organizations. Collaborative efforts ensure seamless service delivery and maximize the impact of programs for targeted populations.
- **Targeting Investments:** Regional strategies are driven by data-informed decision-making, allowing for strategic alignment of resources in key industries and populations. These targeted investments support economic mobility and address disparities in access to workforce opportunities.
- **Expanding Integrated Learning:** The RPU promotes work-based learning opportunities, such as apprenticeships, internships, and on-the-job training programs, which enable job seekers to gain practical, hands-on experience.
- **Resource Sharing and Funding:** By sharing resources and braiding funding streams, the RPU efficiently supports regional goals and ensures that services are accessible and sustainable.

Adopting the OWA brand further amplifies these efforts, enhancing regional recognition and promoting unified services, training programs, labor market insights, and support for businesses, adults, and youth.

B. Regional Administrative Cost Arrangements

The RPU's collaborative approach extends to administrative arrangements, where the three workforce boards act as fiscal agents for specific projects. This structure enables flexibility and ensures accountability while facilitating the effective execution of joint initiatives. Although the boards have not established overarching cost-sharing agreements, they remain open to exploring pooled administrative funding if it proves advantageous for achieving regional objectives.

By focusing on efficiency and collaboration, the RPU ensures that administrative arrangements support the overarching mission of aligning workforce, education, and industry resources to meet regional needs. Future considerations for administrative cost arrangements will be evaluated based on their potential to enhance service delivery and regional impact.

The Regional Planning Unit remains committed to continuous improvement and fostering a unified system that benefits employers, job seekers, and the broader regional economy.

APPENDICES

The following items are included as part of the Regional Plan.

Attachment 1: Stakeholder and Community Engagement Summary

Attachment 2: Public Comments Received that Disagree with the Local Plan

Attachment 3: Signature Page

Attachment 1**A. Stakeholder and Community Engagement Summary**

The local boards hosted a series of discussions outlined in the table below to facilitate stakeholders' engagement in planning for the local workforce development delivery system and in the development of the PY 2025-2028 Local Plan.

The insights and recommendations gathered from these discussions have been incorporated throughout the Regional and Unified Local Plan to inform strategies and initiatives.

Mode of Outreach	Target of Outreach	Summary of Attendance	Comments
Email, phone, social media, local board websites, Eventbrite	Community, Businesses, Chambers, Core Partners, Climate action partners	17 Registered and 13 attended	Regional workforce development strategies that focused on identifying programs, services, and approaches aligned with community priorities and industry sector partnerships to address talent pipeline needs.
Email, phone, social media, local board websites, Eventbrite	English Language Learners	14 Registered and 12 attended	Developing strategies to strengthen services to English language learners, foreign-born individuals, and refugees.
Email, phone, social media, local board websites, Eventbrite	Community, Businesses, Chambers, Core Partners	5 Registered and 5 attended	Strengthening partnerships and coordination with industry leaders and workforce organizations to support the transition to a climate-neutral future, ensuring regional workforce partners meet evolving workforce needs.
Email, phone, social media, local board websites, Eventbrite	WIOA Core Program Partners	16 Registered and 11 attended	Coordination with the WIOA core program partners operating as a unified system, assessing strategic needs and aligning them with service strategies to meet needs of workers and employers.
Email, phone, social media, local board websites, Eventbrite	Child Support Services Partners, Re-entry partners	16 Registered and 7 attended	Strengthening partnerships and coordination with local child support agencies and partner community-based organizations to serve non-custodial parents.

Mode of Outreach	Target of Outreach	Summary of Attendance	Comments
Email, phone, social media, local board websites, Eventbrite	Competitive Integrated Employment Partners	17 Registered and 13 attended	Improving services to individuals with disabilities through competitive integrated employment.
Email, phone, social media, local board websites, Eventbrite	Veterans Serving Organizations	19 Registered and 10 attended	Strengthening partnerships and coordination with Veterans Affairs and partner organizations to better serve veterans and connect them to essential resources and services.
Email, social media, local board websites, Eventbrite	CalFresh Employment and Training Partners	18 Registered and 13 attended	Strengthening partnerships and coordination with county health, human service agencies, and other local CalFresh employment and training partners to serve CalFresh consumers.

Attachment 2

B. Public Comments Received that Disagree with the PY 25-28 Orange RPU Regional Plan

The Orange Regional Plan was posted online for a 30-day public comment period. There were no public comments received that disagreed with the regional plan.