

# **California Jobs First**

## **Orange County Regional Plan Part 2**

July 2024

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# 1 - Vision and Goals

## Orange County Jobs First Theory of Change

Goal: Create an inclusive, equitable, and sustainable, Orange County economy that creates high-road jobs and provides a path toward and equitable transition to a carbon-neutral powered economy.

### Problem statement

Orange County is at a critical juncture due to outdated perceptions and a changing socio-economic landscape, facing challenges such as a shortage of affordable housing, rising living costs, labor force gaps, environmental vulnerabilities, disenfranchised/disinvested neighborhoods, and a digital divide. These hinder the region's ability to promote a unified, sustainable, and equitable growth strategy, impacting its competitiveness and residents' quality of life.

### Inputs

Community and youth engagement, regional plan, data work, pilot projects, funding, strategic collaboration, convener, fiscal agent, HRTC, partner organizations, community stakeholders, residents, Community Engagement Contracts, Catalyst Grant, CA Forward, Technical Advisors, Data Team, Equity Consultants, Sector Investment Coordinators, and Bi-Agency Leadership Team.

### Activities (What We Do)

- Convene partners and stakeholder/sector groups;
- Engage disinvested community members where they are at;
- Undertook an outreach and engagement data project;
- Brief legislative staff and other elected officials on CJF and the Outreach and Engagement Data; and
- Prepare an inclusive Regional Plan

### Outputs

- Thriving and diverse communities;
- More inclusive planning processes;
- Greater cross-sector participation; and
- Enhanced competitiveness in obtaining public funds; and
- New diverse, strategic and leveraged funding opportunities to meet priority community needs; and
- Create or hold a space for deeper engagement and long-term relationships, including honoring and integrating the values of divested and immigrant communities as examples of CJF values.

# Orange County Jobs First Theory of Change



**GOAL:** Create an inclusive, equitable, & sustainable Orange County economy that creates high-road jobs & provides a path toward an equitable transition to a carbon-neutral powered economy

## Problem Statement

Orange County is at a critical juncture due to outdated perceptions & a changing socio-economic landscape, facing challenges such as a shortage of affordable housing, rising living costs, labor force gaps, environmental vulnerabilities, disenfranchised/disinvested neighborhoods, & a digital divide.

These hinder the region's ability to promote a unified, sustainable, & equitable growth strategy, impacting its competitiveness & residents' quality of life.

### Audience:

The Orange County community as a whole

## INPUTS

### Inputs

- Community & youth engagement
- Regional plan
- Data work
- Pilot projects
- Funding
- Strategic collaboration
- Convener
- Fiscal agent
- HRTC
- Partner organizations
- Community stakeholders
- Residents
- Community Engagement Contracts
- Catalyst Grant
- CA Forward
- Technical Advisors
- Data Team
- Equity Consultants
- Sector Investment Coordinators
- Bi-Agency Leadership Team

## OUTPUTS

### Activities (what we do)

- Convene partners & stakeholder/sector groups
- Engage disinvested community members where they are at
- Undertook an outreach & engagement data project
- Brief legislative staff & other elected officials on CJF & the Outreach & Engagement Data
- Prepare an inclusive Regional Plan

### Outputs

- Thriving & diverse communities
- More inclusive planning processes
- Greater cross-sector participation
- Enhanced competitiveness in obtaining public funds
- New diverse, strategic & leveraged funding opportunities to meet priority community needs
- Create or hold a space for deeper engagement & long-term relationships, including honoring & integrating the values of divested & immigrant communities as examples of CJF values

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What will this do? Who will this reach?

*\*TBD by the Collaborative*

Please note that the outcomes associated with Vision and Goals on the previous page are still in draft form and will be finalized during the Catalyst phase.

## Top Line Strategies

- 1. Career Pathways:** Improve education and workforce training opportunities that support career pathways to high-road jobs, particularly in priority industry sectors.
- 2. Apprenticeships:** Increase apprenticeship opportunities that lead to high-road jobs in priority industry sectors in the region.
- 3. Enhance Quality of Life:** Increase wrap-around services to ensure the health and well-being of all families and neighborhoods, particularly in disinvested communities, foster a sense of inclusivity and support, improving climate resilience, and quality of life
- 4. Small Business, Worker Ownership and Entrepreneurship:** Provide capital, technical assistance, and other resources for small businesses, worker ownership and entrepreneurs,
- 5. Housing:** Increase the availability and accessibility of affordable and workforce housing to workers in the region, that promotes infill low impact development and sustainability, including rental and ownership including:
- 6. Uplift Community Voices through Respectful Cultural Engagement:** Improve community participation in the creation of strategies and projects to ensure the highest benefit to disinvested communities. Cultural humility and respectful cultural engagement are essential to the implementation of the plan, including respecting workers, residents, and business owners by following their community norms and customs when engaging with them.
- 7. Green and Emerging Technology and Innovation:** Invest in innovation, research, and industry cluster development in green and emerging technologies, including energy, transportation, infrastructure, nature-based solutions and climate adaptation
- 8. Climate Resilient Environment:** Taking actions to support a sustainable environment, including preparing for and mitigating climate change, which includes, but is not limited to, making, planning, development, infrastructure and quality of life decisions that provides a net environmental benefit. Note - Recommendations for “Strategy 8” are also integrated into the other strategies.

## Top Line Strategies with Actions

Woven into these strategies is the deep inclusion of environmental, health, and economic equity focused on disinvested communities.

**Strategy 1 - Career Pathways:** Improve education and workforce training opportunities that support career pathways to high-road jobs, particularly in priority industry sectors, including:

1. Enhance career pathways in priority sectors and create specific onramps for individuals with less than a two- year degree and limited or no work experience.
2. Promote the availability of education and training programs that lead to high-road career pathways in priority industry sectors to disinvested communities.
3. Fund soft skills and other broad-based transferable skill training programs that support career pathways that lead to high-road jobs in priority industry sectors.
4. Build a talent pipeline to meet the specific workforce needs of local employers and significant local and regional projects.
5. Create new and enhance existing career pathways in priority industry sectors with paid internships and on- the-job training opportunities.
6. Prepare K-16 students and incumbent workers, especially those in disinvested communities, for the future of work, including AI and automation.

**Strategy 2 - Apprenticeships:** Increase access to apprenticeship opportunities that lead to high-road jobs particularly in priority industry sectors in the region, including:

1. Enhancing K-16 CTE offerings that link to state-approved apprenticeships in priority industry sectors, including expanding articulation agreements, pre-apprenticeship programs, preparatory academic work, and internships.
2. Aligning federal and state funding to support new and expanded apprenticeship programs and facilities that serve priority industry sectors.
3. Promote apprenticeship programs in priority industries to disinvested communities, providing information on how to prepare and apply for apprenticeships.

**Strategy 3 - Enhance Quality of Life:** Increase wrap-around services to ensure the health and well-being of all families and neighborhoods, particularly in disinvested communities, foster a sense of inclusivity and support, improving climate resilience and quality of life including:

1. Increasing the availability and accessibility of affordable childcare.
2. Identifying gaps and increasing access to culturally sensitive and affordable healthcare for members of disinvested communities.
3. Revising county disaster and economic shock preparedness, response, and recovery plans to address the needs of disinvested communities with cultural competence. This includes creating a regional fund to provide economic aid to disinvested businesses and

individuals to cover gaps in short-term assistance by state and federal governments, such as lease/rent payments, medical bills, a safe and healthy environment, and other basic needs and expenses.

4. Developing a culturally responsive delivery system for programs and services to support disinvested communities' health, prosperity, and well-being.
5. Form strong partnership with community-based organizations to identify, plan, create, access, and restore lands and waters and designate open space for disinvested communities.
6. Greater access to basic needs that are not directly health care services, but that will impact an individual's mental and physical health (i.e. quality food, housing, rental and utility assistance etc.).

**Strategy 4 - Small Business, Worker Ownership and Entrepreneurship:** Provide capital, technical assistance, and other resources for small businesses, worker ownership and entrepreneurs, including:

1. Providing technical assistance and other resources for start-ups and early-stage businesses in priority industry sectors to help remove barriers commonly encountered by women- and minority-led startups.
2. Engaging all disinvested community businesses to identify and prioritize the removal of barriers to small business growth and stability, including issues related to accessing capital, hiring a skilled workforce, participating in government opportunities, and negotiating regulatory constraints.
3. Encouraging local governments to increase small business participation within local contracting opportunities.
4. Training small businesses in priority industry sectors on critical business skills, including financial literacy and management, AI, and marketing.
5. Removing barriers from disinvested communities to access capital and to the region's experienced financial intermediaries and technical assistance providers. This includes community development financial institutions, community development corporations, chambers of commerce, federally and state-designated technical assistance providers, small business financial development corporations, economic development organizations, community land trusts, and other nonprofits that serve similar purposes in a culturally appropriate manner.
6. Funding, technical assistance, and development of an ecosystem of community support for small businesses and entrepreneurs, and resources to ensure they have the

financial records to qualify for support/government assistance. This should be done within language, focused outreach, or other guidelines to ensure resources benefit small businesses owned by disinvested community members.

7. Provide more opportunities and resources for employee ownership.

**Strategy 5 - Housing:** Increase the availability and accessibility of affordable and workforce housing to workers in the region, that promotes infill low impact development and sustainability, including rental and ownership including:

1. Investing in infrastructure in traditionally marginalized areas to increase affordable and workforce housing availability.
2. Integrating and prioritizing affordable and workforce housing needs in local and regional planning efforts, emphasizing the necessity for more affordable units.
3. Support affordable housing for workers by addressing the disparities between local wages and housing costs.
4. Advancing supportive housing projects to expedite the provision of permanent affordable options for those in need.
5. Expeditiously move forward on supportive housing recommendations in the Homeless Service System Pillars Report, created by the Commission to End Homelessness and accepted by the County of Orange Board of Supervisors in 2022.
6. Investment and collaboration to create more affordable housing that is spacious for larger families and more innovative solutions like cooperatively owned housing, housing stipends and emphasizing housing in community benefits agreements, to address gentrification and rising prices. Furthermore, these housing developments should connect with the investments in infrastructure and green technology already being made.

**Strategy 6 - Uplift Community Voices through Respectful Cultural Engagement:** Improve community participation in the creation of strategies and projects to ensure the highest benefit to disinvested communities. Cultural humility and respectful cultural engagement are essential to the implementation of the plan, including respecting workers, residents, and business owners by following their community norms and customs when engaging with them.

1. Encouraging local governments, foundations, and other funders in the region to use participatory budgeting approaches to ensure that community-determined priorities are being met.

2. Setting a best practice for community engagement through proactive written outreach strategies that specifically include historically excluded groups and geographic areas of the region.

3. Eliminate barriers for disinvested communities and historically excluded voices to access economic development opportunities and resources.

**Strategy 7- Green and Emerging Technology and Innovation:** Invest in innovation, research, and industry cluster development in green and emerging technologies, including energy, transportation, infrastructure, nature- based solutions and climate adaptation including:

1. Establishing and expanding innovation hubs and technology parks to encourage research and development of new technologies, such as AI, that support or, at a minimum, do not impede the region’s transition to a net zero- powered economy.

2. Adapt existing built environment to incorporate cleaner technologies.

3. Establishing Green Innovation Zones, where small businesses, especially business owners from disinvested communities, receive wrap-around support in transitioning to cleaner and more sustainable power sources and methods of operation, production, and distribution.

4. Investment in infrastructure in traditionally marginalized areas to support an inclusive and cost-effective transition to a zero-emission economy.

5. Develop career pathways from traditional lower-wage jobs to careers in high road occupations in priority industry sectors driven by innovation and support the region’s transition to a net zero-emission economy.

**Strategy 8 - Climate Resilient Environment:** Taking actions to support a sustainable environment, including preparing for and mitigating climate change, which includes, but is not limited to, making, planning, development, infrastructure and quality of life decisions that provides a net environmental benefit. Note - Recommendations for “Strategy 8” are also integrated into the other strategies.

1. Empowering and training residents who live in disinvested neighborhoods impacted by environmental hazards to use nature-based solutions including bioremediation and other methods to address these issues.

2. Grow environmental jobs that offer longer-term opportunities.

3. Continue to fund research and data to focus on climate impacts in disinvested communities.
4. Deep dive studies on the concentrations of pollutants and how they correlate to social economical issues.

The research team contributing to this report considered and followed this strategic framework in preparing the content for the remainder of this report.

## 2 - Regional Snapshot and SWOT

### Orange County Regional Snapshot

#### Brief History

What is now Orange County has been inhabited by the indigenous Tongva and Acjachemen people for thousands of years. Orange County itself split off from Los Angeles County in 1889. At that point, it had a population of approximately 15,000 and was a primarily rural community, with orange groves surrounding Anaheim and the Irvine cattle ranch taking up much of what is now Irvine, Tustin, Orange and Newport Beach.

Orange County was home to many military facilities during the Second World War; more than a dozen military bases were established in the county. For instance, the Santa Ana Naval Air Station's blimp hangars remain Tustin icons and are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In January 1942, the United States Army Air Corps opened the 1,336-acre Santa Ana Army Air Base, a basic training camp which hosted the 81<sup>st</sup> Flying Training Wing. After the war, the base was deactivated and transformed into John Wayne Airport, Orange Coast College and the Orange County Fairgrounds.

The county saw tremendous growth after World War II, with its population increasing from approximately 165,000 in 1945 to 1.42 million in 1970. This period saw the establishment of many county landmarks: Disneyland (1955), California State Route 55 (freeway construction beginning in 1964), the University of California, Irvine (1965) and the highest-grossing shopping mall in the United States, South Coast Plaza (1967). The planned "university city" of Irvine was incorporated in 1971; the postwar era also saw the incorporation of Costa Mesa (1953), Garden Grove (1956), Westminster (1957) and Yorba Linda (1967).

Immigration, especially from Mexico and east Asian countries, has transformed Orange County over the past-half century into one of the nation's most diverse counties. Orange County is now home to 34 cities, two major league sports teams, nine community colleges and a number of universities, including the University of California, Irvine (UCI), California State University, Fullerton (CSUF), Chapman University and Vanguard University. The county has also become internationally famous for its high quality of life.

Orange County demonstrated significant resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, which of course disrupted its world-class Hospitality and Tourism industry, as well as every other aspect of life in the county. For instance, after being closed for more than a year and temporarily becoming a vaccine distribution center, Disneyland reopened in April 2021. Despite supply chain interruptions, labor force issues, and macroeconomic issues such as the threat of recession and continuing inflation, the county economy has rebounded strongly from the impacts of the pandemic, with many industries meeting or exceeding pre-pandemic employment totals in 2022 or 2023.

## Demographics

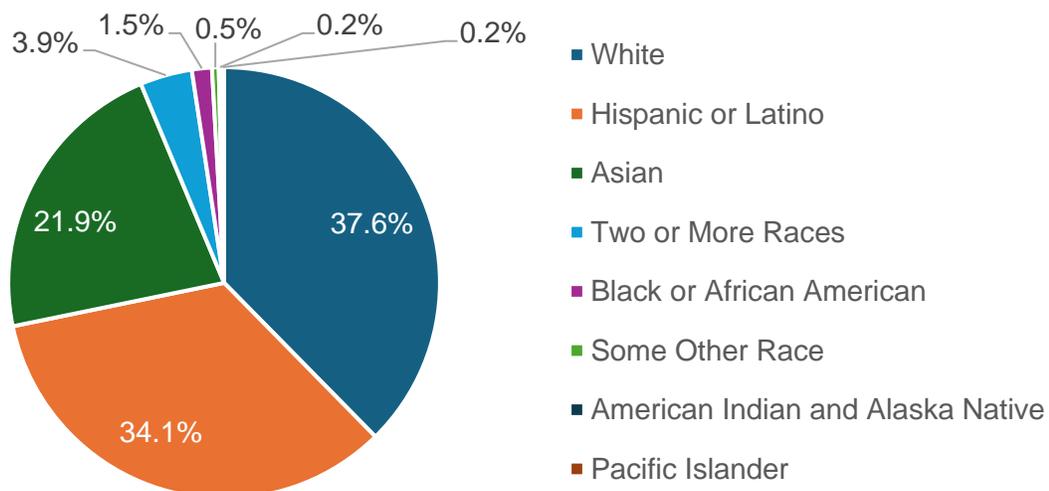
- Total population: 3.162 million (2022). OC is the third largest county in the state and the sixth largest in the nation; it is also bigger than 19 states, including Arkansas, Kansas and Mississippi.
- Median age: 39.2 (2021)
- Unemployment rate: 3.7% (April 2024)

Orange County's population has become both older and more diverse in recent years. The county's median age increased from 36.1 in 2010 to 39.2 in 2021; while both the state and national as a whole are also aging, Orange County's median age is higher than state and national averages.

The proportion of the population under 19 years of age declined from 27.5 percent in 2010 to 24.0 percent in 2021 while the proportion of residents aged 65 and over increased from 11.7 percent to 15.8 percent. By 2060, Orange County's 19 years and younger population will represent only 19.4 percent of the population, compared to 28.9 percent for the 65 year and older age group 65 years and over age group has increased from 11.7 percent to 15.8 percent. These trends have significant implications for the future of the county, including the need for further investment in healthcare services.

The county's diversity index, as measured by the National Equity Atlas, increased from 1.16 in 2000 to 1.27 in 2020. Between 2010 and 2021, the county's White residents declined from 43.9 percent of the population to 37.6 percent, while the percentage of Asian residents increased from 18.0 percent to 21.9 percent and the percentage of Hispanic/Latino residents rose more modestly from 33.8 percent to 34.1 percent.

### Orange County by Race or Ethnicity, 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5- Year Estimates

The 2020 US Census was the first to include specific Asian and Pacific Islander (API) groups, allowing for a more detailed look at Orange County’s diversity. In 2020, the county’s largest API populations included: Vietnamese (219,173), Chinese except Taiwanese (102,688), Korean (98,287), Filipino (82,438) and Indian (58,339).

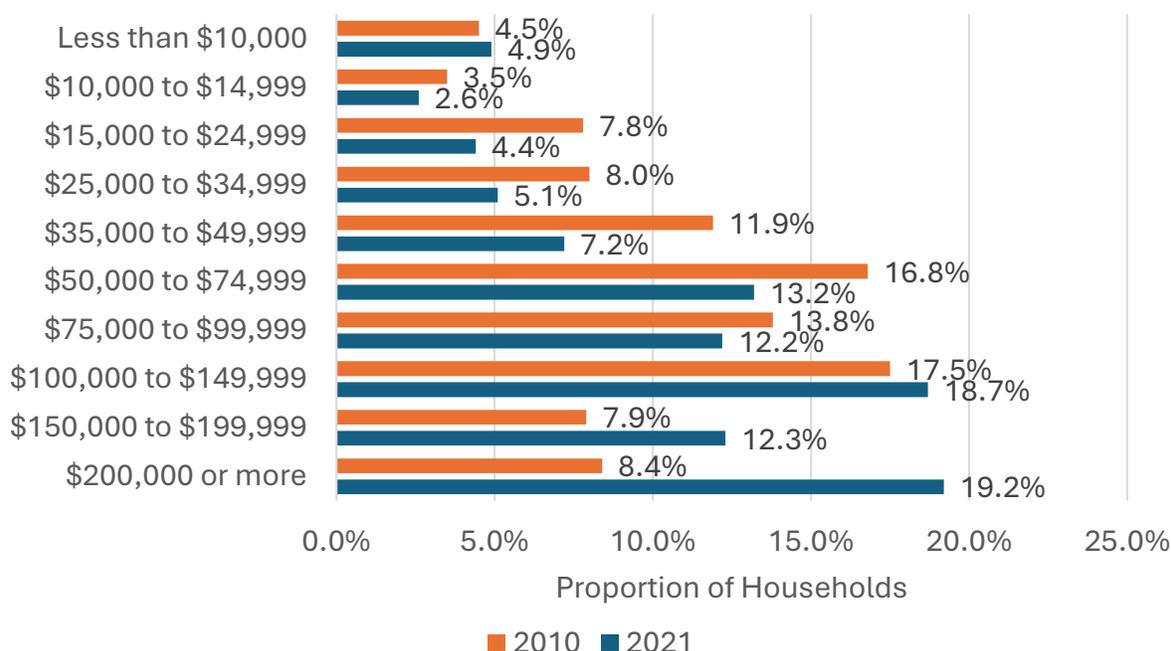
The county’s components of population growth have also changed. While natural increase (births minus deaths) declined from 20,598 to 7,542 from 2010-2011 to 2021-2022, net domestic migration shrank from 4,488 to -30,524 during the same time period. International immigration also declined, from 11,027 to 8,135, a reflection of both global economic uncertainty during the COVID-19 era and the county’s extremely high cost of living.

### Income

- Median household income: \$100,559 (2021)

Median household income in Orange County has increased from \$70,880 in 2010 to \$100,559 in 2021, an increase of 41.9 percent. By comparison, California’s median income increased by 47.1 percent over the same timeframe but remained well below Orange County’s at \$84,907.

### Orange County Household Income Distribution, 2021

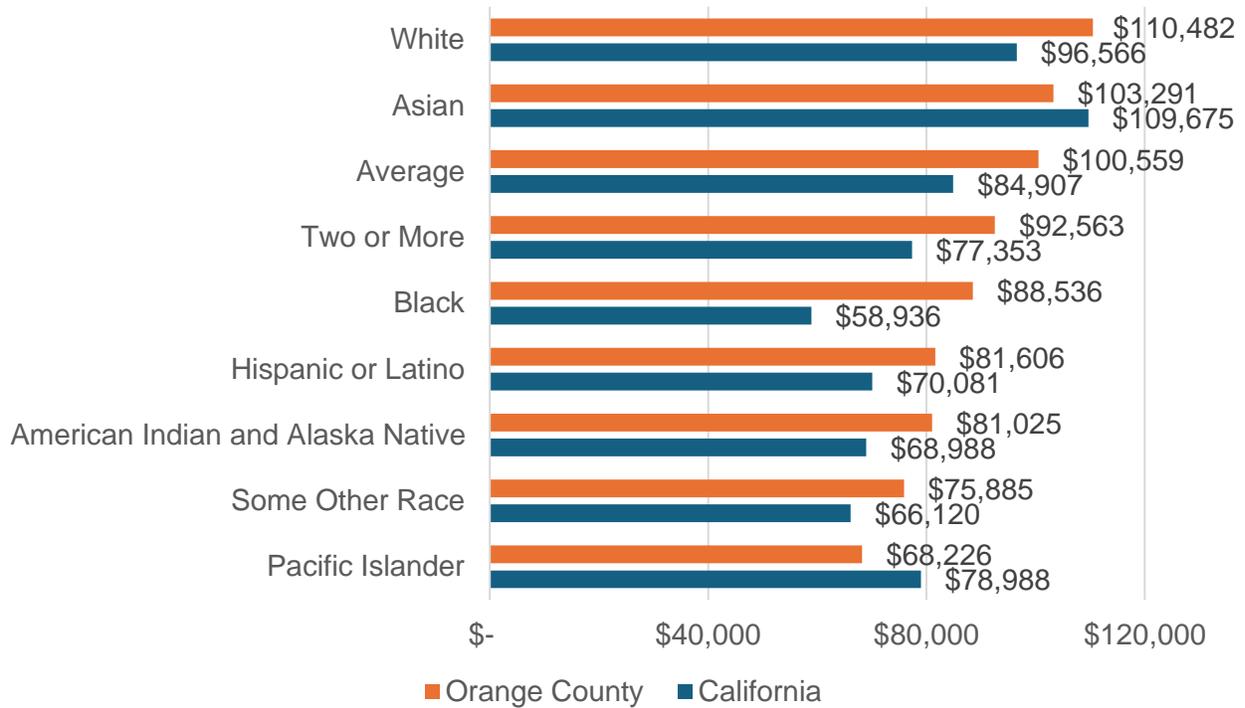


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1- Year Estimates

Average household incomes vary among racial and ethnic groups, as seen below. While Orange County incomes are well above the state-level, the cost-of-living is also higher,

causing affordability concerns for many residents. Overall, 71 percent of households in Orange County earn a ‘living wage’ – the minimum wage required to afford basic needs. While 78.2 percent of White households earn a living wage, only 65.6 percent of Asian households do, followed by 51.3 percent of Hispanic or Latino households and 46.7 percent of Black households.

### Orange County and California Median Household Income by Race/Ethnicity, 2021



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1- Year Estimates

### Education

- High school graduate rate: 92.4%
- Educational attainment: 43.1% of adults have a Bachelor’s

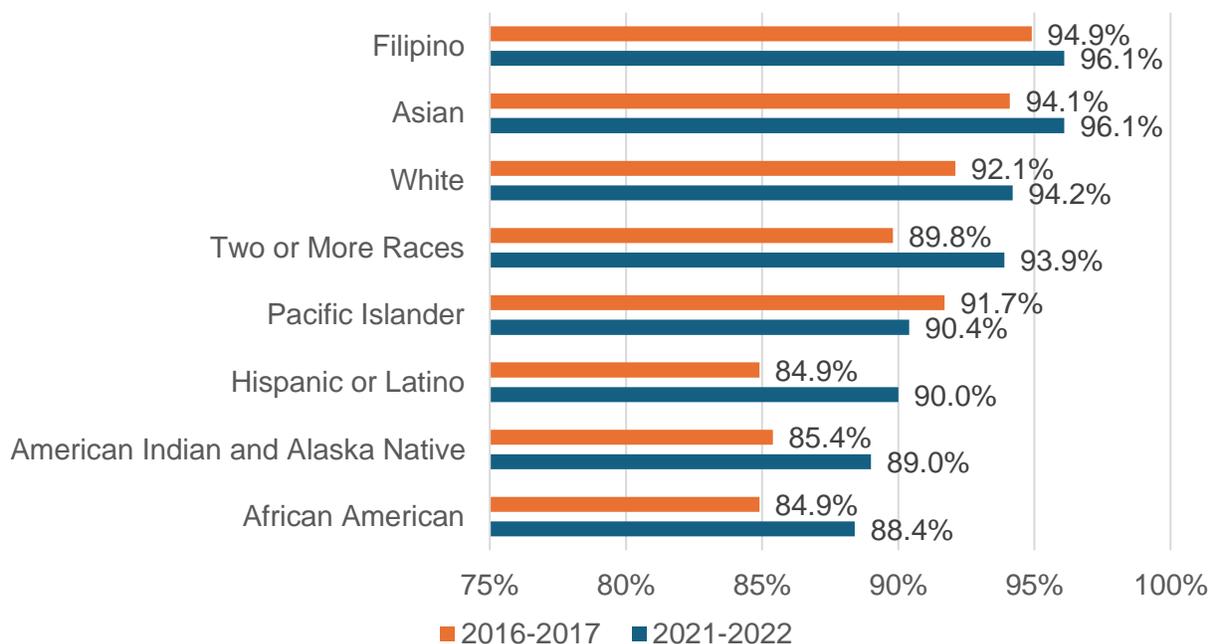
Orange County’s strong educational system – from kindergarten to grad school – is a key competitive advantage. 43.1 percent of the county’s adults have a Bachelor’s degree or higher, compared to 36.1 percent at the state level. This is true of all racial and ethnic groups; while there are significant disparities within Orange County, all groups are more likely to have a Bachelor’s or higher than their state-level counterparts.

While Orange County itself is highly educated when compared to the state and regional peers, educational gaps do exist within the county. Approximately 66.1 percent of Asian

residents in Orange County have a Bachelor’s degree compared to 54.5 percent of White residents and followed by Black residents at 31.7 percent and Hispanic or Latino residents at 18.5 percent.

County educators have made significant progress in recent years towards both closing these gaps and improving the county’s overall educational performance. Since 2016-2017, for instance, the county’s high school graduation rate increased from 88.8 percent to 92.4 percent. Except for Pacific Islanders, all racial and ethnic groups have seen improved performance and gaps between groups have narrowed.

**Orange County High School Graduate Rate by Race/Ethnicity, 2016-2017 – 2021-2022**



Source: California Department of Education, DataQuest

The percentage of UC/CSU-eligible high school graduates has risen from 53.8 percent in 2016-2017 to 57.2 percent in 2021-2022; Orange County’s eligibility rate has remained consistently higher than the state average.

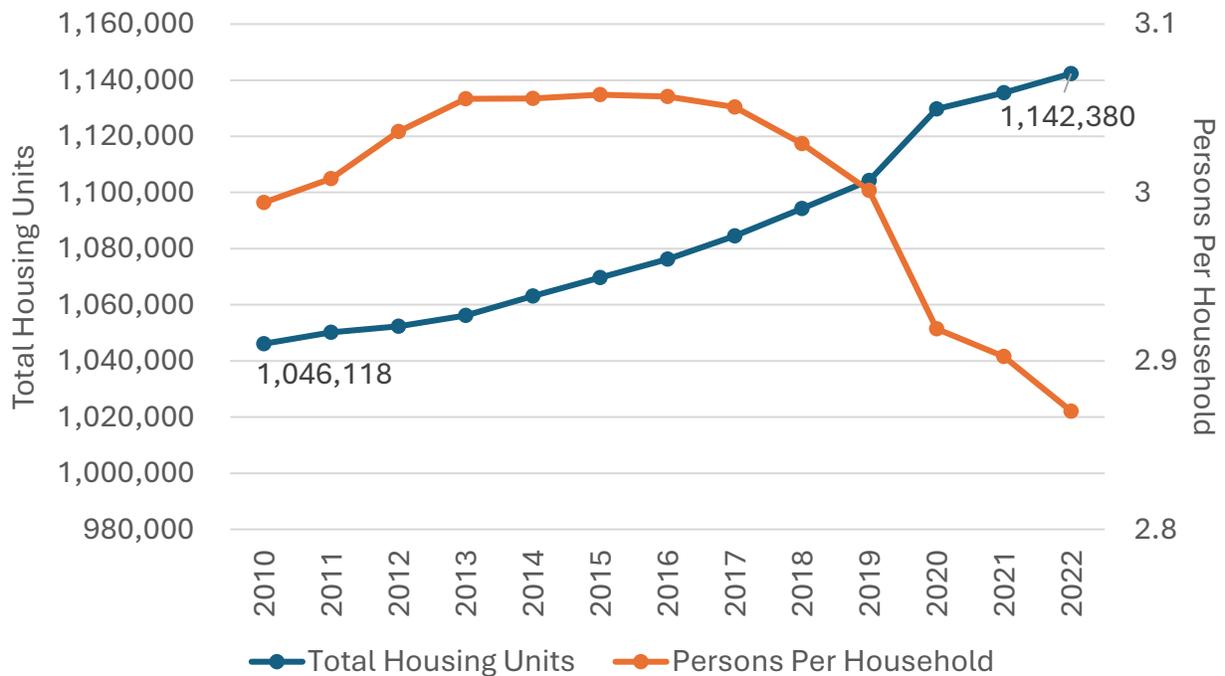
**Housing**

- Median home price: \$1.15 million
- Most common housing types: single detached (49.7% of the total), 5+ housing units (26.8%), and Single Attached (12.0%)

- 56.5% of Orange County housing units were owner-occupied in 2021; 43.5% were rented.

Orange County had a total of 1,142,380 housing units in 2022, a 9.2 percent increase from 2010. While this new housing construction outpaced the county’s population growth of 5.0 percent over the same period, the county’s long-term lack of affordable housing means that there is significant work to do to fill this gap.

**Total Housing Units and Persons per Household in Orange County, 2010-2022**



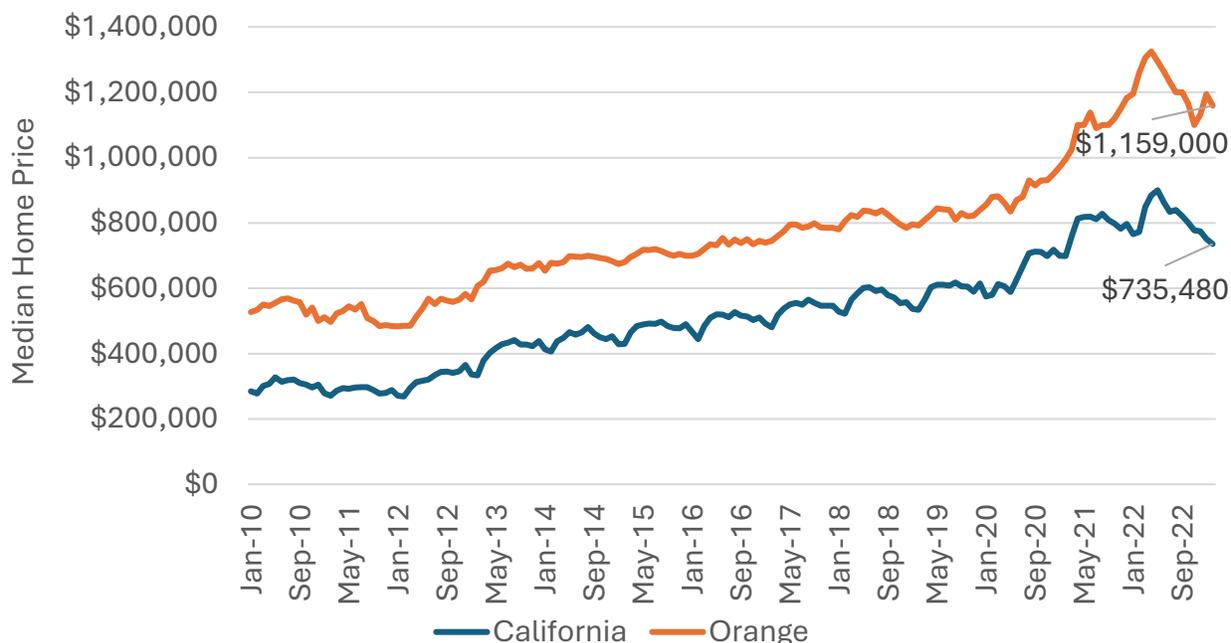
Source: State of California, Department of Finance, *E-5 Population and Housing Estimates for Cities, Counties and the State — January 1, 2021-2022*. Sacramento, California, May 2022.

In 2022, Orange County had 6,483 housing permits in 2022: 2,906 permitted single-family units and 3,577 multi-family units. Orange County’s early role as a bedroom community for Los Angeles manufacturing and office workers has had long lasting implications including a mix of housing which is focused on single-family arrangements. While Orange County has a lower proportion of single detached homes at 49.7 percent compared to 57.2 percent for the state, it has higher proportion of single attached housing units as well as housing units with 5+ units. While it has made some progress, Orange County must build more multi-unit housing structures in order to address its chronic shortage of workforce housing.

Since 2010, the proportion of renter-occupied housing in Orange County has been gradually increasing while owner-occupied housing has been gradually declining. The percentage of renter-occupied housing grew from 40.8 percent in 2010 to 43.5 percent in

2021, while owner-occupied housing declined from 59.2 percent of total housing units to 56.5 percent.

### Orange County and California Median Home Prices, 2010 -2022



Source: California Association of Realtors

Interest rates were cut at the start of the pandemic, triggering increased demand for housing in the county and elsewhere. With low supply and high demand, the median home price in Orange County rose from May 2020 forward before peaking in April 2022 at \$1,325,000. The median home price in the state peaked a month later in May 2022 at \$900,170. Since then, home prices both at the county- and state-level have moderated as the Fed has increased interest rates. While Orange County’s median home price, as seen above, has fallen since its April 2022 peak, it remains more than double what it was in 2010.

According to the California Association of Realtors’ Traditional Home Buyer Affordability Index, only 13 percent of households in Orange County and 17 percent of households across the state could afford to purchase a median priced home. While prices have declined, as previously mentioned, they remain high, and this combined with high interest rates leads to near-historically low levels of affordability.

### Economy

- Gross Regional Product (GRP): \$279 billion (2022), larger than 25 state and many countries
- Total taxable sales: \$23.105 billion (Q4 2022)

The University of California, Irvine (UCI) was Orange County's largest employer in 2022 with more than 26,000 employees. The rest of the county's top ten employers included:

- Walt Disney Company (25,000)
- County of Orange (18,139)
- Providence Southern California (13,079)
- Kaiser Permanente (8,800)
- Albertsons Southern California Division (7,853)
- Hoag Memorial Hospital (7,051)
- Walmart (6,300)
- Target (6,000)
- MemorialCare (5,490)

Small businesses are also an important part of the county and state economy; they account for 94.7 percent of all county businesses. Women-owned small businesses have seen considerable growth in recent years; from 2019 to 2023 the number of women-owned businesses increased at nearly double the rate of businesses owned by men and from 2022 to 2023, the growth rate increased to 4.5 times.<sup>1</sup>

Representation of business owners is evolving through evidence of women making up 45.9 percent of workers and owned 43.1 percent of businesses, Veterans make up 3.5 percent of workers and owned 4.4 percent of businesses, Hispanics make up 37.8 percent of workers and owned 23.4 percent of businesses and racial minorities make up 37.0 percent of workers and owned 27.3 percent of businesses.<sup>2</sup> For additional information on small businesses, please refer to the Regional Plan Part 1.

The county's largest industries include Healthcare & Social Assistance (12.2 percent), Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (9.1%), Food and Accommodation Services (8.9%) and Government (8.9%). Orange County industries with the largest contribution to the county's GRP included Real Estate (15.4%), Manufacturing (13.7%) and Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (10.6%).

Orange County also has a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem. For example, UCI's Applied Innovation Program supports local entrepreneurs and startups through a number of programs and partnerships, including ANEntrepreneur Center, BioENGINE, Experts-in-Residence, I-Corps @ UCI, POP Grants, Tech Surge, and Wayfinder Incubator. Other similar programs include Chapman University's Launch Labs Application, part of the Chapman University Ralph W. Leatherby Center for Entrepreneurship and Business Ethics, and California State University, Fullerton's (CSUF's) CSUF Startup Incubator.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://newsroom.wf.com/English/news-releases/news-release-details/2024/New-Report-Finds-Growth-of-Women-Business-Owners-Outpaces-the-Market/>

<sup>2</sup> [Small-Business-Economic-Profile-CA.pdf \(sba.gov\)](#)

Orange County businesses generated taxable sales of approximately \$23.105 billion in the fourth quarter of 2022, with Retail and Food Services representing 66.2 percent of that total and All Other Outlets accounting for 33.8 percent. The following chart shows the county's largest sources of sales tax.

### Total Taxable Sales by Business Type in Orange County, Q4 2022

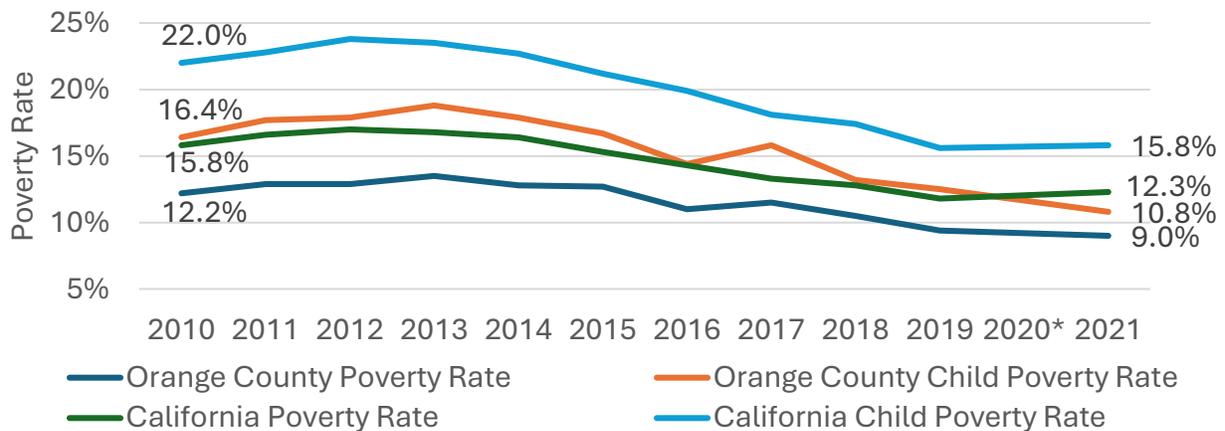


Source: California Department of Tax and Fee Administration, Taxable Sales by Type of Business, 2018 - 2022 Q4

### Disinvested Communities and Red Zones

- Poverty rate: 9.0%
- Health insurance rate: 6.7%

### Orange County and California Poverty Rates, 2021



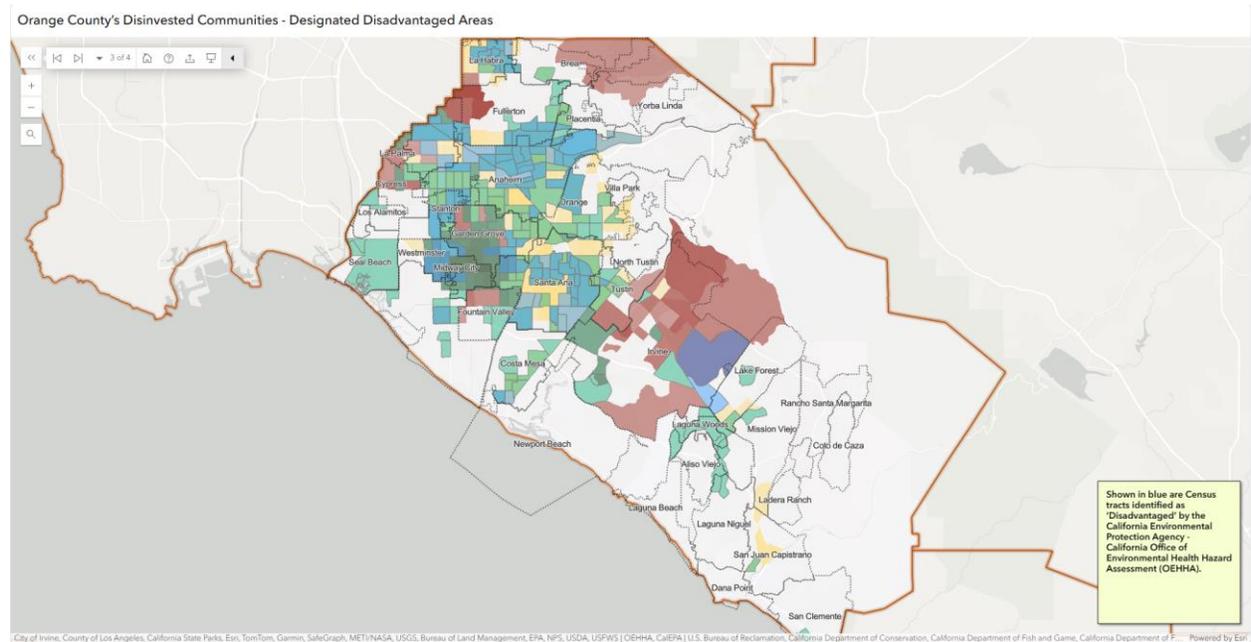
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1- Year Estimates; \*Data not available for 2020

As mentioned throughout this section, Orange County's incredible prosperity is not evenly distributed; the county has both some of the nation's most expensive neighborhoods and many lower household income neighborhoods. As of 2022, just over ten percent of county residents lived under the poverty line. While this is less than any of its neighbors (such as Los Angeles County, at 14.2 percent, and Riverside County, at 12.5 percent), it does represent a significant portion of the county's population.

Alongside lower poverty rates in the county compared to the state, Orange County also had the second lowest proportion of its population without health insurance coverage among the larger Southern California counties. In 2021, 6.9 percent of Orange County residents were uninsured, 0.2 percentage points above San Diego County's rate of 6.7 percent yet below the state average of 7.0 percent and the uninsured rates of Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino Counties.

As part of the Regional Plan Part 1, disinvested communities were identified and mapped across the county. The map below highlights the disinvested communities highlighted in blue in Orange County and are linked [here](#).

### Orange County Disinvested Communities – Designated Disadvantaged Areas



## SWOT Analysis

This Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis provides a high-level overview of Orange County's economy and its short- and long-term future. Strengths and weaknesses are internal factors that local policymakers and stakeholders have some control over and can be leveraged or improved through strategic polices. Opportunities and threats, on the other hand, are external factors with the potential to amplify strengths or exacerbate weaknesses.

This summary of the county's major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats is intended to both supplement the research and analysis in the rest of this report and serve as a first step towards further research and analysis.

### Strengths

- **Orange County's increasingly diverse, globally connected population** is a major strength; it both culturally enriches the county and helps it draw companies, entrepreneurial talent, and international students from around the world. This fuels both innovation and global trade.
- **Orange County's educated, highly qualified workforce** is also a magnet for companies and investors. With educational attainment strongly correlated to wage growth and quality-of-life improvements, this regional strength will continue to be a major asset for both businesses and residents.
- **A central geographic location** – in Southern California and on the Pacific Rim – is another major strength for Orange County. Its proximity to the major population centers of Los Angeles and San Diego, for instance, gives it access to millions of potential visitors (and potential customers for Orange County businesses.) The county's close proximity to the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach is also a key strength because it catalyzes global trade and fuels the growth of Orange County business with global market.
- **Orange County's strong transportation infrastructure**, exemplified by John Wayne Airport and its freeway connections, gives travelers easy access to the county. This both fuels growth in the county's tourism industry and makes the county a more attractive environment for businesses and international students.
- **World-class education and research institutions** such as Chapman University, California State University, Fullerton (CSUF) and the University of California, Irvine (UCI) both provide a steady talent pipeline for local employers and fuel local innovation. Orange County's ten community colleges, which serve more than 200,000 students per year, are also a key economic engine.
- **World-famous tourist attractions** such as the Disneyland Resort and South Coast Plaza attract millions of visitors every year, bringing billions of dollars into the local economy and supporting thousands of local jobs. This industry is especially important as a provider of entry-level jobs – such as cashiers, waitstaff

and theme park employees – that help students and young workers get key early work experience.

- **The county's consistently low unemployment rate** speaks to strong economic fundamentals and to a long history of entrepreneurship and business growth; Orange County has long boasted Southern California's lowest unemployment rates.
- **Broadband connectivity** has become essential infrastructure in the post-COVID, mainstream remote work era. According to Broadbandnow.com, Orange County has one of the highest levels of high-speed broadband internet coverage in the state at 99.9 percent. This high level of connectivity, combined with the county's famous weather and overall quality of life, makes it a potential hotspot for remote work.
- The county's **diverse, well-rounded economy** both provides gainful employment opportunities to individuals at all skill and income levels and makes it more resilient to future economic shocks. It also helps ensure that the county will benefit from innovation and growth in any industry.
- A strong **Groundwater Replenishment System (GWRS)** is a vital piece of infrastructure in California, which has seen major droughts in recent years. Orange County's Groundwater Replenishment System, a joint project between the Orange County Water District (OCWD) and the Orange County Sanitation District (OC San), is the world's largest water purification system for indirect potable reuse capable of producing up to 130 million gallons of high-quality water every day.

## Weaknesses

- **Orange County lacks an overall regional vision or a cohesive story:** the county's 34 cities vary greatly in terms of size, demographics, key industries and long-term strategies. While the region does publish a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), each individual city faces its own challenges, which makes collaboration and cohesion, as exemplified by the CERF initiative, a major long- and short-term goal.
- **Outdated perceptions of Orange County** are also an issue. Simply put, the county is no longer the homogenous, wealthy suburb it once was; it has in fact become one of the most diverse places in the US. Outdated assumptions could prevent the county's disinvested communities from getting much-needed help from government agencies or philanthropic organizations.
- A **gap between employee skills and employer skills** demands leads to inefficiencies in the labor market and unfilled open positions, thus slowing economic growth. Collaboration between employers and educators could help tailor education and training programs for current and future labor market demand.
- The **ongoing economic impacts of AI and automation** could involve significant job losses, both in Orange County and throughout the country; reskilling/retraining workers displaced by automation could be a major challenge.

- **A chronic lack of affordable and low-income housing** has led to population declines as many workers and young families have simply been priced out of Orange County. If unaddressed, this could lead to further population declines, especially in the county's working-age population.
- **A shortage of land for new construction** is a major contributor to the county's high housing costs. With considerably less land area than its regional neighbors, Orange County already has one of the highest populations densities per square mile in Southern California.
- **Orange County's increasingly high cost of living** has placed significant financial stress on many families and households resulting in increased out-migration and a decrease in new residents – especially young families. If left unchecked, this trend could lead to significant population declines.
- **A lack of affordable Childcare** creates significant costs for Orange County parents; the average California parent pays \$1,412 per month for Childcare. Increasing Childcare supply would both lower costs and boost overall economic activity by allowing more parents to return to the workforce.
- Orange County is **vulnerable to natural disasters** such as floods, fires, landslides, drought and earthquakes. Despite significant planning, these events can still occur unexpectedly and have devastating impacts on residents and economic activity, as seen in the recent disruptions to rail service caused by landslides.
- Orange County faces **other environmental/sustainability challenges** such as heat waves, air pollution, flood risks, and coastal erosion. While the county has made significant progress towards sustainability in recent years, more work is needed to ensure that the county is prepared to face these challenges.
- **Economic outcomes are unevenly distributed**: the county's prosperity is not evenly distributed across county racial or ethnic groups. Without addressing these disparities, the county risks leaving behind a large portion of its residents.
- **Climate and environmental impacts are also unevenly distributed**, with urban inland areas in northern and central Orange County facing heat islands (due to impervious artificial surfaces and a lack of tree cover) and increased air pollution from nearby freeways.
- Orange County's disinvested communities experience **disproportionate public health impacts**, including a lower rate of health insurance. Residents of these communities have lower life expectancies and increased rates of diseases such as asthma-related conditions.
- **Other potential infrastructure issues** include increased pressure on the county's electrical grid from increased adoption of electric cars.

## Opportunities

- **Elevating disinvested communities** will both allow members of these communities to more fully participate in the county's economic growth and help

further fuel that growth. This will involve breaking down barriers to employment with strategies such as accessible, affordable career pathways.

- An **overall regional competitiveness strategy** that aligns educational and infrastructure investments with key strategic goals will accelerate the county's economic growth. It will also help ensure that the county's prosperity and famous quality of life reaches all Orange County residents, including residents of disinvested communities.
- By **further promoting innovation and entrepreneurship**, Orange County can leverage – and boost – its existing entrepreneurial ecosystem, as exemplified by incubators such as UCI's The Cove and OCTANe.
- **Leveraging shifting aging and ethnic demographics**, such as the county's increasingly diverse population, could improve overall economic activity and quality of life. For instance, encouraging and supporting women-owned, minority-owned, and minority-women-owned businesses in the region could both boost overall economic growth and better distribute it across the entire county.
- By **leveraging existing and emerging industry clusters**, such as Medical Device Manufacturing, county stakeholders can further boost innovation and entrepreneurship. One example is UCI's Department of Biomedical Engineering, which served 550 undergrads and more than 130 graduate students in 2020-2021; it also had more than \$47.3 million in research expenditures.
- Further **strengthening the county's economic resilience** is important because economic downturns are inevitable. Orange County has experienced three major economic shocks in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, post-COVID supply chain issues, and rapid inflation; while the county managed to weather these shocks quit effectively, another economic challenge is undoubtedly around the corner.
- **Education and training programs** can fuel a strong, inclusive economy by providing pathways to gainful employment that do not necessarily involve the time or expense of a four-year Bachelor's degree.
- A **reindustrialization strategy** could compliment the county's already thriving advanced manufacturing subsectors, which include Medical Device, Biotechnology and Aerospace and Defense.
- **Attracting and retaining world-class employers** is vital. Orange County is **home** to over 30 nationally-recognized organizations, each with a net worth over \$1 billion, including Boeing, Disney, CoreLogic, Masimo Corporation, Edwards Lifesciences Corporation, Vizio, and Viant Technologies. Retaining these companies – and adding to this list – will go a long way towards maintaining the county's status as a regional economic powerhouse.
- A **regional career pathways and skills-based initiative** could help address the skills gap and simultaneously create career opportunities for residents of the county's disinvested communities. Industry-educator partnerships can tailor these programs to the specific needs of the county's labor market while also ensuring that they reflect the impacts of new technologies.

- By **tailoring educational opportunities** to the current needs of both employers and students (including nontraditional students, English learners, immigrants and other potentially marginalized students), county stakeholders can help ensure that its economic prosperity reaches all parts of the county.
- **Career Technical Education (CTE) and apprenticeships** are powerful tools for accomplishing these goals because they involve close collaboration between employers and educational institutions. They provide alternative pathways into gainful employment without the expense or time commitment of college degrees.
- **Increasing Childcare supply and access** could boost the workforce participation of Orange County parents. According to First 5 OC, one in five working Orange County parents and guardians show up late to work due to gaps in childcare; One in six regularly leave work early due to a lack of childcare, while one in ten choose to leave their jobs and one in eleven reduce their hours in order to take care of their children.

## Threats

- Orange County has experienced **population declines** in recent years. Its population fell from 3,186,989 in 2020 to 3,137,164 in 2023, a decline of nearly 50,000 residents. If unchecked, this decline could begin to drain the country's talent pool, thus making it a less attractive business climate.
- In addition to declining, **the county's population is also aging**, which will have several consequences: increased pressure on the county's Healthcare sector, a higher ratio of dependent to work-aging residents, the need for additional investment in social and medical services.
- The county's **extremely high cost of living** could further exacerbate its population decline by pushing residents to relocate to more affordable areas. If unchecked, this could lead to a draining of the county's talent pool that could make it a much less attractive business environment.
- **Poverty and homelessness** remain a significant problem despite the county's economic growth. While many programs and support services are available to unhoused populations in Orange County, ensuring more and more individuals are not left behind should remain the primary goal of regional stakeholders and policymakers.
- Like the rest of California, Orange County has a **stringent regulatory environment**, including significant barriers to entry for new businesses. While California and Orange County remain premier destinations to both live and work, future growth could be hampered by increased business regulations, at the state level as well as the local level.
- Like many places in the country, Orange County has seen **worrying mental health trends**, especially among young people. At the national level, emergency department visits among children aged 12 to 17 increased 31 percent from 2019 to 2020.

- **Automation could have significant consequences for the labor market**, particularly by eliminating entry-level positions such as cashiers. These jobs, typically filled by young workers or individuals entering the labor force for the first-time, represent important rungs on the career ladder which impart valuable experience and soft skills such as teamwork and communication; eliminating them eliminates an important gateway into the world of work.
- **A lack of AI professionals** could slow economic growth in an increasingly AI-driven labor market. In order to capitalize on this emerging sector, additional focus will have to be put on properly educating workers to fill these positions.
- Despite Orange County's strong water infrastructure, **water supply uncertainty at the state level** could cause issues in the future. Helping to reduce its reliance on state water, Orange County maintains one of the world's largest water purification systems, the Groundwater Replenishment System (GWRS) capable of producing 130 million gallons of water per day and also has plans for a new ocean desalination plant to come online in 2028. Further improvements to and innovations in the county's water management system could help the county effectively face these potential challenges.
- **Climate and sustainability challenges** – such as landslides and coastal erosion – could have a particularly strong impact on coastal communities such as San Clement and Newport Beach. Coastal erosion, for instance, could even threaten Amtrack passenger service through San Clemente where officials indicated they would study its potential impacts as part of their own coastal erosion resilience framework.
- **Shifting commercial real estate trends**, driven by the continuing popularity of remote work, could upset the county's real estate market. While office occupancy rates have rebounded from 2020, they remain well below pre-pandemic levels. This downward pressure on office lease prices will impact key county employers.
- Finally, the **potential natural disasters – especially fires, floods, and landslides** – will undoubtedly impact the county's infrastructure, transportation connections and other key sectors.

## 3 - Regional Strategies

### Orange County Jobs First Strategy

This proposal includes ten target sector strategies and eight sector-neutral and economic mobility strategies to build economic resilience in the region while offering equitable access to opportunities, limiting the effects of climate change, and supporting existing state policies on climate change, educational attainment, and career readiness.

**Increasing economic resilience and diversification.** It is true, if a cliché, that today's economy is changing more rapidly than ever, due in part to the usual suspects of global competition and trade, emerging technological advances (most recently including artificial intelligence), increasingly complex financial ownership structures, and ever longer supply chains that are susceptible to unexpected interruptions. Policies to promote economic growth can yield multiple dividends, as regions with higher economic growth also enjoy greater economic equality and more social cohesion.<sup>3</sup> Orange County, and the state of California, need to stay ahead of these global and national changes to ensure that their residents enjoy these benefits by investing in strategies that encourage sustained and diversified growth that is resistant to outside forces.

**Equity for residents, particularly disinvested groups.** Economic growth must also help communities that start from a place of disadvantage. These disinvested communities stand to benefit the most from such investments, and their explicit inclusion is essential to ensuring equity across the region. The sector-based strategies described below are already putatively open to all state residents, but in actuality Californians (including Orange County residents) have unequal access to the education and training opportunities required to enter these and many other living wage jobs. The following sections propose pathways to prosperity for underserved Orange County residents to jobs in designated industries and through other means.

**Counteracting climate change.** As the effects of climate change increasingly affect Californians' economic security, health, and well-being, it is vital to invest in areas that minimize or even reverse negative impacts to the environment. There are many ongoing threats to the environment, particularly the self-reinforcing cycle of pollution and climate change that has led to more frequent and intense wildfires, in turn releasing more carbon

This section (3.a.i.3) discusses the ten Target Sector strategies. These strategies are detailed on page 49.

Please see page 82 (Section 3.b) for the eight Sector-Neutral and Economic Mobility strategies.

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<sup>3</sup> Benner, C., & Pastor, M. (2015). *Equity, growth, and community: What the nation can learn from America's metro areas*. University of California Press.

dioxide and soot into the atmosphere, further exacerbating both climate change and worsening air quality. The state must accelerate its transition to green jobs and industries. The target industries outlined below are at a minimum climate-neutral, and several of the economic mobility strategies (e.g., fostering green innovation zones) are intentionally designed to mitigate environmental threats.

**Supporting existing state strategies.** State investments in economic growth like those proposed in the following sections must also align with and support existing state policies and strategies. These policies include ameliorating the effects of climate change and air pollution mentioned above but also include preservation of natural spaces as detailed in the California 30x30 Initiative, the governor’s goal of 70 percent college attainment goal for working-age Californians, and the governor’s recently announced Master Plan for Career Education, which includes strengthening connections to careers whether or not they require higher education.<sup>4</sup>

### Target Sectors

To steer funding where it will contribute the most to the four goals listed above, Orange County’s California Jobs First Collaborative consulted with experts and community members to identify ten target sectors (industries) for investment. These sectors are

1. ambulatory health care services,
2. hospitals,
3. social assistance,
4. computer and electronic product manufacturing,
5. miscellaneous manufacturing,
6. education services,
7. construction of buildings,
8. specialty trade contractors,
9. accommodation, and
10. food services and drinking places.

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<sup>4</sup> California Natural Resources Agency. (n.d.). *30x30 California: Conserving 30 percent of California’s lands and coastal waters by 2030*. <https://www.californianature.ca.gov>; Corrin, M., & Fung, A. (Sept. 29, 2022). *To reach 70 percent college attainment in California, we need 100 percent of the colleges in the state onboard*. The Institute for College Access & Success. <https://ticas.org/california/to-reach-70-college-attainment-in-california-we-need-100-of-colleges-in-california-onboard-2>; Gallegos, E. (Aug. 31, 2023). Gov. Gavin Newsom signs executive order for a master plan for career education. *EdSource*. <https://edsources.org/2023/gov-newsom-signs-executive-order-for-a-master-plan-for-career-education/696791>

The ten sectors, the occupations they comprise, and selected statistics about them are presented in Appendix A. Each sector was selected for its potential to help Orange County make progress toward the four goals stated above. Nine of the ten sectors are projected to grow over the next decade, and five have projected growth above the overall rate of 18 percent across all sectors. Eight of the ten sectors pay a median salary over \$44,000 annually, well above the Orange County median of \$37,000. Four sectors have median salaries above the county's living wage of \$63,000 for a single adult, and seven pay above \$48,000, one-half of the living wage for a household of two working adults and one child.<sup>5</sup> In addition to paying well, jobs in these sectors tend to come with benefits such as health care, paid vacation, and paid sick leave.

These sectors tend to be safer for workers as well, as most have below-average rates of workplace injuries and illness. Even if every target sector does not meet every criterion, by and large they offer considerable opportunity for high-quality jobs.

Moreover, the diversity of occupations across and within these target sectors offers entry points for Orange County residents with varying levels of academic preparation and opportunities to move up in their fields as they gain experience and educational credentials. Jobs that require minimal to no postsecondary education, like medical assistants (ambulatory health care services sector) and hotel desk clerks (accommodation sector), can be stepping stones to positions with greater responsibility and higher compensation, such as nurses and lodging managers, respectively.

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<sup>5</sup> Glasmeier, A. K. (February 14, 2024). *Living wage calculation for Orange County, California*. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/06059> Hourly wages are annualized by multiplying by 2,080 hours/year and are rounded to the nearest thousand dollars.

### 3.a.i. – Define Target Sectors and Justify Prioritization

## Priority Sector Overview

### *Ambulatory Health Care Services (NAICS 621)*

#### Industry Overview

A subsector of the broader Healthcare and Social Services industry, Ambulatory Health Care Services serves a broad range of patients and represents an important field as many of these services can be considered preventative care therefore allowing patients to potentially avoid future diseases, disabilities, or other health problems before they become serious and/or life-threatening.<sup>6</sup> This allows patients to not only be more aware of their own health but also serves to improve life expectancy without significantly increasing costs as it allows patients to avoid larger, more expensive treatments associated with more serious or acute health conditions.<sup>7</sup>

The associated improvement to life expectancy, enhanced quality of life and future potential costs savings indicates the expansion and support of this priority sector could have dramatic benefits for residents in disinvested communities. Not only a significant source of regional jobs, Ambulatory Health Care Services could serve to raise health equity across regional populations by improving access to more affordable services which improve long-term health and help to avoid serious health concerns and costs. This is especially true for middle-age and older generations in disinvested communities who may be more susceptible to diseases or disabilities than residents in more affluent areas who likely have better access to or can afford health services.<sup>8</sup> With Orange County's median age increasing from 36.7 in 2012 to 39.5 in 2022, and the proportion of seniors residents expected to grow from 18 percent in 2023 to 29 percent by 2060, the region stands to benefit greatly from improving support and access to this sector.<sup>9</sup>

Ambulatory Health Care Services is also a major contributor to Orange County's gross regional product (GRP) adding \$12.2 billion in 2023, or 3.9 percent of regional GRP, the 7<sup>th</sup> largest sector in the region. With a 2023 employment concentration, or location quotient, of 1.14, Ambulatory Health Care Services is 1.14 times more concentrated in Orange County than at the national level. Further supporting the growth and expansion of this sector will not only help to drive economic activity but also accelerate the concentration, or clustering, of this sector serving to push collaboration and innovation.

#### Industry / Occupational Employment and Wages

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<sup>6</sup> <https://health.gov/news/202208/ounce-prevention-can-save-persons-life>

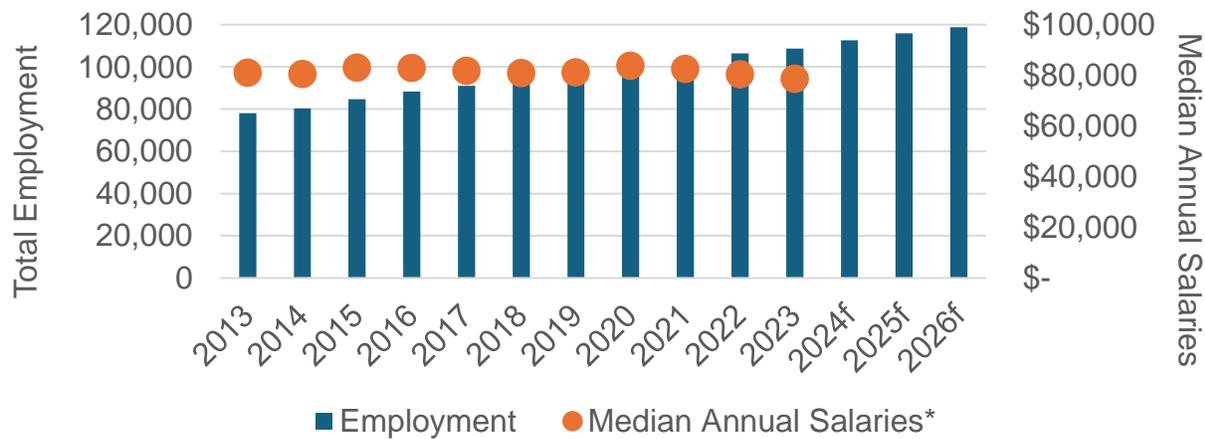
<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nebraskamed.com/health/conditions-and-services/primary-care/how-preventive-care-can-lower-your-health-care-costs>

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanhl/article/PIIS2666-7568\(23\)00035-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanhl/article/PIIS2666-7568(23)00035-1/fulltext)

<sup>9</sup> <https://dof.ca.gov/forecasting/demographics/projections/>

In Orange County, Ambulatory Health Care Services represents a major source of employment for the region with a total of 108,676 jobs, representing 6 percent of total jobs in the region, an average annual salary of \$78,615 and a regional employment concentration of 1.14 in 2023, indicating this industry slightly more concentrated in Orange County than at the national level. Over the past decade, employment in this sector has increased by 39.2 percent, and over the next three years is expected to reach 118,783, an increase of 9.3 percent. The annual average salary in this sector decreased from an inflation-adjusted \$81,051 in 2013 to \$78,615 in 2023.

*Orange County Employment and Average Annual Salaries of Ambulatory Health Care Services Sector, 2013-2026f*



Source: Lightcast  
 \*Inflation-adjusted to 2023

The largest occupations within the Ambulatory Health Care Services industry include Medical Secretaries and Administrative Assistants, Medical Assistants, and Registered Nurses. While Home Health and Personal Care Aides saw employment jump 616 percent over the past decade, reflecting the increased demand from the region’s aging population, median earnings remain low at just \$32,457. While certain occupations have comparatively lower median earnings, these occupations have accessible career pathways, supported by a number of regional academic programs, which allows workers to more efficiently climb career ladders and progress in their professional careers.

As demand for these occupations continues to grow alongside an increasingly older population with higher demand for health care services, median earnings are likely to see more rapid future growth.

## Top Ambulatory Health Care Services Industry Occupations, 2023

	Employment (2013)	Employment (2023)	Percent Change (2013 - 2023)	Median Earnings (2023)
Medical Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	4,630	7,801	68%	\$48,146
Medical Assistants	5,978	7,585	27%	\$45,441
Registered Nurses	4,468	7,008	57%	\$126,108
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	969	6,938	616%	\$32,457
Dental Assistants	4,902	6,847	40%	\$47,766

Source: Lightcast

## Hospitals (NAICS 622)

### Industry Overview

Orange County has over 20 hospitals run by a number of healthcare organizations including Children’s Hospital of Orange County (CHOC), consistently named one of the nation’s best children’s hospitals by U.S. News and World Report;<sup>10</sup> Hoag Hospital, which maintains 3 acute-care hospitals, 16 urgent care centers, and 11 health & wellness centers in the region;<sup>11</sup> and University of California’s Medical Center, rated among the nation’s top 10 academic medical centers and one of the best hospitals in the region for 23 consecutive years.<sup>12</sup> Being home to such a broad and varied healthcare system, Orange County remains uniquely positioned to be able to further drive innovation across a number of subsectors, including Hospitals, while improving industry concentration through continued support.

As Orange County continues to see its population grow older, it is imperative that local and regional populations continue to have access to world-class healthcare services. Further industry concentration will not only help to improve the quality of care provided by hospitals and clinics but will also help drive gainful employment opportunities such as Registered Nurses, an occupation which has already grown by 40 percent between 2013 and 2023 with an inflation-adjusted annual median wage which has increased by 5.8 percent over the same time period, totaling \$126,108 in 2023. Registered Nurses continues to be the most in-demand occupation in the region with 19,092 unique job postings from May 2023 to May 2024, well ahead of the Retail Salespersons which had the second highest number of unique job postings at just 13,027.

Hospitals generated \$4.7 billion in gross regional product (GRP) in 2023, or 1.5 percent of Orange County’s total GRP, and despite having a relatively low employment concentration (0.62), still provide the region with a large number of high-paying jobs and crucially important services. Supporting and accelerating investments into this sector can

<sup>10</sup> <https://choc.org/about/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.hoag.org/about-hoag/>

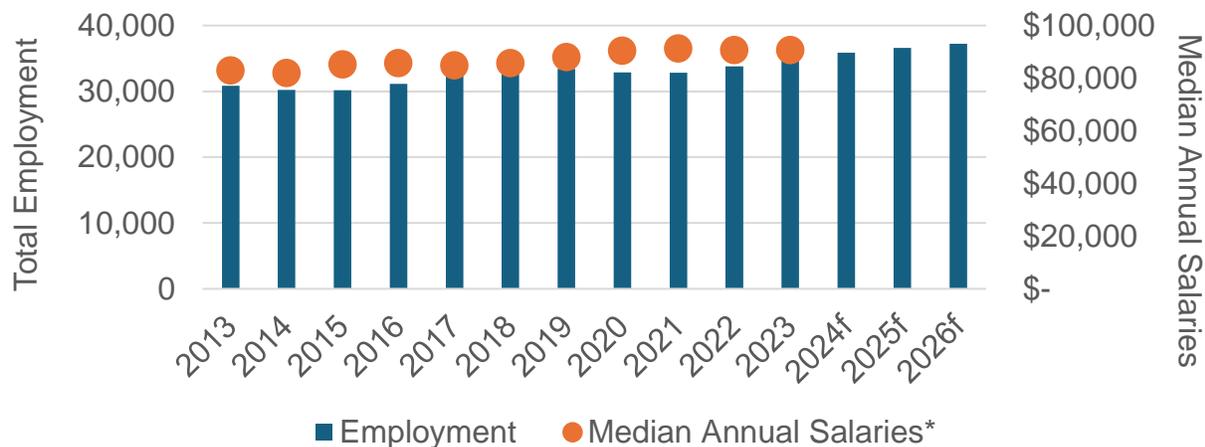
<sup>12</sup> <https://www.ucihealth.org/locations/orange/uci-medical-center>

provide dramatic benefits to disinvested communities through increased access to high-paying jobs, improving financial equity, while increasing access to healthcare services, thereby improving health equity. Additionally, as health technology improves, more specialized occupations are likely to emerge and services are likely to improve, much how telehealth, which saw dramatic growth during the pandemic, has improved patient access, reduced costs, and improved efficiency.<sup>13</sup>

### Industry Employment and Wages

The median annual wage for Hospitals increased from an inflation-adjusted \$82,889 in 2013 to \$90,641, an increase of 9.4 percent, in 2023 at the same time as total employment in this sector increased from 30,827 to 35,068, an increase of 13.8 percent. As such, this industry is an important source of jobs as it provides a range of low- and high-skill occupations which require varying levels of education or experience. Providing Orange County’s disinvested community residents with educational, training or apprenticeship programs to streamline career pathways to high-road jobs within the Hospital sector will not only drive job creation, economic activity, and innovation but will also help improve health equity in disinvested communities. Looking forward, employment is expected to jump by 6.2 percent to 37,238 by 2026 as demand continues to grow.

*Orange County Employment and Average Annual Salaries of Hospitals Sector, 2013-2026f*



Source: Lightcast  
 \*Inflation-adjusted to 2023

As previously indicated, Registered Nurses is the dominant occupation in the Hospitals industry with 11,856 jobs and median earnings of \$126,108 in 2023 compared to just 2,037 Nursing Assistants with median earnings of \$45,926. While Registered Nurses may require additional training or certification such as the RN License or Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Orange County already has several Registered Nursing Programs creating of steady supply of qualified workers capable of filling current and future demand.

<sup>13</sup> <https://hbr.org/2022/05/the-telehealth-era-is-just-beginning>

## Top Hospitals Industry Occupations, 2023

	Employment (2013)	Employment (2023)	Percent Change (2013 - 2023)	Median Earnings (2023)
Registered Nurses	8,448	11,856	40%	\$126,108
Nursing Assistants	1,408	2,037	45%	\$45,926
Medical Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	903	1,459	62%	\$48,146
Medical and Health Services Managers	570	881	54%	\$132,474
Medical Assistants	546	789	45%	\$45,441

Source: Lightcast

## Social Assistance (NAICS 624)

### Industry Overview

Social Assistance represents an important pillar for communities of all sizes providing crucial services, including short-stay basis housing or accommodations, for individuals of all ages especially in disadvantaged communities. Disadvantaged communities rely on Social Assistance services and agencies to help them through periods of instability and assists in helping them land back on their feet and enhancing their quality of life.

The monthly average number of households applications for CalFresh in Orange County totaled 14,848 in 2022 and have since increased to 15,631 in 2023, an increase of 5.3 percent.<sup>14</sup> The number of CalWORKs applications has also seen a general upward trend increasing from a monthly average of 859 applications per month in 2022 to an average of 1,623 applications per month in 2023, an increase of 89 percent.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, the number of unhoused residents in shelters has increased from 2,661 to 2,993, an increase of nearly 13 percent.<sup>16</sup> With the reliance on Social Assistance services increasing over the past year, the need to reinforce and improve not only investment but efficiency of these services will prove crucial in best assisting residents in disinvested communities.

In Orange County, the Orange County Social Services Agency (SSA), under the direction of the Orange County Board of Supervisors and the California Department of Social Services and Health Services, plans and operates a number of social programs in the region. As one of the largest departments in the county, the SSA serves one in four residents in Orange County and had over 4,300 employees in 2020. While important for residents at all income levels, Social Assistance primarily serves lower-income residents often in disinvested communities. As such, reinforcing and increasing support for the

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/research-and-data/calfresh-data-tables/cf296>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/research-and-data/calworks-data-tables/ca-237-cw>

<sup>16</sup> <https://ochmis.org/point-in-time-count-pit/>

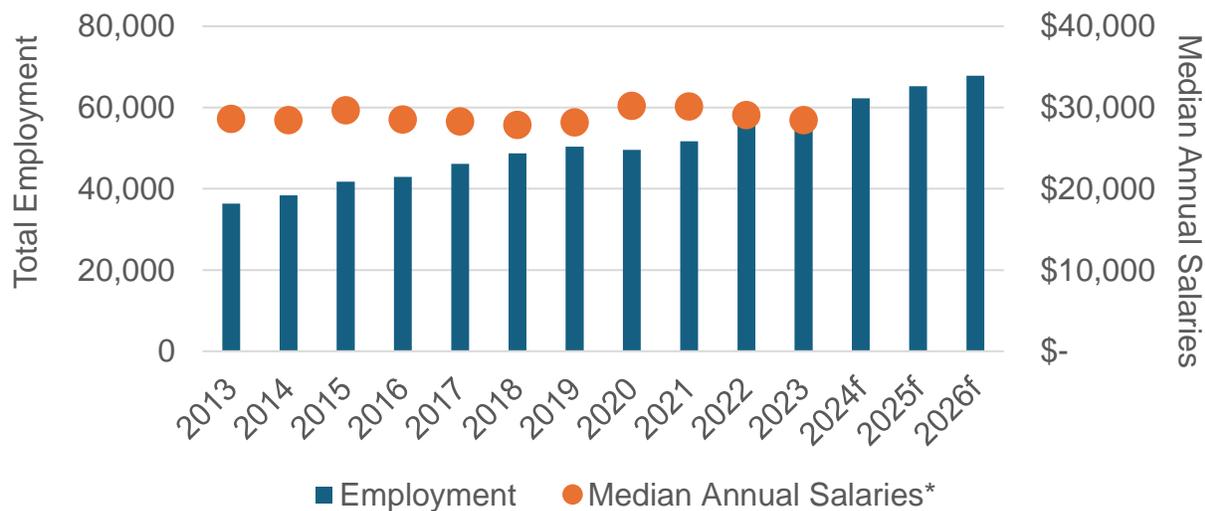
Social Assistance sector will be a crucial strategy in improving equity for residents in disinvested communities. With an employment concentration of 1.11, meaning industry employment is 1.11 times more concentrated in the region than at the national level, and overall employment increasing 62 percent from 2013 to 2023, Orange County is well positioned to satisfy the expected increasing levels of demand.

As a large number of Social Assistance programs rely on federal, state, and local government for funding, finding innovative ways to further drive investment into this sector will help to increase the availability of services and, as such, serve more families and individuals. As this sector continues to improve access and efficiency on its programs and services provided to families, focusing on this industry cluster will have a dramatic impact on the ability for families and individuals in disinvested communities to rebound from periods of difficulty and uncertainty while aiding in improving equity across a number of metrics.

### Industry Employment and Wages

Since 2013, the Social Assistance subsector has seen employment increase from 36,375 to 58,795, a jump of 61.6 percent or 22,419 jobs. At the same time, inflation-adjusted average annual salaries moved from \$28,851 to \$28,431. While employment is expected to increase by another 9,043 jobs or by 15.4 percent by 2026, it is important that wages see meaningful growth as well to continue to attract and retain workers.

*Orange County Employment and Average Annual Salaries of Social Assistance Sector, 2013-2026f*



Source: Lightcast  
 \*Inflation-adjusted to 2023

Home Health and Personal Care Aides were the largest occupation in this subsector in 2023 at 35,360 and also experienced the most significant increase over the past 10 years, expanding by 387 percent.

## Top Social Assistance Industry Occupations, 2023

	Employment (2013)	Employment (2023)	Percent Change (2013 - 2023)	Median Earnings (2023)
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	7,265	35,360	387%	\$32,457
Childcare Workers	4,290	3,008	(30%)	\$33,725
Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education	2,138	2,357	10%	\$38,220
Social and Human Service Assistants	1,675	1,613	(4%)	\$46,241
Child, Family, and School Social Workers	777	1,154	49%	\$66,264

Source: Lightcast

## Computer and Electronic Product Manufacturing (NAICS 334)

### Industry Overview

The manufacturing of computers, computer peripherals, as well as semiconductors and other products utilizing highly specialized production technologies has grown in economic significance for decades now. In an attempt to bring this specialization back domestically, the Chips and Science Act was signed in 2022 and will provide over \$50 billion for semiconductor research, development, manufacturing and workforce development as well as funding to bolster supply chains, \$10 billion to invest in regional innovation and technology hubs, and improve access and equity to STEM opportunities.<sup>17</sup> In 2023, the University of California, Irvine, along with a number of other academic institutions led by the University of Southern California, were granted \$26.9 million to help launch 'California DREAMS' or the California Defense Ready Electronics and Microdevices Superhub. The goal of California DREAMS is to drive research and development as well as the growth of domestic microelectronics manufacturing by funding eight regional 'Microelectronics Commons' hubs.<sup>18</sup> These hubs are meant to promote collaboration and communities between researchers, designers and manufacturers, with each hub having its own specializations and its own network of supplementary and complementary organizations to improve innovation.

Considering the funding resulting from the Chips Act as well as the significant increase in current and future demand for highly specialized microchips, properly supporting and prioritizing this sector could bring dramatic benefits to the Orange County economy. This also represents a crucial opportunity to help improve financial equity for residents in

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/09/fact-sheet-chips-and-science-act-will-lower-costs-create-jobs-strengthen-supply-chains-and-counter-china/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://news.uci.edu/2023/11/02/uc-irvine-is-member-of-defense-department-funded-microelectronics-research-hub/>

disinvested communities as many of the occupations in this sector are not only in high demand but also provide above average wages.

In 2023, Computer and Electronic Product Manufacturing generated \$10.7 billion in gross regional product, the 9<sup>th</sup> largest contribution to the Orange County economy. At the same time, this sector has one of the highest employment concentrations within the broader Manufacturing industry at 2.82, meaning this industry employment is already 2.82 times more concentrated in Orange County than at the national level. Home to a number of chip manufacturers including Broadcom, Tower Semiconductor and Skyworks Solutions and with a deep history in aerospace and defense; Orange County is well suited to continue to attract and retain these high values manufacturers. Ensuring that disinvested communities have access to educational and training programs focus on Computer and Electronic Product Manufacturing which enables them to find gainful employment in this sector or even launch their own business will help to ensure equity is better spread across the regional population.

### Industry Employment and Wages

Between 2013 and 2023, employment in Computer and Electronic Product Manufacturing has increased by 1,037 jobs or by 3.1 percent and by 2026 is expected to reach 34,357, an increase of 256 jobs or 0.8 percent. While wages in this sector peaked in 2021 at an inflation-adjusted \$168,748, they have since moderated slightly back down to \$152,714. In Orange County, this sector is dominated by two primary subsectors including Navigational, Measuring, Electromedical, and Control Instruments Manufacturing (13,833 jobs with median annual salaries of \$147,320) and Semiconductor and Other Electronic Component Manufacturing (13,436 jobs with median annual salaries of \$173,055) which accounted for 80 percent of total sector employment in 2023.

*Orange County Employment and Average Annual Salaries of Computer and Electronic Product Manufacturing Sector, 2013-2026f*



Source: Lightcast  
 \*Inflation-adjusted to 2023

While the largest occupations in this sector have seen uneven growth over the past decade, Software Developers, which saw median earnings of \$150,097 in 2023, saw employment grow by 1 percent since 2013.

*Top Computer and Electronic Product Manufacturing Industry Occupations, 2023*

	<b>Employment (2013)</b>	<b>Employment (2023)</b>	<b>Percent Change (2013 - 2023)</b>	<b>Median Earnings (2023)</b>
Electrical, Electronic, and Electromechanical Assemblers	3,670	3,870	5%	\$44,662
Software Developers	2,029	2,057	1%	\$150,097
Misc. Assemblers and Fabricators	1,594	1,430	(10%)	\$40,078
Inspectors, Testers, Sorters, Samplers, and Weighers	986	1,086	10%	\$48,484
Electrical Engineers	823	816	(1%)	\$131,690

Source: Lightcast

*Miscellaneous Manufacturing (NAICS 339)*

**Industry Overview**

Miscellaneous Manufacturing is a sector which makes a wide range of products ranging from athletic equipment, toys, dental and optical instruments, office supplies and a variety of other goods. In Orange County, this sector is largely dominated by the Medical Equipment and Supplies Manufacturing subsector, which accounted for 21,617 jobs in 2023 or 81.5 percent of total employment within Miscellaneous Manufacturing, while providing median annual salaries of \$90,439.

While Miscellaneous Manufacturing has an employment concentration of 3.66 in Orange County, Medical Equipment and Supplies Manufacturing has an employment concentration of 5.85. Looking further, Medical Equipment and Supplies Manufacturing is driven by two primary sectors – Surgical and Medical Instrument Manufacturing (11,022 jobs with median annual salary of \$105,557) and Dental Laboratories (5,719 jobs with median annual salary of \$63,428) which have employment concentrations of 7.33 and 10.53, respectively.

Miscellaneous Manufacturing, and subsequently medical devices, have long been a specialty in Orange County helping to both driven innovation as well as providing high-road jobs to residents across the region. As this industry cluster has evolved it has helped push entrepreneurship and small business creation in the region supported by incubators and accelerators such as OCTANe and The Cove @ UCI and partnerships between academia and local industry leaders such as Edwards Lifesciences, Applied Medical, and Medtronic. This is evidenced by programs such as the UCI Edwards Lifesciences Foundation, Cardiovascular Innovation and Research Center (CIRC) within the Henry Samueli School of Engineering which aims to advance cardiovascular health and health

equity while creating a source of skilled local engineering talent;<sup>19</sup> and the Medical Innovation, Research and Entrepreneurship (MIRE) program created by University Lab Partners, a nonprofit incubator located in UCI's Research Park which welcomed 75 students spanning 12 school districts into their Spring 2024 program.<sup>20</sup>

Thanks to its already deep knowledge and experience in this priority sector, Orange County has a significant amount of assets or infrastructure already in place to further drive industry specialization and concentration. Additionally, this sector already attracts significant investment into the region, ranking 4<sup>th</sup> in 2018-2022 healthcare device and supplies venture capital spending with \$1.05 billion;<sup>21</sup> indicating that continuing to foster a landscape of innovation and growth in this sector could accelerate outside investments into the region.

Further supporting this priority sector will not only reinforce important, lucrative career pathways for residents in disinvested communities but also drive small business growth and entrepreneurship across the region as well as enhance the quality of life of residents through both high-road jobs and improved healthcare products and services. Effectively, Orange County should leverage its existing competitive advantage in Miscellaneous Manufacturing to further cultivate and concentrate this industry cluster and cement its position as a regional, if not nationwide, leader.

### **Industry Employment and Wages**

Employment in Miscellaneous Manufacturing has fluctuated over the past decade, yet as of 2023 measured 26,540, 2,900 jobs or 12.3 percent above 2013 totals while providing median annual salaries of \$86,741. While this industry saw comparatively little impacts from the pandemic, with employment now 7.0 percent above 2019 totals, inflation-adjusted wages show a decline from \$89,251 in 2013 to \$86,741 in 2023. Providing additional support to industry stakeholders and further improving collaboration – and competition – could help reverse this negative wage trend.

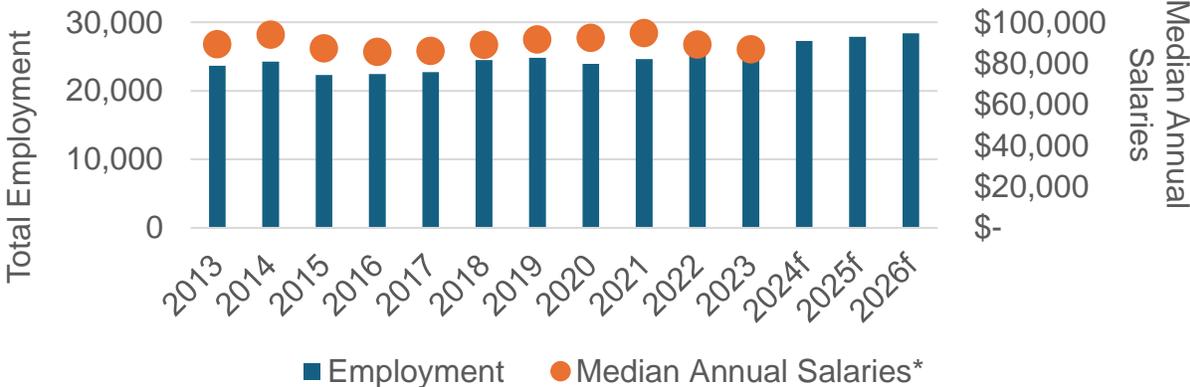
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<sup>19</sup> <https://research.uci.edu/center/edwards-lifesciences-center-for-advanced-cardiovascular-technology/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.universitylabpartners.org/blog/stem-based-program-in-irvine-fosters-the-next-gen-of-medtech-talent>

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.ocbj.com/healthcare/oc-a-hotbed-of-innovation-in-medtech-report/>

*Orange County Employment and Average Annual Salaries of Miscellaneous Manufacturing Sector, 2013-2026f*



Source: Lightcast  
 \*Inflation-adjusted to 2023

*Top Miscellaneous Manufacturing Industry Occupations, 2023*

	Employment (2013)	Employment (2023)	Percent Change (2013 - 2023)	Median Earnings (2023)
Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators	2,912	3,417	17%	\$40,078
Dental Laboratory Technicians	1,740	1,651	(5%)	\$50,101
Inspectors, Testers, and Weighers	704	1,016	44%	\$48,484
Production Workers, All Other	483	687	42%	\$36,838
First-Line Supervisors of Production and Operating Workers	658	681	3%	\$74,487

Source: Lightcast

*Education Services (NAICS 611)*

**Industry Overview**

With a strong K-12 system and world-class research universities, Orange County’s Education Services sector provides crucial employment opportunities and also helps prepare individuals of all ages for entry or reentry into the labor market. The Education Services sector includes all privately owned, public, for profit or not for profit institutions which offer in-person or distance-learning programs.

Alongside the large number of K-12 programs which serve Orange County families, the region is also home to world-class universities such as University of California, Irvine (UCI); California State University, Fullerton (CSUF); and Chapman University. These institutions not only serve domestic and international students, but they also act as strong research universities helping to drive local and regional innovation and entrepreneurship

in Orange County. Further driving innovation and entrepreneurship, organizations such as The Cove @ UCI provides students and entrepreneurs a physical location with the tools and resources, including meeting rooms, offices, workspaces and prototyping labs as well as fostering an innovative ecosystem with support from both academic and industry professionals.<sup>22</sup>

Educational attainment has always been one of the primary ways to access more career pathways leading to improved incomes and career opportunities. As of 2022, the median earnings of residents who were high school graduates totaled only \$37,795 compared to \$78,753 for residents with a Bachelor's degree, a difference of 108 percent.<sup>23</sup> As such, improving disinvested community resident access to quality academic programs could help to dramatically improve financial equity. While traditional four-year universities may be prohibitively expensive for some residents, certification programs can also impart valuable, specialized skills and knowledge to workers, often more rapidly and at a lower cost. Another option – trade schools and apprenticeships – which have exploded in popularity at the same time as college attendance has begun to weaken, allows residents to start working almost immediately while avoiding significant levels of debt associated with traditional four-year colleges. Additionally, as artificial intelligence becomes more widespread and increasingly adopted by organizations, many young individuals see physical jobs involving manual labor as more resilient to technological threats.<sup>24</sup>

Supporting this priority sector helps drive several top line strategies including improving career pathways, increasing access to apprenticeships, enhancing the quality of life, and pushes small business creation and entrepreneurship. This also presents stakeholders with the ability to uplift community voices through respectful cultural engagement; as Orange County becomes increasingly diverse ensuring academia and training programs respect resident cultural norms and improve cultural engagement can help further attract both domestic and international residents and workers. With net immigration being the primary way, Orange County's population expands, even surpassing natural increase (births minus deaths) from 2021 to 2023, fostering a welcoming and respectful cultural environment will benefit both new and existing residents in disinvested communities.

## **Industry Employment and Wages**

Employment in Educational Services has seen continued growth, with the exception of 2020 and 2021, when the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted this trend. Despite this, employment has still increased from 33,698 in 2013 to 42,507 in 2023, an increase of 8,809 jobs or 26.1 percent. Looking forward, employment is expected to continually improve growing to 46,450, an increase of 4,033 jobs or 9.5 percent.

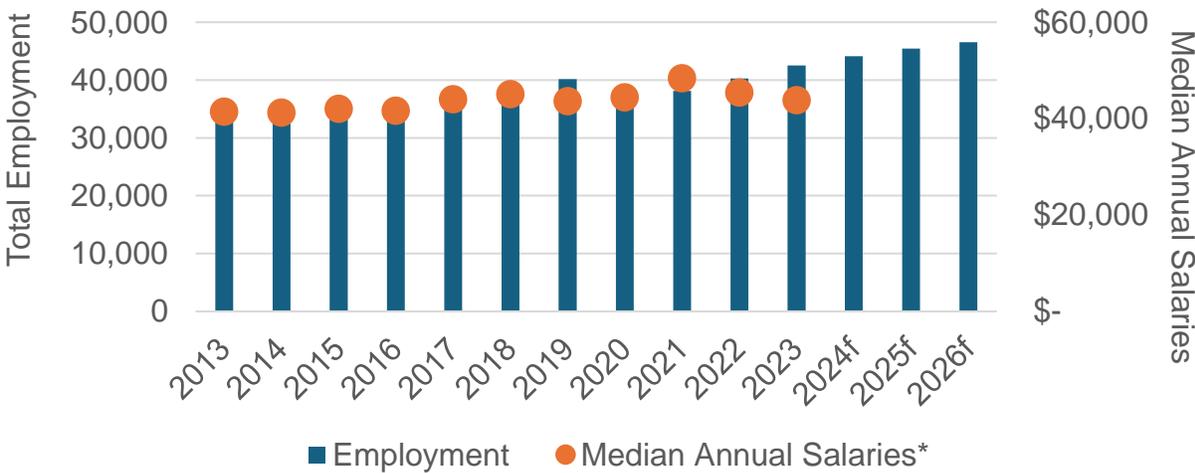
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<sup>22</sup> <https://innovation.uci.edu/the-cove/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2022.S1501?t=Educational%20Attainment&g=050XX00US06059>

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.npr.org/2024/04/22/1245858737/gen-z-trade-vocational-schools-jobs-college>

*Orange County Employment and Average Annual Salaries of Educational Services Sector, 2013-2026f*



Source: Lightcast  
 \*Inflation-adjusted to 2023

Self-Enrichment Teachers represented the largest occupation in this sector with 7,261 jobs in 2023, representing an increase of 162 percent over 2013 levels.

*Top Education Services Industry Occupations, 2023*

	Employment (2013)	Employment (2023)	Percent Change (2013 - 2023)	Median Earnings (2023)
Self-Enrichment Teachers	2,770	7,261	162%	\$44,283
Tutors	2,773	4,230	53%	\$36,664
Postsecondary Teachers	5,210	3,778	(27%)	\$98,294
Coaches and Scouts	1,314	1,727	31%	\$46,996
Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	1,473	1,571	7%	\$97,383

Source: Lightcast

*Construction of Buildings (NAICS 236)*

**Industry Overview**

Construction has long been a pathway for individuals to begin working immediately after high school as apprenticeships, internships, or on-the-job training are typically offered. Leveraging the emerging demand for trade jobs and further supporting the Construction of Buildings sector would increase access to career pathways, increase availability of apprenticeships and accelerate new housing supply. Additionally, in order to best support the expansion of this industry, it is imperative that local and regional stakeholders better understand the headwinds hindering growth from the simple lack of buildable land, to

zoning concerns, NIMBYs, labor and material costs as well as sometimes hostile regulatory environments which may alienate developers. Supporting this priority sector and fostering a healthy environment of collaboration between industry leaders, policymakers and community stakeholders can lead to the implementation of new, innovative strategies or policies which benefit communities and their regional labor markets as well as drive housing supply growth.

Focusing on improving this industry's concentration in the region would provide a number of benefits, especially to disinvested communities where there is a severe lack of affordable housing options. According to the 6<sup>th</sup> Regional Housing Needs Assessment conducted in 2021 by the Southern California Association of Governments, Orange County needs approximately 46,416 very-low income units, 29,242 low income units and 32,546 moderate income units by 2029 to meet residential demand.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, as remote work became increasingly adopted, office space demand has seen a significant decline with vacancy rates reaching 14.3 percent in Q1 2024, compared to just under 10 percent five years ago.<sup>26</sup> While troubling, this trend also offers a potential remedy where developers may retrofit existing office buildings into multifamily structures, similar to strategies proposed in Orange County Business Council's Inside Orange County's Retail E-volution which proposed retrofitting old and outdated retail buildings into residential structures. Additionally, as an increased focus is placed on green or renewable technologies and climate resilience, the Construction of Buildings sector is uniquely positioned to adopt and implement new and emerging technologies. Placing an emphasis on leveraging renewable energy sources and building materials while mitigating potential climate change impacts through effective infrastructure planning and development; this priority sector helps drive a number of regional priority strategies.

Overall, the Construction of Buildings sector should be a priority for the region due to the multiple layers of benefits provided. From additional affordable housing and increasing the supply of lucrative jobs to increasing access to apprenticeships and deployment of new green technologies and materials, supporting this industry helps improve both housing and financial equity for disinvested residents while helping to tackle a more than decades-long housing supply imbalance which has created a significant drag on potential economic growth and activity.

## **Industry Employment and Wages**

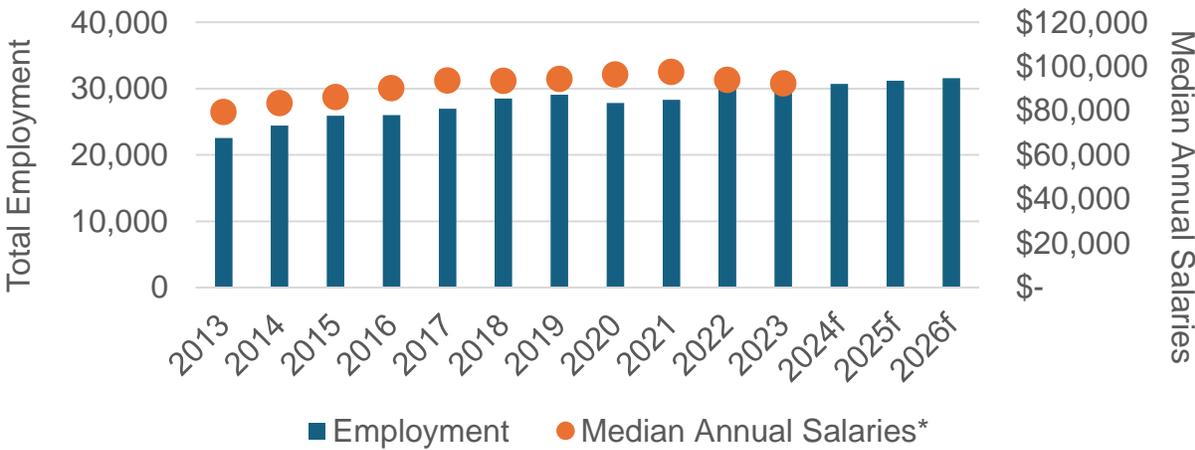
Following the continued demand to live and work in the County, employment in Construction of Buildings has increased by 33.6 percent from 2013 to 2023 representing an increase of 7,759 jobs. At the same time, inflation-adjusted average annual salaries have increased from \$79,235 to \$92,287. Looking forward, employment in this sector is expected to grow to 31,548, an increase of 1,435 or 4.8 percent.

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<sup>25</sup> [https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/6th\\_cycle\\_final\\_rhna\\_allocation\\_plan\\_070121.pdf?1646938785](https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/6th_cycle_final_rhna_allocation_plan_070121.pdf?1646938785)

<sup>26</sup> <https://mktgdocs.cbre.com/2299/5da03e9f-84fb-4fff-aa9c-4d64b3cefaed-1482987420/v032024/Orange%20County%20Office%20Figures%20Q1%202024.pdf>

*Orange County Employment and Average Annual Salaries of Construction of Buildings Sector, 2013-2026f*



Source: Lightcast  
 \*Inflation-adjusted to 2023

Further highlighting the continued demand and importance of this sector, all of the top occupations have seen growth since 2013, with Construction Managers and Project Management Specialists, both occupations providing median earnings above \$100,000 increasing by 80 and 1,657 percent, respectively.

*Top Construction of Buildings Industry Occupations, 2023*

	Employment (2013)	Employment (2023)	Percent Change (2013 - 2023)	Median Earnings (2023)
Carpenters	5,407	5,729	6%	\$65,249
Construction Laborers	3,833	3,874	1%	\$50,954
Construction Managers	1,491	2,682	80%	\$115,956
First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades Workers	1,723	2,249	31%	\$94,514
Project Management Specialists	87	1,522	1657%	\$102,722

Source: Lightcast

*Specialty Trade Contractors (NAICS 238)*

**Industry Overview**

With consistent housing demand, a healthy homeownership rate, and above-average incomes, Orange County represents a lucrative market for Specialty Trade Contractors. Orange County is already home to a broad range of local construction and building unions from Plumbers and Pipefitters to Laborers and Utility Workers. Helping to drive the broad and varied career pathways, organizations such as the LA/OC Building Trades Council help to promote apprenticeships and educate the public regarding the benefits of working

in their field. As the high cost of post-secondary education has alienated many young adults and caused admissions to fall, there has been an increase in individuals entering trade schools to take advantage of well-paying occupations which come with no debt.<sup>27</sup> This priority sector falls in line with several major strategies for improving disadvantaged communities from providing reliable career pathways and apprenticeships to increasing the supply of housing and encouraging small business creation as contractors strike out on their own after their educational or training programs.

While Specialty Trade Contractor employment has been declining since 2018 in Orange County, growing calls for increasing the housing supply could help drive future employment in this sector. Additionally, as the supply of workers increases, spurred by a reversal in the long-term trend of young residents opting for four-year colleges instead of trade school, the industry is like to see its employment concentration increase well above its current score of 1.24. As such, additional resources should be pointed at trade schools and career-technical education programs to help streamline the increasing supply of young workers choosing construction-related career fields. Improving access to and support of programs such as Orange Coast Colleges' Building and Construction Trades programs which includes Construction Technology, HVACR Technology, Manufacturing Technology and Welding Technology;<sup>28</sup> while encouraging guidance and collaboration with industry professionals would help to ensure a supply of well-qualified, knowledgeable workers.

Overall, Orange County already maintains a high degree of specialization in this sector with a broad number of training or academic programs giving it a strong foundation on which to continue to grow and improve, especially as demand for these occupations returns. It is also important that this sector remain flexible, nimble, and able to rapidly respond to shifts in economic, social, or demographic trends with innovative solutions. The shift to remote work and rapid deterioration of the commercial office real estate market, increasing e-commerce, generational preferences and affordability rates - all present both opportunities and challenges which, if properly leveraged, could dramatically benefit the region, especially disinvested communities.

## **Industry Employment and Wages**

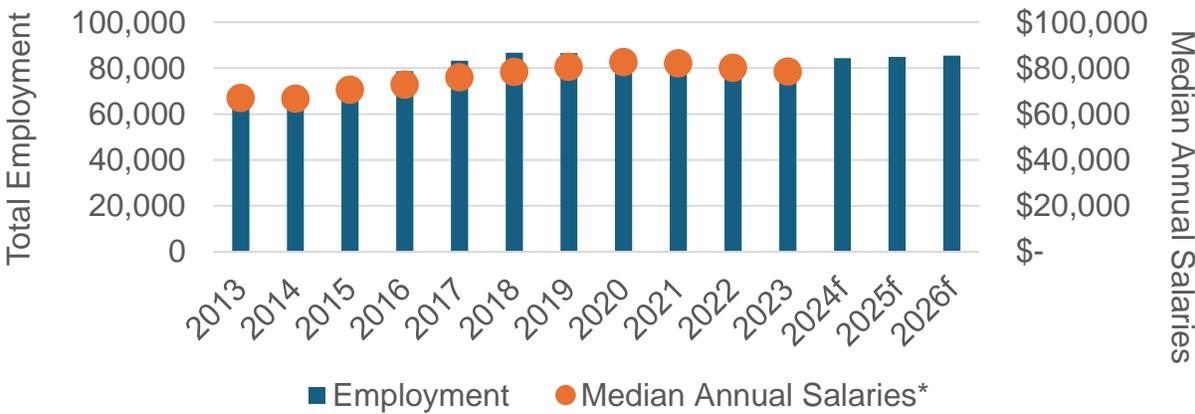
Similar to Construction of Buildings, employment for Specialty Trade Contractors has seen healthy expansion, growing from 64,147 in 2013 to 83,476 by 2023, an increase of 30.1 percent or 19,329 jobs. At the same time, median annual salaries have increased from an inflation-adjusted \$66,856 to \$78,334. While recent employment trends have been soft, as trade schools continue to gain popularity and housing demand remains strong, employment in this sector is likely to accelerate in the near future.

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<sup>27</sup> [https://www.dnronline.com/news/more-students-choosing-trade-schools-as-college-enrollment-drops/article\\_724b5c6c-4427-533c-9bdc-3b8aa6f70032.html](https://www.dnronline.com/news/more-students-choosing-trade-schools-as-college-enrollment-drops/article_724b5c6c-4427-533c-9bdc-3b8aa6f70032.html)

<sup>28</sup> <https://orangeoastcollege.edu/academics/career-advantage/index.html>

*Orange County Employment and Average Annual Salaries of Specialty Trade Contractors Sector, 2013-2026f*



Source: Lightcast  
 \*Inflation-adjusted to 2023

Of the top occupations in this sector, only Construction Laborers, which had one of the lowest median earnings in 2023, saw employment declines over the past decade shrinking by 2 percent. At the same time, First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers, with median earnings of \$94,514, increased by 64 percent to 4,387 in 2023.

*Top Specialty Trade Contractors Industry Occupations, 2023*

	Employment (2013)	Employment (2023)	Percent Change (2013 - 2023)	Median Earnings (2023)
Electricians	5,663	6,670	18%	\$77,855
Construction Laborers	6,173	6,068	(2%)	\$50,954
Carpenters	5,261	6,007	14%	\$65,249
Plumbers, Pipefitters, and Steamfitters	3,353	4,639	38%	\$66,584
First-Line Supervisors of Construction Trades and Extraction Workers	2,670	4,387	64%	\$94,514

Source: Lightcast

*Accommodation (NAICS 721)*

**Industry Overview**

Perhaps the industry most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Accommodation industry took a massive hit as travel restrictions were put in place and both domestic and international travel drastically fell. Yet, with attractions such as Disneyland, 42-miles of beautiful coastline, and luxury shopping destinations, tourism and the Accommodation

sector have nearly recovered. Tourism has been an integral part of Orange County's economy for decades and has provided an important source of jobs with low barriers to entry for residents and an important source of income for local retailers, restaurants and hotels. With such a deep history and specialization, and significant number of tourism amenities, Orange County's Accommodation sector is uniquely positioned to continue to grow.

In 2019, Orange County saw an estimated 50.2 million visitors and while visitation numbers have dropped, they are expected to return to these highs by 2024.<sup>29</sup> At the same time, travel-related spending in Orange County saw a dramatic decline from \$14.5 billion in 2019 to \$6.8 billion in 2020 before recovering to \$15.8 billion in 2023. The Accommodation accounts for \$3.8 billion or 24 percent of total travel-related spending, behind only Food Services.<sup>30</sup> While the hotel sector has seen some disruption from app-based rental services such as Airbnb or Vrbo, these services have seen some push back due to increasing service fees, cleaning fees, owner disputes, and their roles in reducing housing supply and how they can impact neighborhoods.

Looking forward, daily room demand in Orange County is expected to increase from 43,160 in 2023 to 45,596 by 2026, an increase of 5.6 percent, just behind San Diego (+5.7 percent) and San Francisco Bay Area (+9.1 percent). At the same time, occupancy levels will increase from 71.7 percent to 74.3 percent, the second largest increase in California, yet still behind 2019 levels of 77.5 percent. Despite lower occupancy, projected room revenue in Orange County is expected to grow by 12.9 percent from 2023 to 2026, reaching \$3.7 billion, well above the 2019 total of \$2.7 billion. Overall, while occupancy is projected to be just 96 percent of 2019 totals by 2026, room demand is expected to reach 101 percent room revenue is expected to reach 140 percent of 2019 totals. As this has long been an important cluster in the region, and with visitor demand and projected revenue expected to continue to grow, ensuring this industry is properly supported will provide significant benefits to both residents, workers and regional businesses.

While the dominant occupations in this sector do provide comparatively lower wages, they represent important positions with low barriers to entry for residents who may not be able to enter certification or other educational programs. These positions also provide valuable skills and experience which individuals can then leverage to climb career ladders or use in another industry or discipline.

## **Industry Employment and Wages**

Orange County's Accommodation sector saw one of the largest impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic with employment slipping from 26,586 in 2019 to 16,591 in 2020, a decline of nearly 10,000 jobs or 37.6 percent. In the following years, employment has steadily recovered totaling 25,454 in 2023, an increase of 53.4 percent since 2020 lows, yet still

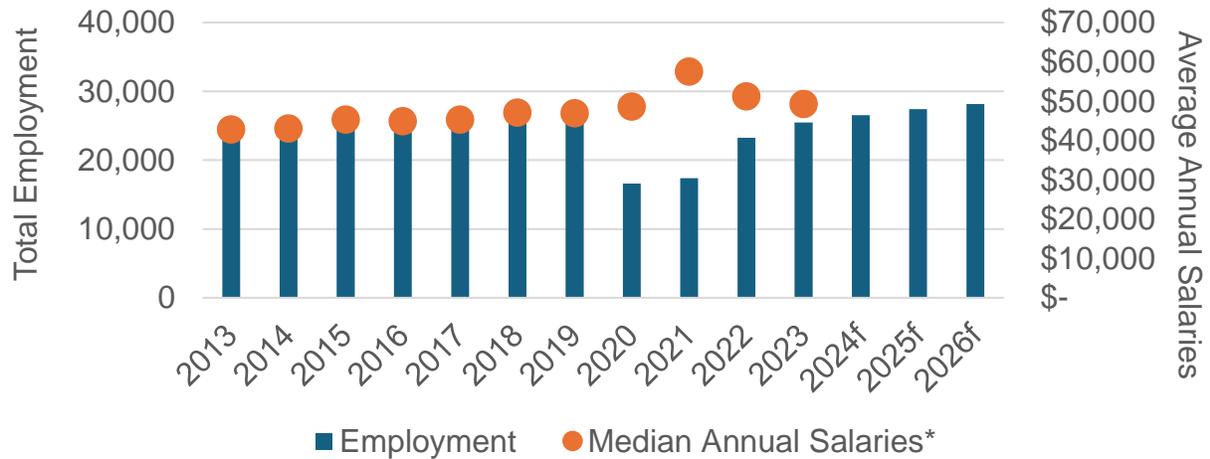
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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.visitanaheim.org/articles/post/national-travel-and-tourism-week/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://industry.visitcalifornia.com/research/economic-impact?sort=county&region=Orange>

4.3 percent below 2019 highs. Over the past decade, median annual salaries have increased from an inflation-adjusted \$42,780 in 2013 to \$49,309 in 2023.

*Orange County Employment and Average Annual Salaries of Accommodation Sector, 2013-2026f*



Source: Lightcast  
\*Inflation-adjusted to 2023

The top occupations in Orange County’s Accommodation sector have seen uneven growth since 2013. While providing comparatively lower median earnings, many of these occupations help to build important common and soft skills, skills which have become increasingly in-demand as employers look to fill middle-skill occupations.

*Top Accommodation Industry Occupations, 2023*

	Employment (2013)	Employment (2023)	Percent Change (2013 - 2023)	Median Earnings (2023)
Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	5,651	6,166	9%	\$36,148
Hotel, Motel, and Resort Clerks	2,440	2,752	13%	\$36,947
Waiters and Waitresses	2,088	1,498	(28%)	\$32,521
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	872	1,090	25%	\$48,901
Dining Room and Cafeteria Attendants and Bartender Helpers	1,006	892	(11%)	\$32,509

Source: Lightcast

*Food Services and Drinking Places (NAICS 722)*

**Industry Overview**

Similar to the Accommodation sector but not as pronounced, Food Services and Drinking Places employment in Orange County saw a considerable decline during the pandemic

but has since just completely recovered totaling 151,397 in 2023 compared to 151,039 in 2019. While the Accommodation sector had little recourse in dealing with pandemic-related restrictions, organizations in the Food Services and Drinking Places sector were able to leverage food ordering and delivery applications such as UberEats and DoorDash to stay connected to their customers.

A crucial component for visitors and tourists, vibrant restaurant options across a broad range of specialties help attract domestic visitors from neighboring counties and states. Orange County's diverse population, with heavy Asian influences in cities like Irvine to more Hispanic or Latino influences in cities like Santa Ana provides residents with a wide range of restaurant options. Effectively, this priority sector serves to empower local and regional communities through respectful cultural engagement, enabling business owners to showcase and share their regional or ethnic cuisine, and as a result, their culture with Orange County residents.

Orange County has also begun to innovate on eatery destinations creating developments such as 4<sup>th</sup> Street Market in Santa Ana, a public food hall and commercial kitchen space for new or innovative chefs looking to test ideas and concepts<sup>31</sup> or the Anaheim Packing District, another food hall for young chefs and entrepreneurs to show off their culinary skills or new menus<sup>32</sup>. Creating a landscape which fosters emerging technologies and innovation and also provides an environment for young chefs to become young entrepreneurs, especially in disinvested communities with diverse cultures and ethnicities, will serve to further attract new and innovative businesses but also elevate community identities and voices. These developments have proven to be especially popular for younger generations who are looking more for destinations which provide not only diverse eating options but also provide a strong sense of community and gathering.

Food Services and Drinking Places accounted for \$3.8 billion in travel-related spending in 2023 in Orange County, the largest contributor to travel-related spending of any sector.<sup>33</sup> Many organizations in this sector are also beginning to explore automation, especially fast-food restaurants such as McDonalds which opened its first nearly fully automated location in Fort Worth, Texas in late 2022.<sup>34</sup> As with other sectors, while this may cause a decline in demand for fast food workers, other more technical occupations will likely see considerable growth as these technologies are increasingly adopted.

## **Industry Employment and Wages**

Also seeing considerable impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, employment within the regional Food Services and Drinking Places sector dove 20.9 percent between 2019 and 2020, a decline of 31,495 jobs. As of 2023, employment in this sector has completely recovered totaling 151,397, 0.2 percent over 2019 highs. Between 2013 and 2023, the

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<sup>31</sup> <https://www.4thstreetmarket.com/mission>

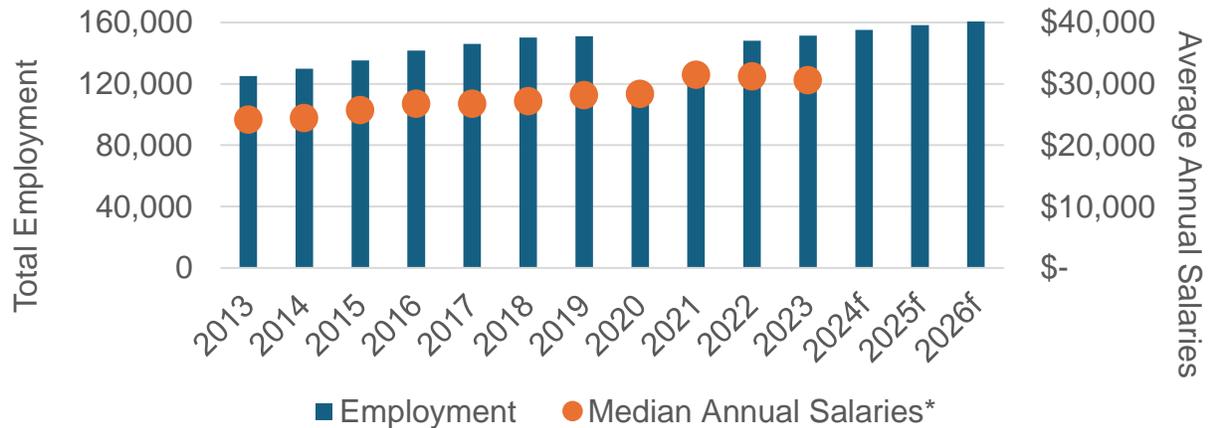
<sup>32</sup> <https://www.anaheimpackingdistrict.com/calendar>

<sup>33</sup> <https://industry.visitcalifornia.com/research/economic-impact?sort=county&region=Orange>

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.foxbusiness.com/technology/mcdonalds-unveils-first-automated-location-social-media-worried-will-cut-millions-jobs>

median annual salary for Food Services and Drinking Places increased from \$24,189 to \$30,629.

*Orange County Employment and Average Annual Salaries of Food Services and Drinking Places Sector, 2013-2026f*



Source: Lightcast  
\*Inflation-adjusted to 2023

Of the top occupations in this industry, Cooks, Fast Food saw the largest growth over the past decade increasing by 63 percent, followed by First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers (+33 percent), and Fast Food and Counter Workers (+27 percent). These occupations represent important rungs on the career ladder as they represent jobs with low barriers to entry crucial for workers who are entering or re-entering the workforce. These occupations also provide important common skills which can help workers when transferring to another field or occupation.

*Top Food Services and Drinking Places Industry Occupations, 2023*

	Employment (2013)	Employment (2023)	Percent Change (2013 - 2023)	Median Earnings (2023)
Fast Food and Counter Workers	29,225	37,172	27%	\$34,257
Waiters and Waitresses	23,784	20,870	(12%)	\$32,521
Cooks, Fast Food	10,595	17,314	63%	\$34,010
Cooks, Restaurant	13,491	13,363	(1%)	\$37,293
First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	7,295	9,667	33%	\$42,096

Source: Lightcast

### 3.a.i.2 - Increasing Economic Diversification and Resilience

Orange County has a long record of economic growth over many years, which has been accompanied by improvement in the general well-being of its residents, as represented by the high and rising income per capita of the county.

The county's growth trajectory stems in part from its diverse economic base, consisting of significant manufacturing sectors ranging from aerospace to medical devices, the large tourism segment of the county economy, construction and real estate, and high-tech industries. These industries have contributed to economic growth over time and will continue to do so over the next several years. Moreover, the county has several vibrant population-serving sectors that include health care, retail trade, personal services, and arts and entertainment, contributing to the quality of life of the county's residents.

Orange County's diverse economy also contributes to its resilience. The US EDA describes resilience as follows:

“...Economic resilience... [meaning,] to better prepare regions to anticipate, withstand, and bounce back from any type of shock, disruption, or stress it may experience... Establishing economic resilience in a local or regional economy requires the ability to anticipate risk, evaluate how that risk can impact key economic assets, and build a responsive capacity.”

The concept of economic resilience was first introduced decades ago, but little formal research was conducted until the years following the Great Recession, and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. Even so, research has largely been qualitative in nature. There is little empirical analysis on the effectiveness of resilience strategies per se, but there is research that documents the impacts of jobs programs, infrastructure programs, and other typical policy responses to economic downturns and other disruptions to the economy.

From an economist's perspective, macroeconomics -- that is, economics viewed at the national level -- has long had a set of “stabilization” policies and tools use during economic downturns, whether due to the business cycle or other non-economic events, such as a pandemic or large natural disaster. Economic resilience strategies may be viewed as stabilization policies that are intended to do the same at the local level. Some are “automatic stabilizers” while others involve discretionary policy choices.

Still, it is possible to lay out in broad terms the efforts a local jurisdiction or jurisdictions may pursue to increase the resilience of economy. Some may be specifically oriented to certain industries, small business, and segments of the workforce, while others may be oriented toward the overall economy.

While nearly all industries in a local economy must ride the ups and downs of economic cycles and other disruptions, health care and certain manufacturing industries tend to be more resilient, while construction, tourism, arts and entertainment, and other industries tend to be more pro-cyclical.

Resilience measures tend to fall into two categories

- Long-term proactive planning
- Short-term reaction and responses

A key feature of resilience is planning. Long-term measures must be put in place well ahead of time if they are to limit the downside of a shock to the economy. For example, it is known that unemployment rates are lower among better educated members of the workforce. Therefore, raising educational attainment of the workforce will generally lead to lower unemployment, including during downturns. But education takes time: the third-grade child of today will likely enter the workforce nine to 12 years from now.

Short-term measures are direct responses to the symptoms of the shock itself. There were several short-term responses to the pandemic at all levels of government, including stimulus checks to support the consumer spending of taxpayers, unemployment insurance to workers who lost their jobs, and small business support programs enable business owners to keep their doors open and keep employees on payroll.

While the short-term measures may be responses in real time, many of them require advance planning, and anticipation to be effective. For example, federal and state government agencies often allocate funds to infrastructure projects during downturns to mitigate job losses. These projects generate employment, wages, and economic activity at the local level, serving as a backstop by limiting downturns in economic activity. If the county and its communities can identify shovel-ready public infrastructure projects up front, then they can act quickly when those funds become available, submitting proposals in a timely fashion in hopes of receiving funding for one or more projects.

Orange County's California Jobs First priority sectors are a subset of the county's leading industries: health care and social assistance, leisure and hospitality, manufacturing (specifically, medical devices and computers), education, and construction.

Manufacturing, construction, and the tourism component of leisure and hospitality are defined as traded or export-oriented sectors. Traded sectors sell products or services to customers outside the county. The proceeds from those sales expand the economic "pie" by generating jobs, income and economic activity that otherwise would not enter the county economy. Much of the income that is earned by workers in these sectors enters the local economy when the workers and their households purchase items in stores, enjoy meals at restaurants, and patronize service establishments such as hair salons or fitness centers. In doing so, they create a ripple or multiplier effect throughout the local economy, with benefits to industries beyond the traded industries themselves.

The health care, education, and leisure and hospitality sectors are generally viewed as local population serving sectors, meaning that they provide medical services, dining experiences, and education to the county's residents, thereby contributing to their quality of life and the character of the communities in which they reside. Once workers earn

income, it circulates within the economy, creating jobs and economic activity at population serving establishments.

However, it is more accurate to view these Orange County sectors as hybrids, in the sense that some industries generally serve the local population, others generally serve nonresidents, and some serve both residents and nonresidents. For example, health care institutions such as Hoag and UCI Medical have a regional presence that goes beyond county borders. Similarly, retail hubs such as South Coast Plaza attract shoppers from adjacent counties in addition to county residents. Finally, tourist destinations such as Disneyland and numerous other attractions serve visitors from all over the country and the world even as they are patronized by local residents.

Manufacturing, construction, and tourism tend to vary cyclically with the ups and downs of the economy. However, the individual priority industries in the California Jobs First strategy are expected to follow a positive growth trajectory over the foreseeable future. Demand for medical devices and health care will hold steady as the population grows and ages. Computer manufacturing is somewhat different in that local firms must adapt as the global industry changes in the coming years, especially with the growth of artificial intelligence and applications across industries. Design and research & development may remain in the county, but actual manufacturing may shift elsewhere. And with lower interest rates expected in the coming years, construction activity is expected to pick up. Construction activity is interest-rate sensitive, so as the Federal Reserve Bank gradually reduces key policy rates in the next year or so, activity in this sector should pick up. As for tourism, Orange County is known nationally and globally as a destination, and as such, it should exhibit upward growth over the foreseeable future.

Population-serving sectors such as health services, retail trade, and education rely on a combination of population and income growth to increase over time. After declining in recent years, Orange County's population is projected to stabilize in 2024 and exhibit slight upward growth of 0.2% to 0.3% over the next few years. As for income, county household income exceeds that of the state and has matched or exceeded the state's income growth trajectory. Taken together, gains in income and population will fuel growth in the population service sectors of the county economy.

One caveat applies to education. The school-age population in the state and the county has decreased in recent years, mainly as a result of demographics. Recent age cohorts such as Generation Z and Generation Alpha are small compared to earlier generations such as the Boomers and Millennials, with Generation X somewhat smaller than both of these groups. The current and anticipated number of school-age children is small compared to these previous groups. As such, the fate of education in the coming years depends on the extent to which education institutions (public and private) are able to go beyond their traditional student demographics and engage individuals in career development and lifelong learning experiences.

## Target Sector Strategies

The Target Sector Strategies take an innovative community development approach centered on equity, employing a cross-sectional methodology to address the diverse needs of marginalized and disinvested communities through targeted interventions. This strategy aims to amplify equitable access to opportunities across various sectors, recognizing the widening disparities in today's economic landscape. By focusing on specific community segments rather than applying a one-size-fits-all solution, the strategy ensures that all members benefit according to their unique circumstances, ultimately creating a more level playing field and breaking down barriers that historically hinder access to education, employment, housing, and overall quality of life.

### *1. Creating Work-Based Learning Opportunities in High-Demand Industries*

Support efforts by local educational institutions and non-profits, especially those serving disadvantaged communities, to connect with local employers to create and expand work-based learning opportunities, such as pre-employment training, soft skills training, registered apprenticeships and internships, to build career pathways in high demand and just transition industries, such as AI, clean renewables and healthcare.

### **Data-Driven Approach to Addressing Inequity:**

Our strategy is informed by crucial data highlighting disparities in youth engagement and poverty rates, which reveal deeply problematic trends:

1. **Disconnected Youth:** Despite overall increasing enrollment rates across the county, the rate of "Disconnected Youth" - those neither enrolled in education nor working - remains alarmingly high. This issue disproportionately affects certain racial and ethnic groups<sup>35</sup>:
  - Black or African American: have the highest disconnection rate at 22.3%
  - Other Races: 14.7%
  - American Indian or Alaska Native: 14.0%
  - Japanese: 13.3%
  - Two or More Races: 12.5%
  - White: 10.9%
  - Three or More Races: 9.9%
  - Other Asian/Pacific Islander: 8.9%
  - Chinese: 6.1%

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<sup>35</sup> Disconnected youth by race (ACS 2021; 1-year estimate) based on ages 16-24 within the state of California according to the latest [report](#) by California's Opportunity Youth Network.

2. These statistics are deeply concerning as they indicate a persistent cycle of disadvantage. Disconnected youth are at higher risk of long-term unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion, perpetuating intergenerational inequity.
3. Child Poverty: A third of the region's children live in homes reporting income below the federal poverty line, with high concentrations in areas predominantly populated by minorities. This data is particularly troubling as childhood poverty has far-reaching consequences, affecting educational outcomes, health, and future economic prospects.

The persistence of these issues suggests that current systems are failing to provide equitable opportunities for all youth, particularly those from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds. These statistics are more than just numbers; they represent a critical failure in our social and economic systems. The high rates of disconnected youth, particularly among minority groups, have far-reaching consequences for our entire community:

1. Economic Impact: Each disconnected youth represents lost productivity and potential. This translates to reduced economic growth, lower tax revenues, and increased public spending on social services and healthcare.
2. Social Cohesion: High rates of youth disconnection can lead to increased social tension, crime rates, and community instability. This affects not just the disconnected individuals, but the safety and well-being of all residents.
3. Innovation Gap: When a significant portion of our youth is disconnected, we lose out on their unique perspectives and potential innovations. This hampers our region's ability to compete in an increasingly global and technology-driven economy.
4. Perpetuation of Inequality: The disproportionate rates of disconnection among minority groups reinforce existing racial and ethnic disparities, making it harder to achieve true equity and social justice in our community.
5. Future Workforce Challenges: As our economy evolves, requiring more skilled workers, a large population of disconnected youth could lead to critical labor shortages in key industries, affecting our region's long-term economic viability.

## *2. Growing Mid-Level Technical Jobs and Developing Training Programs*

Grow mid-level technical jobs that do not require a four-year degree in emerging industries and develop the necessary training programs, such as certifications and credentials, and leverage organizations such as the Orange Workforce Alliance to do so.

The second key strategy of our Target Sector approach focuses on growing mid-level technical jobs that don't require a four-year degree in emerging industries. This strategy

builds directly upon our first strategy of expanding work-based learning opportunities, creating a comprehensive approach to improving equity in disinvested communities.

While the first strategy aims to create entry points and foundational skills through apprenticeships and internships, this second strategy provides the next step in the career ladder by developing concrete job opportunities and specialized training programs. Together, these strategies create a seamless pathway from initial engagement to sustainable, well-paying careers.

**This approach significantly improves equity by addressing several critical gaps and needs in disinvested communities:**

1. **Education Gap:** By focusing on jobs that don't require a four-year degree, we're providing viable career paths for individuals who may face barriers to traditional higher education, whether due to financial constraints, time limitations, or other factors.
2. **Skills Gap:** The specialized training programs we're developing directly address the skills gap often found in disinvested communities, equipping residents with the specific technical skills needed for growing industries.
3. **Opportunity Gap:** By targeting emerging industries and creating new mid-level technical jobs, we're expanding the range of opportunities available to residents of disinvested communities, who have historically been excluded from or underrepresented in these sectors.
4. **Wage Gap:** Mid-level technical jobs typically offer higher wages than entry-level positions, helping to address income disparities that disproportionately affect disinvested communities.
5. **Advancement Gap:** The connection between initial work-based learning and more advanced technical jobs creates a clear path for career advancement, addressing the lack of upward mobility often experienced in disinvested communities.

By addressing these gaps, our strategy aims to create a more equitable economic landscape, where residents of disinvested communities have access to the training, skills, and job opportunities needed to achieve long-term financial stability and career success. This comprehensive approach not only addresses immediate employment needs but also works towards breaking cycles of poverty and underemployment that have historically affected these communities.

**Strategic Approach:**

1. **Focus on Emerging Industries for Economic Growth:** Our strategy targets growing sectors that offer substantial opportunities for mid-level technical jobs. These include:

- Ambulatory Health Care Services
  - Hospitals
  - Social Assistance
  - Computer and Electronic Product Manufacturing
  - Miscellaneous Manufacturing
  - Education Services
  - Construction of Buildings
  - Specialty Trade Contractors
  - Accommodation
  - Food Services and Drinking Places
2. By prioritizing these sectors, we aim to create new avenues for economic mobility in disinvested communities and contribute to overall regional economic growth.
  3. Developing Accessible Training Programs: We're committed to developing and promoting certifications and credentials that align with these industries' needs, with a strong emphasis on accessibility. This approach provides pathways to well-paying jobs without the time and financial burden of a four-year degree, which can be particularly beneficial for residents of disinvested communities who may face barriers to traditional higher education. Key considerations include:
    - Offering flexible scheduling to accommodate working adults
    - Locating training centers in or near disinvested communities to improve access
    - Offering financial assistance or scholarships for training programs
  4. Creating Clear Pathways for Advancement: Our strategy doesn't just focus on entry-level positions but creates a clear trajectory for career growth. This includes:
    - Developing tiered training programs that allow for progressive skill development
    - Working with employers to create transparent career ladders within targeted industries
    - Providing ongoing support and resources for continued professional development
  5. Monitoring and Addressing Economic Gaps: We're committed to continually assessing the economic impact of our programs on disinvested communities. This involves:
    - Regular data collection and analysis on program participation and outcomes, focusing on economic indicators
    - Adjusting strategies based on findings to ensure we're effectively reaching and benefiting economically disadvantaged areas
    - Setting specific goals for increasing economic mobility and job placement rates in targeted industries

By implementing this economically focused approach, we aim to not only grow mid-level technical jobs but to ensure that these opportunities are accessible to and benefit residents of disinvested communities. This strategy is designed to address economic disparities, create new pathways for financial stability, and contribute to the long-term economic vitality of our entire region.

### *3. Expanding Awareness of Diverse Employment Opportunities*

The third key strategy of our Target Sector approach focuses on ensuring that all high school-aged and adult students are exposed to a wide range of employment opportunities. This strategy aims to broaden horizons and create pathways to economic stability for individuals from diverse educational backgrounds, including those in non-college tracks.

#### **Strategic Approach:**

1. **Comprehensive Career Exposure:** We're committed to showcasing a diverse array of employment opportunities across various sectors. This approach ensures that students, including those not pursuing traditional college paths, are aware of the full spectrum of career possibilities available to them.
2. **Family Engagement:** Recognizing the crucial role of family support in educational and career decisions, our strategy extends to engaging parents, guardians, and families. This involves:
  - Providing information sessions for families
  - Ensuring language accessibility in all communications
  - Offering resources to help families support their students' education and career pathways
3. **Adult Education Focus:** Our strategy acknowledges the unique needs and challenges of adult learners. Key considerations include:
  - Flexible learning options to accommodate work and family responsibilities
  - Career counseling tailored to adult learners' experiences and goals
  - Partnerships with local employers to create direct pathways from education to employment

#### **Economic Impact and Addressing Disparities:**

This strategy is designed to address significant economic disparities in Orange County:

1. **Educational Attainment Gap:** Orange County has a considerable number of adult residents with less than a high school degree. Educational attainment varies widely across the population, with some groups having high rates of bachelor's degree

attainment while others have high rates of individuals without a high school diploma.

2. **Intergenerational Economic Mobility:** By increasing access to workforce attainment and mobility across age groups, we aim to improve the income of low-wage adults. This has a dual benefit:
  - Directly improving the economic situation of adult learners
  - Indirectly benefiting children living in low-income households by improving their parents' earning potential
3. **Addressing Adult Student Challenges:** Adult students often face unique challenges compared to traditional students:
  - They're more likely to be seeking higher wages to support themselves and their families
  - Many are parents, meaning their educational success can directly impact their children's economic situation
  - By improving outcomes for adult students, we can simultaneously address child poverty

### **Long-Term Community Benefits:**

1. **Increased Economic Stability:** Providing pathways to stable, well-paying jobs can lead to increased economic stability for families and communities.
2. **Breaking Cycles of Poverty:** By improving educational and career outcomes for adult learners, we're creating opportunities for families to break out of cycles of poverty.
3. **Community Economic Growth:** As more residents access better employment opportunities, it can lead to increased economic activity and stability in previously disinvested areas.

This strategy recognizes that improving economic outcomes requires a multi-faceted approach that considers both youth and adult learners, engages families, and provides exposure to diverse career paths. By implementing these measures, we aim to create a more equitable economic landscape that provides opportunities for all residents, regardless of their educational background or current economic situation.

### ***4. Fostering Innovation and Sustainable Development***

The fourth key strategy of our Target Sector approach focuses on establishing and expanding innovation hubs, green innovation zones, and technology parks to benefit existing and new businesses. This strategy aims to encourage ethical research and development of new technologies, AI, and green innovation by small businesses, addressing both equity and climate concerns.

### Strategic Approach:

1. Creation of Innovation Ecosystems: We're committed to developing and expanding:
  - Innovation hubs
  - Green innovation zones
  - Technology parks
2. These specialized areas will serve as incubators for small businesses, fostering collaboration and driving forward-thinking solutions.
3. Focus on Ethical and Sustainable Development: Our strategy emphasizes:
  - Ethical research practices
  - Development of new technologies, including AI
  - Green innovation to address climate challenges
4. Empowering Small Businesses: By providing resources and spaces dedicated to innovation, we aim to level the playing field for small businesses, allowing them to compete and contribute meaningfully to technological and environmental advancements.

### Addressing Environmental and Health Disparities:

This strategy recognizes and aims to address the concentrated impact of environmental issues on certain communities:

1. Concentrated Environmental Challenges: Heat, air quality, and related health impacts are often concentrated in specific areas, typically those that have historically faced economic disadvantages.
2. Workforce Investment in Affected Communities: By directing workforce investment towards these communities, we aim to:
  - Increase personal investment in local environmental outcomes
  - Empower the local workforce to address sectors that directly impact their quality of life
  - Create a positive feedback loop where improved environmental conditions lead to better health outcomes and increased economic activity

### Long-Term Community Benefits:

1. Improved Environmental Outcomes: By fostering green innovation, we aim to develop and implement solutions that directly address local environmental challenges while also helping to drive adoption of green technologies or processes by other businesses and industries.

2. **Enhanced Quality of Life:** Addressing environmental issues can lead to significant improvements in quality of life and potentially increase life expectancy in affected communities.
3. **Economic Revitalization:** The creation of innovation hubs and technology parks can spur economic growth, attracting investment and creating job opportunities in areas that may have previously been overlooked.
4. **Skill Development and Job Creation:** These innovation ecosystems will create opportunities for local residents to develop skills in emerging fields, potentially leading to higher-paying, future-proof jobs.
5. **Community Empowerment:** By involving local communities in the development of solutions to their environmental challenges, we foster a sense of ownership and empowerment.

This strategy recognizes the interconnected nature of environmental, health, and economic challenges. By creating spaces for innovation and directing investment towards communities most affected by environmental issues, we aim to address multiple challenges simultaneously. This approach not only promises to improve local environmental conditions but also to create economic opportunities and enhance overall quality of life in these communities.

The success of this strategy will be measured not just in terms of technological advancements or business growth, but also in tangible improvements to air quality, reduction in heat impacts, and positive health outcomes for residents. By aligning economic development with environmental sustainability and community well-being, we're working towards a more equitable and resilient future for all residents.

### 3.a.ii – Aligning Job Quality with Access, Equity, and Climate

## **Aligning Job Quality with Access, Equity, and Climate: A Strategic Response for Orange County**

### *Introduction*

Orange County, like many regions across the United States, stands at the crossroads of significant socio-economic and environmental transformations. These changes, driven by technological advancements, evolving industry demands, and pressing climate imperatives, necessitate a strategic approach to workforce development. To foster a resilient, inclusive job market that promotes high-quality employment opportunities, ensures equitable access, and incorporates climate considerations, we must develop a comprehensive strategy. The following response elaborates on such a strategy, focusing on work-based learning opportunities, mid-level technical job development, exposure to diverse employment opportunities, and support for K-16 education. Additionally, it addresses local workforce investment, technical assistance and resources for businesses, small business and entrepreneurial support, and the facilitation of strategic collaboration. This integrated approach aligns with the goals outlined in the California Jobs First Regional Plan Part 2 document, aiming to drive equitable economic growth and sustainability in Orange County.

### *Job Quality and Access*

#### **Creating and Expanding Work-Based Learning Opportunities**

The first step in aligning the workforce with available jobs is to expand work-based learning opportunities. This initiative involves collaboration with local educational institutions and non-profits to connect with employers for pre-employment training, soft skills training, apprenticeships, and internships. By supporting educational institutions, including K-14 schools and training centers, as well as non-profits, we can ensure that educational programs are tailored to meet the specific needs of the job market.

Employer-led initiatives are essential in this context. By allowing employers to guide the development of training programs, we can ensure that the skills being taught are directly relevant to industry needs. Partnerships with training centers, K-12 schools, and community colleges are vital to understanding current needs and identifying gaps in existing programs. The measurable success of these initiatives can be gauged by the number of new training programs introduced and the number of participants enrolled. Conducting audits of current locations, programs, and enrollments will help identify areas for improvement.

Ultimately, these efforts aim to increase job readiness, particularly in disadvantaged and disenfranchised communities, thereby improving their economic mobility and overall well-being. The development of career pathways in high-demand industries like AI, clean renewables, and healthcare, focusing on accessibility for disadvantaged communities, is crucial. Aligning with the 10 CERF Priority sectors, such as Ambulatory Health Care

Services, Hospital, Social Assistance, Computer Electronic Product Manufacturing, Miscellaneous Manufacturing, Education Services, Construction of Buildings, Specialty Trade Contractors, Accommodation, and Food Services and Drinking Places, will ensure that the jobs created are aligned with industry needs and offer meaningful career opportunities.

### **Training Programs for Lower-Wage Employees**

Investing in training for lower-wage employees is essential in improving job quality and providing access to higher-paying jobs. This initiative involves helping lower-wage employees understand their rights, organize for better standards, and secure higher-paying jobs in priority sectors. By educating employees on their rights and career advancement opportunities, particularly in sustainable industries, we can empower lower-wage workers and enhance their economic mobility.

Measurable outputs for this initiative include the number of existing and training programs, as well as the number of participants enrolled. Assessing program alignment with employer needs and identifying gaps will help guide training development, sunseting, and adjustments. The ultimate outcome is improved access to healthcare, retirement benefits, career advancement, and safe working conditions, with an emphasis on equitable access for disinvested communities.

### **Developing Mid-Level Technical Jobs**

Developing mid-level technical jobs that do not require a four-year degree is another crucial component of our strategy. By creating necessary training programs, we can ensure that these jobs are accessible to a broader range of individuals. This approach is particularly beneficial for disenfranchised communities, providing them with viable career paths that offer living wages and opportunities for advancement.

Measurable outputs for this initiative include the number of existing and projected technical jobs with less than a four-year degree, as well as assessing demographic accessibility of those occupying these jobs. Assessing the skillsets needed by employers to improve and expand on mid-level technical jobs aligned with employer expectations will help in fine-tuning these programs. The ultimate outcome is improved access to healthcare, retirement benefits, career advancement, and safe working conditions, with an emphasis on equitable access for disinvested communities.

### **Exposure to Employment Opportunities**

Exposing high school-aged and adult students to diverse employment opportunities is essential in preparing them for the job market. This initiative involves ensuring that students are exposed to employment opportunities in various industries, including non-college tracks. By assessing the current landscape of job fairs and hiring centers, we can identify existing opportunities and gaps.

Ensuring language accessibility for families is a critical aspect of this initiative. By confirming appropriate languages for different communities and industries, we can support career pathways more effectively. Increasing the number of career exposure events and participants will help students make informed career choices and better prepare them for the workforce. Measurable outputs for this initiative include the number of existing K-16 programs (in high schools, adult education, and other adult-focused training programs) that incorporate apprenticeship and career-based programming. Additionally, tracking the demographic characteristics of those in these programs will provide insights into their inclusivity and reach. Assessing existing programs and the needs of employers to improve and expand on job/employer-informed opportunities and their alignment with employer expectations will help in developing more effective career exposure initiatives.

The ultimate outcome of this initiative is that students and their families understand and support education and career pathways, with adequate language accessibility. This will ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have the information and resources they need to pursue fulfilling careers.

### **Innovation Hubs and Technology Parks**

Establishing and expanding innovation hubs and technology parks is essential for fostering ethical research and development in new technologies, AI, green innovation, and alignment with 10 CERF Priority sectors. These hubs can serve as centers for collaboration, bringing together researchers, businesses, and policymakers to drive innovation and sustainability.

Measurable outputs for this initiative include the number of existing entities (established and developing) by sector that could contribute and benefit from hub environments. Evaluating metrics of awareness, participation, program development, and community engagement will help determine the impact of these hubs. The ultimate outcome is the creation and retention of high-quality jobs and career advancement in cutting-edge industries.

### *Closing Workforce and Demographic Gaps*

#### **Analysis and Tailored Training Programs**

Analyzing workforce and demographic trends to create tailored training programs and inclusive recruitment practices is crucial for closing workforce gaps. This initiative involves conducting community assessments by race/ethnicity, education level, industry profession, and geographic location to determine need. By understanding the specific needs and challenges faced by different communities, we can develop more effective training programs and recruitment practices.

Measurable outputs for this initiative include the creation of programs with the Orange Workforce Alliance that collect demographic information and assess skillset/education to determine the best educational opportunity. Mapping the impact of these programs, such

as increases in salary, changes in job, and qualitative feedback on the betterment of life, will provide insights into their effectiveness. The ultimate outcome is closing gaps and achieving universal service levels, with outcomes disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and income.

### **Equitable Access**

Focusing on historically disinvested communities, providing language accessibility, and removing cultural barriers are essential for ensuring equitable access to job opportunities. This initiative involves utilizing current work that has identified disinvested communities, giving space for community voice and incorporating access based on location to workforce/training resources.

Measurable outputs for this initiative include determining a plan of outreach by community and industry, which measures awareness, participation, impact, and outcomes by community. The ultimate outcome is ensuring equitable access to job opportunities for all communities, particularly those that have been historically marginalized.

### *Supporting Workers in At-Risk Industries*

#### **Preventing Displacement**

Investing in retraining and reskilling programs for workers in at-risk industries is essential for preventing displacement and ensuring smooth transitions to high-quality jobs in emerging sectors. This initiative involves identifying at-risk industries and developing targeted retraining programs that align with the needs of emerging sectors.

Measurable outputs for this initiative include the number of retraining programs developed and the number of workers enrolled. Assessing the effectiveness of these programs in terms of job placement and career advancement will help in fine-tuning them. The ultimate outcome is ensuring that workers in at-risk industries are not left behind but instead have opportunities to transition to sustainable, high-quality jobs.

#### **Retaining High-Quality Jobs**

Collaborating with employers to improve existing job quality is crucial for retaining high-quality jobs and preventing the displacement of incumbent workers. This initiative involves working with employers to identify areas for improvement in job quality, such as working conditions, benefits, and career advancement opportunities.

Measurable outputs for this initiative include the number of employers engaged and the number of job quality improvement initiatives implemented. Assessing the impact of these initiatives on worker retention and job satisfaction will provide insights into their effectiveness. The ultimate outcome is preventing the displacement of incumbent workers by enhancing job quality and ensuring that existing jobs remain viable and attractive.

## *Equity*

### **Tailored Training Programs and Clear Pathways**

Improving accessibility to training by exposing high school-aged and adult students to employment opportunities in various industries is essential for creating clear pathways for individuals from disinvested communities to attain necessary education or skills. This initiative involves promoting apprenticeship programs and career awareness, particularly for disinvested communities.

Measurable outputs for this initiative align with the above “Exposure to Employment Opportunities” objective. The ultimate outcome is ensuring that individuals from disinvested communities have clear pathways to attain the education or skills needed for fulfilling careers.

### **Inclusive Recruitment Practices**

Promoting inclusive recruitment practices and broad career awareness is essential for ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their background, have access to job opportunities. This initiative involves promoting apprenticeship programs and career awareness, particularly for disinvested communities.

Measurable outputs for this initiative align with the above “Creating and Expanding Work-Based Learning Opportunities” and “Training Programs for Lower-Wage Employees” objectives. By assessing the diversity of recruitment pools and tracking the participation rates of underrepresented groups, we can ensure that recruitment practices are inclusive. The ultimate outcome is a more diverse and inclusive workforce, where individuals from all backgrounds have equitable access to job opportunities and career advancement.

## *Climate Considerations*

### **Green Jobs and Renewable Energy**

Promoting jobs in green industries and renewable energy is essential for aligning workforce development with climate goals. This initiative involves creating training programs and career pathways in sectors such as clean renewables, energy efficiency, and sustainable agriculture. By focusing on industries that contribute to environmental sustainability, we can support economic growth while addressing climate change.

Measurable outputs for this initiative include the number of training programs developed in green industries and the number of participants enrolled. Assessing the impact of these programs on job placement and career advancement in the green sector will provide insights into their effectiveness. The ultimate outcome is the creation of high-quality jobs that support environmental sustainability and provide economic opportunities for communities.

## **Sustainable Practices in Existing Industries**

Encouraging sustainable practices in existing industries is crucial for reducing environmental impact and promoting long-term economic resilience. This initiative involves working with employers to adopt sustainable practices, such as energy efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable sourcing, across various sectors. The effectiveness of implementation is accompanied by providing training and resources that don't financially burden the employer.

Measurable outputs for this initiative include the number of employers adopting sustainable practices and the specific sustainability initiatives implemented. Assessing the impact of these practices on reducing environmental impact and improving business operations will provide insights into their effectiveness. The ultimate outcome is a more sustainable and resilient economy where businesses contribute positively to environmental goals.

## **Climate Resilience in Job Planning**

Incorporating climate resilience into job planning is essential for ensuring that the workforce can adapt to the impacts of climate change. This initiative involves analyzing climate risks and developing job training programs that equip workers with the skills needed to thrive in a changing climate. This includes preparing for jobs in climate adaptation, disaster response, and resilient infrastructure development. The effectiveness of implementation is accompanied by providing training and resources that don't financially burden the employer.

Measurable outputs for this initiative include the number of climate resilience training programs developed and the number of participants enrolled. Assessing the effectiveness of these programs in terms of job placement and career advancement in climate-resilient sectors will help in fine-tuning them. The ultimate outcome is a workforce that is well-prepared to address the challenges of climate change and contribute to building a resilient economy.

## *Strategic Collaboration*

### **Local Workforce Investment**

Investing locally in workforce development is crucial for ensuring that training programs and job opportunities align with the needs of the community. This initiative involves collaborating with local governments, educational institutions, and businesses to develop targeted workforce investment strategies.

Measurable outputs for this initiative include the amount of investment in local workforce programs and the number of partnerships formed. Assessing the impact of these investments on job creation and economic growth will provide insights into their effectiveness. The ultimate outcome is a locally-driven workforce development strategy that supports economic growth and addresses the specific needs of the community.

## **Technical Assistance and Resources for Businesses**

Providing technical assistance and resources for businesses is essential for supporting their growth and ensuring they can offer high-quality jobs. This initiative involves offering support in areas such as business planning, financial management, and workforce development.

Measurable outputs for this initiative include the number of businesses receiving technical assistance and the specific resources provided. Assessing the impact of this assistance on business growth and job quality will provide insights into its effectiveness. The ultimate outcome is a thriving local business community that offers high-quality jobs and contributes to economic growth.

## **Small Business and Entrepreneurial Support**

Supporting small and family-owned businesses and entrepreneurs is crucial for fostering innovation and job creation. This initiative addresses unique challenges such as succession planning, conflict resolution and regulatory and financial barriers by providing access to capital, mentorship, and training programs. Special focus should be placed on family-owned businesses, with additional support or academic programs such as California State University, Fullerton's Center for Family Business, an educational forum designed to connect family-owned businesses to create new relationships or exchange information.

Measurable outputs for this initiative include the number of small businesses and entrepreneurs supported and the specific resources provided. Assessing the impact of this support on business growth and job creation will provide insights into its effectiveness. The ultimate outcome is a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem that drives economic growth and creates high-quality jobs.

## **Facilitating Strategic Collaboration**

Facilitating strategic collaboration among various stakeholders, including government agencies, educational institutions, non-profits, and businesses, is essential for creating a cohesive workforce development strategy. This initiative involves forming strategic partnerships and fostering collaboration to address workforce challenges and create opportunities for economic growth.

Measurable outputs for this initiative include the number of strategic partnerships formed and the specific collaborative initiatives implemented. Assessing the impact of these collaborations on workforce development and economic growth will provide insights into their effectiveness. The ultimate outcome is a collaborative and integrated approach to workforce development that leverages the strengths and resources of all stakeholders.

## *Conclusion*

Aligning job quality with access, equity, and climate considerations is essential for fostering a resilient and inclusive economy in Orange County. By creating and expanding work-based learning opportunities, developing mid-level technical jobs, exposing students to diverse employment opportunities, and supporting workers in at-risk industries, we can ensure that all individuals have access to high-quality jobs and career advancement.

Addressing workforce and demographic gaps through tailored training programs, inclusive recruitment practices, and equitable access initiatives is crucial for promoting social and economic equity. Emphasizing climate considerations by promoting green jobs, sustainable practices, and climate resilience in job planning aligns workforce development with environmental sustainability goals.

Investing locally in workforce development, providing technical assistance and resources for businesses, supporting small business and entrepreneurial ventures, and facilitating strategic collaboration among stakeholders are essential strategies for creating a cohesive and effective workforce development framework.

The ultimate goal is to create a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable economy where all individuals have the opportunity to thrive. By aligning job quality with access, equity, and climate considerations, Orange County can serve as a model for other regions, demonstrating how strategic workforce development can drive economic growth, social equity, and environmental sustainability. Through collaborative efforts and a commitment to continuous improvement, we can build a brighter future for all residents of Orange County.

### 3.a.iii – Workforce Development

## **Response to Call to Action: Alignment with Job Quality & Access, Equity, and Climate**

### *Introduction*

Orange County is at a pivotal juncture where aligning job quality with access, equity, and climate considerations can drive sustainable economic growth and inclusivity. This response outlines a comprehensive strategy to prioritize high-quality jobs through targeted sector strategies, workforce development, and strategic collaboration. By focusing on matching skills to available jobs, addressing talent and recruitment challenges, and fostering partnerships, we aim to build a resilient and inclusive economy. This response delves into the outlined strategy, providing a detailed explanation of the actions, implementations, measurable outputs, and anticipated outcomes.

### *Matching Skills to Available Jobs*

#### **Work-Based Learning Opportunities**

To bridge the gap between education and employment, it is essential to support educational institutions (K-14 schools and training centers) and non-profits in connecting with local employers, including industry associations and unions. This initiative involves expanding pre-employment training, soft skills training, registered apprenticeships, and internships in high-demand industries such as AI, renewable energy, and the ten CERF Priority sectors (Ambulatory Health Care Services, Hospitals, Social Assistance, Computer and Electronic Product Manufacturing, Miscellaneous Manufacturing, Education Services, Building Construction, Specialty Trade Contractors, Accommodation, and Food Services and Drinking Places).

This expansion must be employer-led to ensure that the skillsets developed align with industry needs. Partnerships with training centers, K-12 schools, and community colleges are crucial to understanding current needs and identifying areas that fall short. The success of this initiative can be measured by the number of new or adapted training programs and the number of participants enrolled. Conducting audits of current training locations, accessibility, programs, and enrollment will help identify gaps and areas for improvement.

The expected outcome is increased job readiness in disadvantaged and disenfranchised communities, providing these individuals with the skills and opportunities necessary to secure stable employment. Moreover, we anticipate that these efforts will foster greater engagement between educational institutions and industries, creating a feedback loop that ensures the training provided remains relevant and responsive to the changing economic landscape.

## **Mid-Level Technical Jobs**

Developing mid-level technical jobs in emerging industries is essential for creating accessible career paths that do not require a four-year degree. This initiative should focus on the ten CERF Priority Sectors, such as Ambulatory Health Care Services. Guided by partnerships with industry leaders, technical job creation must be driven by both current demand and the need for a skilled labor force.

Establishing certification and credential programs tailored to industry requirements is crucial. By working with industry partners to identify high-need certifications and credentials, we can ensure that the programs developed are both relevant and valuable. The number of certifications awarded will serve as a key metric, and it is important to align these certifications with job availability to prevent surpluses or gaps.

This initiative aims to increase access to mid-level technical jobs, particularly benefiting disenfranchised communities by providing them with viable career paths that do not necessitate a four-year degree. Additionally, we will establish strong mentorship and support systems to help individuals navigate these career paths, ensuring they have the guidance needed to succeed and advance.

## **Exposure to Employment Opportunities**

Exposing high school-aged and adult students to diverse employment opportunities is essential for broadening their career horizons. This effort involves evaluating existing job fairs, hiring centers, and other opportunities to identify and address gaps. Ensuring language accessibility for families supporting career pathways is crucial; identifying the appropriate languages for each community and industry will enhance the initiative's effectiveness.

We will track the number of career exposure events and participants, setting goals to increase exposure by community, location, and industry. The expected outcome is greater awareness and preparation for various career paths among students, leading to informed career choices and improved job readiness. This exposure will also help demystify certain industries and roles, making them more accessible and appealing to a broader range of students.

## **Support for K-16 Education**

Aligning federal and state programs through OC Pathways' K-16 Education Collaborative is essential for creating seamless educational pathways. Building partnerships between educational institutions and local employers will facilitate this alignment. The number of partnerships formed will serve as a key metric. The anticipated outcome is the development of seamless pathways to living-wage jobs, ensuring that students are workforce-ready upon graduation.

To achieve this, we will also focus on integrating real-world experiences into the curriculum, such as project-based learning and industry-sponsored challenges. This

approach will help students develop practical skills and understand how their education applies to real-world scenarios, enhancing their employability and readiness for the workforce.

## *Addressing Talent and Recruitment*

### **Local Workforce Investment**

Investing in training for lower-wage employees is essential for enhancing job quality and improving access to higher-paying positions. Educating employees about their rights and career advancement opportunities in sustainable industries will empower them to seek better employment conditions and opportunities. The effectiveness of these efforts will be measured by tracking the number of training sessions conducted and the participants involved.

Developing a partnership model to determine who will conduct the training and how to support both employees and employers will further enhance the initiative's effectiveness. The expected outcome is improved job quality and increased access to higher-paying jobs for lower-wage employees. This not only benefits the individuals but also contributes to a more robust and equitable economy by reducing income disparity and promoting upward mobility.

### **Technical Assistance and Resources**

Providing training resources tailored to economic needs will support new businesses in transitioning to a carbon-neutral economy. By identifying industries with the shortest path to achieving carbon-neutral objectives and targeting areas with the most significant impact, we can prioritize our efforts effectively. Forming partnerships will be crucial in facilitating these transitions.

We will measure success by the number of businesses supported. The anticipated outcome is increased business creation and sustainability, particularly in emerging green industries and those with substantial long-term growth potential. This initiative will also include providing guidance on best practices for sustainability, helping businesses not only meet regulatory requirements but also benefit from the economic advantages of being early adopters of green technologies.

Furthermore, we will establish a network of advisors and consultants who specialize in green technologies and sustainable practices. This network will provide ongoing support to businesses, helping them to continuously improve their operations and remain competitive in a rapidly changing economic landscape.

### **Small Business and Entrepreneurial Support**

Providing funding and technical assistance to small businesses and entrepreneurs is essential for fostering innovation and economic growth. Identifying the greatest support

needs for small businesses, particularly in areas such as talent acquisition and recruitment, is crucial. This initiative will focus on outreach efforts, appropriate training programs focusing on support of entrepreneurial coursework within business management for small and family-owned businesses offered through programs in the public college and university systems and maintaining/upskilling current employees.

We will measure the program's efficacy by tracking the number of small businesses receiving support and the specific areas in which they receive assistance. The primary goal is to enhance economic opportunities and unique entrepreneurial training for historically disinvested communities. By supporting small businesses and family-owned businesses, we can create jobs and stimulate economic activity in these areas, driving overall economic growth.

Additionally, we will provide networking opportunities and access to markets for small and family-owned businesses, helping them to expand their reach and grow their customer base. This will include organizing trade shows, business expos, and online marketplaces where small businesses can showcase their products and services. Furthermore, additional support could take the form of business management courses to help drive entrepreneurship and new business creation.

### *Facilitating Strategic Collaboration*

#### **Collaboration Between Government and Non-Profits**

Enhancing communication and collaboration between government entities and non-profits is crucial for a coordinated workforce development strategy. Partnering during emergency operations and funding infrastructure for safety nets will strengthen these relationships and ensure robust community support systems. We will track the number of collaborative initiatives to measure progress. The expected outcome is strengthened community support systems, providing a safety net for vulnerable populations and ensuring a more resilient community infrastructure.

To further this collaboration, we will establish regular forums and working groups where government agencies and non-profits can share information, coordinate efforts, and develop joint strategies. These forums will also serve as a platform for stakeholders to voice their concerns and provide input on policy decisions, ensuring that the needs of the community are adequately addressed.

#### **Innovation Hubs and Green Technology**

Establishing innovation hubs and technology parks will drive job creation in emerging industries. Promoting ethical research in AI and green technologies within these hubs will ensure that development aligns with broader societal goals. The number of innovation projects initiated will serve as a key metric. Evaluating the effectiveness of current projects by industry, as well as their support for disinvested communities, will be essential. The primary outcome will be job creation in emerging industries, with a strong focus on making these opportunities accessible to disinvested communities.

We will also foster partnerships between academia, industry, and government to ensure that innovation hubs are well-supported and can effectively translate research into real-world applications. This will include providing funding for research and development, as well as creating pathways for commercialization of new technologies.

### **Community-Based Partnerships**

Forming partnerships with community-based organizations will help develop green and blue spaces in disinvested communities. This effort involves identifying suitable areas and understanding the community's needs and the potential impacts. The number of new green spaces created will be tracked as a key metric. Improved community health and environmental quality are the anticipated outcomes. Tools like CalEnviroScreen and AdvanceOC can be used to identify areas in need and measure the initiative's impact effectively.

In addition to creating green spaces, we will also focus on community engagement and education, ensuring that residents are involved in the planning and development process. This will help to build a sense of ownership and stewardship, encouraging long-term sustainability and maintenance of these spaces.

### **Utilization of Data and Mapping**

Using data-informed approaches to address environmental and social issues will enhance the targeting and effectiveness of initiatives. By developing strategies that specifically focus on disadvantaged communities based on data insights, we can ensure our efforts are well-directed and impactful. We will measure success by tracking the number of data-informed targeted initiatives implemented. The expected outcomes are reduced environmental and social disparities, ultimately leading to a more equitable and sustainable community.

We will also develop data-sharing agreements between relevant organizations to ensure that data is accessible and actionable. This will involve the creation of integrated data systems that can provide real-time insights into community needs and program effectiveness. Regular evaluations and updates to these systems will ensure they remain relevant and accurate.

## *Enhancing Economic Resilience*

### **Diversifying the Local Economy**

Diversifying the local economy by promoting high-growth industries such as renewable energy, biotechnology, and advanced manufacturing is crucial for long-term economic resilience. This initiative involves identifying and supporting key sectors with high growth potential and aligning workforce development programs to meet their needs. The number of new businesses and jobs created in these sectors will serve as a key metric.

We will also focus on creating an ecosystem that supports innovation and entrepreneurship within these sectors. This includes providing access to capital, mentorship programs, and business incubation services. By fostering a supportive environment, we can encourage the growth of new enterprises and the expansion of existing ones.

### **Supporting Workforce Flexibility and Mobility**

Promoting workforce flexibility and mobility is essential for adapting to economic shifts and technological advancements. This initiative includes developing programs that support lifelong learning and skills development, enabling workers to transition between industries as needed. The number of workers participating in reskilling and upskilling programs will be tracked as a key metric.

To support this, we will establish partnerships with educational institutions and industry leaders to develop customized training programs that address specific skill gaps. These programs will be designed to be flexible and accessible, allowing workers to balance their education with other responsibilities.

### **Strengthening Supply Chains**

Strengthening local supply chains is critical for economic resilience, particularly in times of crisis. Small businesses provide California with a competitive advantage in our trade relations. In 2021, California exported over \$163.9 billion in goods, with 95.1% of the firms being small (less than 500 workers per the SBA) and 42% by dollar value.<sup>36</sup> This initiative involves mapping existing supply chains, identifying vulnerabilities, and developing strategies to address them. The number of supply chain improvements and partnerships formed will serve as key metrics.

We will also promote the use of local suppliers and manufacturers, reducing dependency on global supply chains and supporting local businesses, including small businesses. This will involve creating incentives for businesses to source and hire locally and developing networks that connect local suppliers with potential customers.

### *Promoting Environmental Sustainability*

#### **Transitioning to a Green Economy**

Transitioning to a green economy involves promoting the adoption of sustainable practices across all industries.

#### **Enhancing Public Transportation**

Enhancing public transportation infrastructure is essential for reducing carbon emissions and improving access to employment opportunities. This initiative involves expanding public transportation options, improving service reliability, and making transportation

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<sup>36</sup> <https://advocacy.sba.gov/2023/11/14/2023-small-business-profiles-for-the-states-territories-and-nation/>

more affordable. The number of new public transportation projects and the increase in ridership will be tracked as key metrics.

We will also focus on integrating public transportation with other modes of transportation, such as biking and walking, to create a comprehensive and user-friendly transportation network. This includes developing bike lanes, pedestrian pathways, and multimodal transit hubs.

## **Promoting Energy Efficiency**

Promoting energy efficiency in buildings and infrastructure is crucial for reducing energy consumption and lowering greenhouse gas emissions.

### *Measuring Success and Ensuring Accountability*

#### **Establishing Clear Metrics**

Establishing clear metrics is essential for measuring the success of our initiatives and ensuring accountability. This includes developing specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals for each initiative. Regularly tracking progress against these metrics will allow us to identify areas for improvement and make necessary adjustments.

We will also develop a comprehensive reporting system that provides transparency and accountability. This includes publishing regular progress reports, holding public meetings to discuss outcomes, and soliciting feedback from stakeholders.

#### **Conducting Regular Evaluations**

Conducting regular evaluations of our initiatives is crucial for ensuring their effectiveness and making data-driven decisions. This includes conducting both formative and summative evaluations to assess the design, implementation, and outcomes of our initiatives. The results of these evaluations will be used to inform future planning and decision-making.

We will also engage external evaluators to provide an independent assessment of our initiatives. This will help to ensure objectivity and credibility in our evaluation processes.

#### **Engaging Stakeholders**

Engaging stakeholders is essential for ensuring the success of our initiatives and building community support. This includes involving stakeholders in the planning and decision-making processes, soliciting their feedback, and addressing their concerns. We will track the number of stakeholder engagements and the level of stakeholder satisfaction as key metrics.

We will also establish advisory councils and working groups that include representatives from various stakeholder groups, such as community organizations, businesses, educational institutions, and government agencies. These councils and groups will provide ongoing input and guidance, ensuring that our initiatives are responsive to the needs and priorities of the community.

### **Transparent Reporting**

Transparency is the cornerstone of accountability and the foundation upon which trust is built. Therefore, we are committed to developing a comprehensive reporting system that provides clear, accessible, and timely information on the progress of our initiatives. This system will encompass a multi-faceted approach to information sharing, including the publication of detailed annual reports that provide a comprehensive overview of our accomplishments, challenges encountered, and outcomes achieved throughout the year. To ensure stakeholders have access to more frequent updates, we will also provide quarterly progress reports that offer a snapshot of our ongoing work, allowing for timely adjustments and course corrections as needed. Recognizing the importance of real-time data transparency, we will create online dashboards that track key metrics related to our initiatives, making this information readily available to all stakeholders. To foster direct engagement and dialogue, we will also host regular public meetings where stakeholders can receive in-person updates, ask questions, share feedback, and engage in meaningful discussions about our progress. Through these transparent communication practices, we aim to cultivate a culture of trust and collaboration, ensuring that all stakeholders are well-informed, actively engaged, and confident in our commitment to delivering on our promises.

### **Anticipated Outcomes:**

Our vision for Orange County is one of inclusive and sustainable economic growth, where all residents have the opportunity to thrive and contribute to a prosperous future. To achieve this vision, we have identified ten key objectives that will guide our efforts: increasing job readiness among individuals in disadvantaged communities, creating accessible career paths in emerging industries for mid-level technical jobs, increasing awareness of and preparation for diverse career opportunities among students, developing seamless pathways from education to living-wage jobs, enhancing job quality and access to higher-paying positions for lower-wage employees, promoting the adoption of sustainable business practices and green technologies, diversifying the local economy and strengthening supply chains to enhance resilience, reducing carbon emissions and improving community health through sustainability initiatives, fostering stronger collaboration between government, non-profits, and the private sector, and ensuring clear, transparent, and accountable reporting on the progress and outcomes of our initiatives. By pursuing these objectives with unwavering dedication and collaborative

spirit, Orange County will emerge as a national model for inclusive and sustainable economic development, demonstrating the transformative power of equitable opportunity and responsible growth.

### *Conclusion*

Orange County stands at a critical juncture where the alignment of job quality with access, equity, and climate considerations can drive sustainable economic growth and inclusivity. This comprehensive strategy aims to prioritize high-quality jobs through targeted sector strategies, workforce development, and strategic collaboration. By focusing on matching skills to available jobs, addressing talent and recruitment challenges, and fostering partnerships, we aim to build a resilient and inclusive economy.

Through initiatives such as work-based learning opportunities, support for mid-level technical jobs, exposure to diverse employment opportunities, and alignment of K-16 education with workforce needs, we will ensure that our workforce is prepared for the demands of the future. Addressing talent and recruitment challenges through local workforce investment, technical assistance, and support for small businesses will further strengthen our economic foundation.

Facilitating strategic collaboration between government entities, non-profits, and the private sector will enhance our capacity to respond to community needs and promote innovation. Promoting environmental sustainability through initiatives focused on transitioning to a green economy, enhancing public transportation, and promoting energy efficiency will ensure that our growth is sustainable and equitable.

By establishing clear metrics, conducting regular evaluations, engaging stakeholders, and maintaining transparent reporting, we will ensure that our initiatives are effective and accountable. Together, these efforts will drive Orange County towards a future where economic growth is inclusive, sustainable, and resilient.

### 3.a.iv - Alignment with State Strategies

#### Introduction

The State of California has set ambitious goals to address climate change, promote sustainability, and enhance resilience across various sectors. This strategy assessment examines how Orange County can focus on the ten key target sectors that align with and be supported by existing state strategies in areas such as clean energy, air pollution reduction, transportation decarbonization, climate adaptation, sustainable water management, and natural and working lands.

The target sectors under consideration are:

1. Ambulatory Health Care Services
2. Hospitals
3. Social Assistance
4. Computer and Electronic Product Manufacturing
5. Miscellaneous Manufacturing
6. Education Services
7. Construction of Buildings
8. Specialty Trade Contractors
9. Accommodation
10. Food Services and Drinking Places

By analyzing these sectors in the context of California's environmental and sustainability initiatives, we can identify opportunities for synergy, areas of potential conflict, and strategies for mutual support between industry and state goals.

#### Overview of State Strategies

California has implemented several key strategies to address environmental challenges and promote sustainability:

1. [California Climate Adaptation Strategy](#): This comprehensive plan outlines the state's approach to building resilience against climate change impacts. It covers various sectors and emphasizes the importance of equity, nature-based solutions, and regional collaboration.<sup>37</sup> The State is in the midst of updating its Climate Adaptation Strategy for the first time since 2021. A related state program is the "Integrated Climate Adaptation and Resiliency Program" or ICARP housed at the former Governor's Office of Planning and Research which shapes "California's

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<sup>37</sup> See: <https://climateresilience.ca.gov/>

response to climate impacts, prioritizing equitable approaches that integrate mitigation and adaptation.”<sup>38</sup> Progress updates on all the Strategy’s metrics can be found [here](#).

2. [California Climate Change Scoping Plan](#): Updated every five years, this plan outlines how the state will achieve its greenhouse gas reduction targets, as it “lays out a path to achieve targets for carbon neutrality and reduce anthropogenic greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 85 percent below 1990 levels no later than 2045.” It includes sector-specific strategies and emphasizes the role of innovation and technology in meeting climate goals.<sup>39</sup> The plan also provides [guidance](#) on equity-centered actions by local governments that advance climate-smart neighborhoods, commercial corridors, town centers, and other locations.
3. [Sustainable Groundwater Management Act \(SGMA\)](#): Enacted in 2014, SGMA aims to achieve sustainable groundwater management by 2042. It requires the formation of local groundwater sustainability agencies and the development of plans to ensure long-term aquifer health.<sup>40</sup> Orange County adopted its first groundwater management plan in 1989.<sup>41</sup> Implementing resources include, but are not limited to, [technical](#) and [financial](#) assistance.
4. [California's 30x30 Initiative](#): This initiative aims to conserve 30% of the state's land and coastal waters by 2030. It focuses on protecting biodiversity, enhancing climate resilience, and expanding access to nature for all Californians.<sup>42</sup> A related state program is the Strategic Growth Council’s Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Program (SALC), which uses Cap and Trade funds to protect productive farmland.<sup>43</sup> The initiative is supported with a [resources page](#) and a [Pathways to 30x30 strategy](#). These strategies, among others, provide a framework for the state's environmental and sustainability efforts. The following analysis will examine how the target sectors can align with and support these initiatives while also benefiting from their implementation.

## Target Sector Analysis

### 1. [Ambulatory Health Care Services](#)

#### Alignment with State Strategies:

- Climate Adaptation Strategy: Ambulatory health care services can play a crucial role in community resilience by adapting their operations to climate-related health risks.

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<sup>38</sup> See: <https://opr.ca.gov/climate/icarp/>

<sup>39</sup> See: <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/our-work/programs/ab-32-climate-change-scoping-plan/2022-scoping-plan-documents>

<sup>40</sup> See: [https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sgma/about\\_sgma.html](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sgma/about_sgma.html)

<sup>41</sup> See: <https://www.ocwd.com/what-we-do/groundwater-management/groundwater-management-plan/>

<sup>42</sup> See: <https://www.californianature.ca.gov/>

<sup>43</sup> See: <https://sgc.ca.gov/grant-programs/salc/>

- Climate Scoping Plan: This sector can contribute to emissions reduction through energy-efficient practices and telemedicine.

Support for State Strategies:

- Educate patients on climate-related health risks and preventive measures, supporting adaptation efforts.

Support from State Strategies:

- Funding and incentives for energy-efficient medical equipment and facilities.
- Integration of climate risk data into health care planning and service delivery.

## 2. Hospitals

Alignment with State Strategies:

- Climate Adaptation Strategy: Hospitals are critical infrastructure that must be resilient to climate impacts.
- Sustainable Groundwater Management Act: Large water users like hospitals can contribute to sustainable water management.

Support for State Strategies:

- Develop disaster response plans that account for climate-related emergencies.

Support from State Strategies:

- Grants for climate-resilient infrastructure upgrades.
- Technical assistance for implementing water conservation measures.

## 3. Social Assistance

Alignment with State Strategies:

- Climate Adaptation Strategy: Social assistance organizations can help vulnerable populations adapt to climate change.
- 30x30 Initiative: These organizations can support equitable access to nature and green spaces.

Support for State Strategies:

- Develop programs to assist low-income communities with energy efficiency upgrades.
- Organize community-based climate adaptation and resilience initiatives.

Support from State Strategies:

- Funding for climate-focused social programs.
- Training and resources for addressing climate-related social needs.

#### 4. Computer and Electronic Product Manufacturing

##### Alignment with State Strategies:

- Climate Scoping Plan: This sector can contribute to emissions reduction through energy-efficient product design and manufacturing processes.
- Climate Adaptation Strategy: Developing technologies for climate monitoring and adaptation.

##### Support for State Strategies:

- Innovate and produce energy-efficient electronics and smart home technologies.
- Develop and manufacture equipment for renewable energy systems.

##### Support from State Strategies:

- R&D incentives for clean technology development.
- Streamlined permitting for facilities producing climate-friendly technologies.

#### 5. Miscellaneous Manufacturing

##### Alignment with State Strategies:

- Climate Scoping Plan: Opportunity to reduce industrial emissions and improve energy efficiency.
- Sustainable Groundwater Management Act: Potential to innovate water-efficient manufacturing processes.

##### Support for State Strategies:

- Adopt circular economy principles to reduce waste and resource consumption.
- Develop and produce materials and products for climate adaptation (e.g., heat-resistant building materials).

##### Support from State Strategies:

- Technical assistance for implementing energy and water efficiency measures.
- Incentives for transitioning to clean energy in manufacturing processes.

#### 6. Education Services

##### Alignment with State Strategies:

- Climate Adaptation Strategy: Schools and universities can serve as community resilience hubs. Educational institutions should also adopt climate resilience plans. As part of that effort these institutions should take proactive measures to decarbonize their buildings and electrify their campus (including shifting vehicle fleets to zero emissions vehicles), while also encouraging less single occupant commuting and travel and fewer vehicle miles traveled.

- 30x30 Initiative: Educational institutions can promote environmental literacy and conservation.
- Development of Climate Resilience Plans: Educational institutions develop plans to identify and reduce emissions and climate impact.

Support for State Strategies:

- Integrate climate change and sustainability into curricula at all levels.
- Use campus facilities for demonstrating and researching sustainable practices.

Support from State Strategies:

- Funding for green school infrastructure and climate education programs.
- Partnerships with state agencies for environmental research and workforce development.

## 7. Construction of Buildings

Alignment with State Strategies:

- Climate Scoping Plan: This sector is crucial for reducing emissions in the built environment.
- Climate Adaptation Strategy: Construction practices must adapt to future climate conditions.
- New Construction Energy Efficient Standards: Incentivize for all-electric buildings

Support for State Strategies:

- Incorporate climate resilience features in new construction projects and ensure all new buildings and facilities are all electric.

Support from State Strategies:

- Updated building codes that prioritize energy efficiency and climate resilience.
- Incentives for adopting advanced clean construction technologies as well as for all new buildings and facilities to be all electric.

## 8. Specialty Trade Contractors

Alignment with State Strategies:

- Sustainable Groundwater Management Act: Contractors specializing in water systems can support water conservation efforts.

Support for State Strategies:

- Offer services for retrofitting buildings for energy efficiency and climate resilience.
- Specialize in installation and maintenance of renewable energy systems.

#### Support from State Strategies:

- Training programs for green construction skills and certifications.
- Streamlined permitting processes for clean energy and water-saving projects.

#### 9. Accommodation

##### Alignment with State Strategies:

- Climate Adaptation Strategy: The hospitality industry must adapt to changing climate conditions and potential impacts on tourism.
- 30x30 Initiative: Hotels and resorts can promote sustainable tourism and conservation.
- Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI): Locate more affordable housing near concentrations of hotel jobs to reduce vehicle miles traveled and overall commute times, while saving money for workers. Also ensure that there are available transit options to/from these new affordable homes to ensure that accommodation industry workers have low cost, carbon friendly ways to get around.

##### Support for State Strategies:

- Educate guests about local environmental initiatives and responsible tourism.

##### Support from State Strategies:

- Incentives for green hotel certifications and sustainable tourism practices.
- Provide affordable housing and rideshare/public transport options for those working within the hospitality industry.
- Integration of climate risk assessments in tourism development plans.

#### 10. Food Services and Drinking Places

##### Alignment with State Strategies:

- Climate Scoping Plan: This sector can contribute to reducing food waste and associated emissions.
- Sustainable Groundwater Management Act: Restaurants can play a role in water conservation efforts.

##### Support for State Strategies:

- Source ingredients locally to reduce transportation emissions and support local agriculture. Promote use of electric products and facilities to help improve the working conditions, especially in warmer climates. Restaurants can better support temperature-controlled environments and contribute to lower carbon emissions.

### Support from State Strategies:

- Technical assistance for implementing energy and water efficiency measures.
- Incentives for adopting sustainable food service practices and equipment.

## Cross-Sector Opportunities and Challenges

### Opportunities:

1. **Integrated Solutions:** Many sectors can collaborate to create comprehensive solutions. For example, the construction industry, specialty trade contractors, and computer/electronic manufacturing can work together to develop and implement smart, energy-efficient buildings that support multiple state strategies.
2. **Workforce Development:** The transition to a more sustainable economy creates opportunities for cross-sector training and job creation. Education services can partner with industries to develop curricula that prepare workers for green jobs across various sectors.
3. **Innovation Ecosystems:** Collaboration between sectors can drive innovation. For instance, healthcare services and technology manufacturers could jointly develop telemedicine solutions that reduce transportation emissions and improve climate resilience in healthcare delivery.
4. **Supply Chain Sustainability:** Sectors can work together to create more sustainable supply chains, supporting goals in emissions reduction and resource conservation across multiple industries.

### Challenges:

1. **Regulatory Complexity:** Aligning with multiple state strategies may create regulatory challenges for businesses, particularly smaller ones with limited resources.
2. **Initial Costs:** Implementing sustainable practices and technologies often requires significant upfront investment, which can be a barrier for some sectors or individual businesses.
3. **Balancing Priorities:** Sectors may face challenges in balancing immediate business needs with longer-term sustainability goals.
4. **Technological Gaps:** Some sectors may lack the necessary technologies to fully align with state strategies, requiring further research and development.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

This assessment demonstrates that California's target sectors have significant potential to align with, support, and benefit from the state's environmental and sustainability strategies. By actively engaging with these initiatives, sectors can not only contribute to broader societal goals but also enhance their own resilience, efficiency, and competitiveness.

During the planning phase, Coalition members contributed to a stakeholder map and identified other regional resources that will advance the implementation of the regional plan by leveraging the expertise of Orange County organizations, including [Map-My-CBO-Orange County](#). By implementing these recommendations and fostering a collaborative approach, Orange County will help California accelerate its progress towards its environmental and sustainability goals while supporting the growth and resilience of key economic sectors.

## 3.b - Sector Neutral and Economic Mobility Strategies

The topline strategies that have been identified as a part of Orange County's California Jobs First Regional Plan are briefly described here:

1. **Career Pathways** - Education and training opportunities that support career pathways to high-road jobs.
2. **Apprenticeships** - Apprenticeship opportunities leading to high-road jobs in priority industry sectors.
3. **Enhance Quality of Life:** Wrap-around services to ensure health and well-being of individuals and communities.
4. **Small Business, Worker Ownership and Entrepreneurship Support:** Capital and other assistance for small businesses, worker ownership and entrepreneurs.
5. **Housing:** Increase housing, including rental and owner-occupied housing.
6. **Uplift Community Voices through Respectful Cultural Engagement:** Improve community participation.
7. **Green and Emerging Technology and Innovation:** Invest in green and emerging technologies.
8. **Climate Resilient Environment:** Support a sustainable environment.

These strategies are generally sector-neutral, although they inevitably respond to the county's priority industries to some degree. They capitalize on the diverse set of industries in the economy, which drive growth over time and contribute to the county's economic resilience. By and large, they are also long-term in scope, bringing change over time to the county's population, workforce, industries, communities, and environs, thereby contributing to the resilience of the county.

Strategies 1 (Career Pathways) and 2 (Apprenticeships) create education and training opportunities that will support an individual's long-term employability and career development. These programs tend to be tailored to the county's current and future job needs in specific occupations and industries, for example, in construction, medical technology, or culinary arts. Therefore, they have the potential to fast-track individuals from training to employment in a relatively short span of time, putting the individual on a path that can lead to a career and stable income.

Strategy 3 (Enhance Quality of Life) involves increasing resident awareness of and participation in public and community services, with efforts targeted to the county's varied groups and sub-groups. Services include assessing needs and providing access to

affordable health care, childcare, and other basic needs. Whereas strategies 1, 2, and 4 are oriented toward the workforce and employers, this strategy is directed toward residents and is inherently sector neutral.

Strategy 4 (Small Business, Worker Ownership, and Entrepreneurship Support) provides small businesses and similar entities with resources to support their growth and success. Training may have both technical, industry-specific dimensions (how to set up a restaurant) and general business dimensions (how to manage a business, financial literacy), the latter being transferrable to other industries. Support also includes access to capital needed during the start-up phase of a business, and specialized support to members of disinvested communities as needed.

Strategy 5 (Housing) directly addresses a chronic problem that has persisted in Orange County and elsewhere in California for decades. Nearly 6 in 10 renting households in the county are rent-burdened, spending over 30% of their income on housing. This is a particular challenge for households in disinvested communities. The cost of living overall depends heavily on the cost of housing. Ideally, the county can bring down the cost of housing through strategies that increase the amount of affordable and workforce housing, despite the hurdles posed by the extremely high cost of land and high cost of construction. Like strategy 3, this strategy is directed toward residents and is inherently sector neutral.

Strategy 6 (Uplift Community Voices through Respectful Cultural Engagement) is a common thread throughout the other strategies, and as such, is sector neutral. Orange County's economy has thrived and prospered in recent decades, but by giving a voice to the many groups and sub-groups in the county, the needs and wants of its diverse population will be better communicated and understood. This will increase the likelihood that the other strategies will reach into segments of the county population that might otherwise be left out. If successful, public-sector entities, community organizations, and employers can all ensure that more residents share in the county's prosperity.

Strategies 7 (Green and Emerging Technology) and 8 (Climate Resilient Environment) are forward-looking strategies that have the potential to deliver long-term benefits to residents, workers, and employers. Orange County can build its history of invention, innovation and entrepreneurship and direct public and private resources toward green and emerging technologies and actions that support sustainability. In terms of benefits, this strategy is sector neutral. In pursuing these strategies, the county can draw from its pool of talent and firms in areas of engineering, architecture, and other professional and technical services, along with its construction sector.

## Identify Problem and Opportunity

### 1. Career Pathways

Establishing strong career pathways sets workers on course to effectively progress in their professional lives and up their respective careers ladders. This upward mobility not

only helps to improve regional income equity and quality of life but also helps reinforce the region's strong, qualified pool of workers able to fill a broad range of open positions. This is especially important in addressing the skills gap, a mismatch between employer expectations and employee skills and abilities. Improving local and regional academic and workforce training programs which provide clear career pathways can help strengthen the labor market while also improving the lives of residents, especially those in disinvested communities.

Further helping to address the skills gap or mismatch currently impacting the labor market, crafting solid career pathways for young professionals to follow supported by skills-based learning initiatives helps to strengthen the regions labor talent pipeline while also improving access to these occupations for displaced or marginalized workers across a multitude of industries. Focusing on enhancing partnerships between industry and academia will better shape and inform these programs on existing and emerging technologies and processes allowing individuals to be better prepared to fill these positions.

## **2. Apprenticeships**

Career Technical Education (CTE) and the building trades are programs offered to students of all ages and provide students with the academic and technical skills to succeed in skilled crafts or trades. A great example are the building trades with various curriculum and trainings surrounding apprenticeships. With federal funded infrastructure projects coming through the pipeline, building trade apprenticeships are a great opportunity for Orange County to create new skilled construction workers to take advantage of these good paying jobs.

With the increased cost of traditional universities continuing to climb pricing many students out, marketing and communicating the benefit of these occupations through the enhancement of CTE programs throughout the county could help drive employment growth in these sectors providing a different pathway to career success and further helping to drive economic prosperity across the region.

## **3. Enhance Quality of Life**

Orange County has a long history of having a strong, resilient labor market with above average wages which has served to drive not only economic growth and activity but the regional quality-of-life as well. The county has become internationally famous for its high quality of life. Five Orange County cities made WalletHub's 2022 list of the best places in which to raise a family, including Irvine (3rd), which has also gained a national reputation as one of the safest cities in the United States.

As such, there needs to be effective and actionable strategies to not only preserve but enhance this quality of life for all Orange County residents, especially those in disinvested communities. With existing gaps in income, education, housing and health, local stakeholders and policymakers, in collaboration with support organizations, academia and industry leaders, are uniquely positioned to help drive local and regional equity to ensure that all residents benefit from regional success and growth.

#### **4. Small Business, Worker Ownership and Entrepreneurship**

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimated that small businesses were responsible for nearly two-thirds of new jobs from 1995 to 2021. Following the pandemic, when many businesses were shuttered, small business formation experienced a massive boom with 5.4 million business registrations in 2021 and 5 million in 2022, a 42 percent increase from pre-pandemic levels.<sup>44</sup> This significant rebound in small business was largely thanks to a broad range of programs and financial support which allowed them to continue to function and grow. With many of these programs coming to an end, additional support may be needed to help drive small business growth and creation. While small business drives both economic activity and employment, it also creates an environment that promotes entrepreneurship and innovation, both of which are crucial for healthy economic growth and activity.

A 2020 survey of over 22,000 California small businesses illustrated both the devastating impact of the pandemic and the critical need for support for this vital economic engine. The survey found over 6% of small businesses closed permanently due to the pandemic, with revenue losses averaging 75%. Smaller, younger, minority-owned, and women-owned businesses, particularly in arts and entertainment, were hardest hit. While federal relief programs like PPP and EIDL provided a lifeline, many businesses exhausted this funding and require additional capital. This highlights the importance of business development centers and policies that support small businesses and entrepreneurs, especially in regions like Orange County, where small businesses with less than 50 employees represent 97.4% of all businesses.<sup>45</sup>

A significant majority of Orange County businesses are small businesses. Approximately 97.4 percent of businesses have less than 50 employees, and 50.1 percent of Orange County businesses have only 1 to 4 employees. Only 1.1 percent of businesses in the region have over 100 employees. This helps to highlight the importance of business development centers as well as strategies and policies which support and encourage the growth of small businesses and support of entrepreneurs.

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.uschamber.com/small-business/state-of-small-business-now>

<sup>45</sup> [COVID-19-Impact-on-California-Entrepreneurs-v2.pdf \(edcollaborative.com\)](#)

## **5. Housing**

Demand to both live and work in Orange County has consistently remained high serving to push the cost of housing in the region to new highs in 2023. As a result, low-income or affordable housing options have become increasingly sought after as wage growth failed to keep pace with housing cost growth. This housing burden has been especially hard for all but upper middle- and high-income households.

There were 1,142,380 housing units in the county in 2022, up 9.2 percent from 1,046,118 in 2010. Over the same time period, the population grew by 5.0 percent. On the supply side, housing permits in Orange County generally rose in the first half of the last decade, peaking in 2016 with 4,116 single family permits and 7,967 multi-family housing permits for a total of 12,083 housing permits. This figure has declined in recent years. As of 2022, there were 2,906 permitted single-family units and 3,577 multi-family units, bringing the total to 6,483.

## **6. Uplift Community Voices through Respectful Cultural Engagement:**

As Orange County's population has evolved over the past several decades, driven early-on by a combination of domestic and international migration, it has become increasingly more diverse with growing levels of Asian, Latino/Hispanic, and Middle Eastern communities and the beneficial global connections these communities bring to the table that contribute to Orange County's diverse, vibrant economy. This increased diversity has culturally enriched several regions of the county resulting in unique retail stores and experiences and also leads to international connections that help increase international trade and attract international businesses and entrepreneurs.

Further supporting cultural engagement, by accommodation the unique spaces and needs of diverse communities, will not only serve to benefit residents in these communities, especially those in disinvested communities, but will help to further drive participation in cultural events providing more and more residents with new cultural experiences serving to improve cultural humility and respect. As Orange County expects to become increasingly diverse in the coming decades, fostering welcoming and curious communities which support engagement, innovation and business creation will provide a significant benefit to disinvested communities.

## **7. Green and Emerging Technology and Innovation**

As the impacts of climate change accelerate, the need for green or renewable technology innovations will increase across the nation. With the adoption of electric vehicles increasing as a broader range of models become available, it is important that the region have adequate infrastructure in place to support this growth. This is not specific to just electric vehicles, renewable materials in construction or manufacturing, renewable processes which help save energy or reduce waste, are likely to see considerable growth

as well as residents and organizations look for how to reduce their carbon footprint or environmental burden.

## **8. Climate Resilient Environment**

Climate change threatens to bring a multitude of potential impacts across the state and nation including the potential for rising sea-levels and the associated coastal erosion. With over 40 miles of coastline, several Orange County communities, including disadvantaged communities in more inland regions, have some level of risk. Alongside risks to residential structures, several transportation systems are at-risk including state highways in Seal Beach, Newport Beach and near Moro Canyon as well as Amtrak's Pacific Surline – the coastal route between San Diego and San Luis Obispo which carries nearly 3 million passengers annually – has closed several times following landslides induced by rising sea levels.

## **Regional Assets**

### **1. Career Pathways**

Orange County has a number of organizations and programs aimed at improving career pathways through additional education or training including:

- OC Pathways
- United Way - Upskill OC
- OC Workforce Development Board
- Community Colleges and Career Technical Education (Orange Coast College, Saddleback College, Santa Ana College, North Orange Continuing Education)

### **2. Apprenticeships**

- LA/OC Building Trades – Multi-Craft Coire Curriculum; Apprenticeship Readiness Fund
- California Division of Apprenticeship Standards - The County of Orange, in partnership with the Orange County (OC) Workforce Development Board and the California Division of Apprenticeship Standards, announces an apprenticeship program collaborative to help Orange County employers develop a skilled workforce with viable career pathways through the creation of Pre-Apprenticeship and Apprenticeship programs.
- Priority sector apprenticeships: Map<sup>2</sup> – Advanced Manufacturing, LA/OC Building Trades – Construction
- Unite Here! Local 11 – Represents over 32,000 workers employed in restaurants, airports, and sports arenas throughout Southern California and provides the Hospitality Training Academy (HTA) which provides top-quality workforce development, apprenticeships, vocational ESL and training programs for workers in the hospitality and food service industry.

### **3. Enhance Quality of Life**

- County of Orange Social Services Agency - The County of Orange Social Services Agency (SSA) operates under the policy direction of the Orange County Board of Supervisors and the California Departments of Social Services and Health Services. SSA is responsible for planning, implementing, and operating many of the social services programs provided by the County of Orange. Funding for programs comes from State, Federal, and County sources.
- Orange County Community Services – an organization with three primary divisions including Workforce & Economic Development Division, Office on Aging, and Veteran Service Office which provide a variety of services and programs including affordable rental housing lists, job seeker services, youth programs, caregiver resources.

### **4. Small Business, Worker Ownership and Entrepreneurship**

The following is a representative list of economic development initiatives aimed at supporting small businesses and entrepreneurship that have been or are currently in use in Orange County communities, with cities using these initiatives shown in parentheses:

- Business friendly practices and measures: streamlined permit approval processes, one-stop permitting, film permitting (Irvine, Huntington Beach);
- Business incubators and accelerators (The Cove @ UCI; OctaneOC; OC Startup Council)
- Dining or food halls for new restaurants or concepts (4<sup>th</sup> Street Market in Santa Ana; Anaheim Packing District).
- Cielo, a small business support organization for Orange County's underserved communities, immigrants and people of color, which provides the tools, training, and resources to help drive entrepreneurship and small business growth.
- Cooperacion Santa Ana, a business development program, offers training, coaching and business incubation for low-income residents and families with the goal of empowering residents and small businesses to effectively grow and succeed.
- Small business assistance, directly and indirectly by introducing business owners to Small Business Development Centers and other agencies at the state and federal level that support local business (Orange County Women's Business Center, SoCal Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC), Apex Accelerators, and other businesses centers serving the unique needs of women, veterans, American Indians, minority owned businesses, manufacturing industry and many others.)

At the state level, the California Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development (Go-Biz) promotes job growth, business assistance, and economic development support to communities across the state (<https://business.ca.gov/#>). Go-Biz has several programs that include business assistance, international trade promotion, small business and entrepreneurial programs, and various financing vehicles.

## 5. Housing

Orange County’s residential and commercial real estate sectors rapidly expanded alongside the rapidly growing population and labor force, the Construction sector jumped from 77,100 in 2000 to 105,000 in February 2023, an increase of 27,900 jobs or 36.2 percent. Alongside its strong Construction workforce, Orange County has a number of organizations which advocate for affordable housing developments including OC Housing Authority, The Kennedy Commission, Habitat OC, and United to End Homelessness’s Housing Champions Advocacy Network.

Highlighting its efforts to grow housing supply, Orange County currently has mixed-use developments currently under construction including:

- OC Vibe – Includes two hotels, commercial space, 20 acres of public open space, 1,500 residential units, 1.1 million square feet of office space, and a concert venue.<sup>46</sup>
- The Village Santa Ana – Potentially includes 3.6 acres of open space, 300,000 square feet of office space, 80,000 square feet of commercial space, and 1,583 residential units.<sup>47</sup>
- North Harbor Apartments – 87-unit affordable housing development for residents earning up to 30 percent of the area median income.

## 6. Uplift Community Voices through Respectful Cultural Engagement

Orange County is home to a number of museums, Spanish missions, cultural centers, ethnic restaurants, and diverse neighborhoods all which help drive cultural engagement and participation while helping to highlight diverse communities. This helps drive economic activity into these regions as other residents are able to experience and participate in cultural events or traditions. Some of these include:

- The Bowers Museum
- Mission San Juan Capistrano
- Guggenheim Gallery Chapman University
- Orange County Museum of Art

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<sup>46</sup> <https://la.urbanize.city/post/mixed-use-project-surrounding-anaheims-honda-center-could-swap-offices-housing>

<sup>47</sup>

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63f68d3c05c6742f3393f9ef/t/64e646884e43d657c02bf571/1692812950255/23.08.07-The-Village-Santa-Ana-Specific-Plan-City-of-Santa-Ana-Compressed.pdf>

- Casa Romantica Cultural Center and Gardens

## **7. Green and Emerging Technology and Innovation**

Institutions and programs such as UCI's The Cove, a 100,000 square foot facility built specifically as a location for innovative entrepreneurs to connect, share, and grow with access to a broad set of tools and resources and exposure to potential partners and advisors. Alongside The Cove, Orange County also has a number of incubators and accelerators such as OCTANe and Orange County Startup Council further helping to better support and grow the region's entrepreneurial community.

## **8. Climate Resilient Environment**

Orange County has implemented a number of climate resilience projects in an attempt to anticipate the potential impacts of climate change including:

- Orange County Sanitation Districts Climate Resiliency and Adaptation Plan
- South Orange County Regional Coastal Resilience Strategic Plan
- Climate Action Plan
- The Orange County Transportation Authority Climate Adaptation and Sustainability Plan
- Caltrans Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment

### 3.b.i – Identify Problem and Opportunity

#### Sector-Neutral and Economic Mobility Strategies

Expanding the number of good jobs is a critical route to shore up regional economic prosperity and resilience, but not every Orange County resident is ready, willing, and able to enter a new occupation, including completing any educational credentials it may require. Others may prefer to work toward improving working conditions at their current employers or to start or expand their own small businesses. For these individuals, Orange County's California Jobs First Collaborative also developed and refined eight sector-neutral and economic mobility strategies, or mobility strategies for short. These eight strategies are as follows:

1. Invest in the success of the local workforce by providing training opportunities that **educate and empower lower-wage employees** to know their rights, organize to improve standards and acquire higher-paying jobs in priority and environmentally sustainable industries, and ensure adequate language accessibility to those opportunities.
2. Facilitate funding, technical assistance, and development of an **ecosystem of community support for the small businesses and entrepreneurs**, and resources to ensure they have the financial records to qualify for support/government assistance. This should be done with in language, focused outreach, or other guidelines to ensure resources benefit small businesses owned by historically disinvested community members.
3. Support efforts by local educational institutions and non-profits, especially those serving disadvantaged communities, to connect with local employers to create and **expand work-based learning opportunities**, such as pre-employment training, soft skills training, registered apprenticeships and internships, to build career pathways in high demand and just transition industries, such as AI, clean renewables and healthcare.
4. **Grow mid-level technical jobs that do not require a four-year degree** in emerging industries and develop the necessary training programs, such as certifications and credentials, so those jobs can be accessed.
5. Provide resources and opportunities for individuals to be trained to meet the needs of the economic shock and convert that **training and experience as the foundation for their own business to emerge stronger** out of the economic shock, such as just transition in a new carbon economy, and ensure these resources and opportunities are inclusive of language, cultural, and other barriers to access.

6. Ensure that all high school aged and adult students are **exposed to employment opportunities in a variety of industries**, such as healthcare, construction, manufacturing, education and hospitality, including those in non-college tracks. It is also important to bring this awareness to their parents, guardians and families, and do so with adequate language accessibility so they can support the student in their education and career pathway.
7. **Establish and/or expand innovation hubs, green innovation zones, and technology parks** to encourage ethical research and development of new technologies, AI and green innovation by small businesses.
8. Support the OC Pathways' K-16 Education Collaborative, and other collaborative approaches, to **build strong partnerships between high schools, community colleges, the public sector, and local employers** to create seamless pathways to jobs that pay a living wage.

Each strategy potentially furthers one of the goals of increasing economic resilience, ensuring equity for residents, minimizing the effects of climate change, and aligning with other state strategies, and some serve multiple purposes. For example, innovation hubs, green innovation zones, and technology parks (mobility strategy 7) would create technologies and jobs to fight climate change and possibly preserve open space consistent with state policy. Supporting the county's K-16 education collaborative of schools and employers (mobility strategy 8) will not only bolster the economy (goal 1) by facilitating better transitions to employment in a fashion that is accessible to the county's underserved communities (goal 2) but also reinforces state policy (goal 4), as articulated by state's nascent Master Plan for Career Education, to more closely tie school and work.

**Both sets of strategies work together.** In some cases, the target sector strategies and the economic mobility strategies are mutually reinforcing. For example, efforts to grow mid-level technical jobs (mobility strategy 4) will support employment in construction of buildings and specialty trade contractors (target sectors 7 and 8). These policies will also work to address the high prices and low availability of housing, which constitute one of the county's key challenges.<sup>48</sup> Supporting the K-16 education collaborative (mobility strategy 8) will help guide individuals to industries that typically require college education (such as target sector 6, education services), while supporting work-based learning opportunities (mobility strategy 3) will lead to careers that typically start with apprenticeships, like many of the occupations in construction of buildings and specialty trade contractors (target sectors 7 and 8).

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<sup>48</sup> Orange County Business Council. (2024). *Orange County 2023-2024 community indicators report*, pp. 50-56 <https://ocbc.org/2023-2024-community-indicators-report>

Community colleges are already the most accessible segment of higher education, from their geographic dispersion to their open access policies and very low fees (which are fully waived for nearly all low-income students). They are also well-positioned to offer affordable and quality child care options to students by expanding their early care and education programs by staffing them with student apprentices. The county's two public universities are poised to contribute leadership and expertise to the parts of the target sectors that require more residents with bachelor's and advanced degrees and in the research-driven mobility strategies like supporting entrepreneurship and small business and creating innovation hubs and zones.

**Ensuring coordination.** Much of the work of coordinating the supply and demand is already baked in to the proposed sector and mobility strategies, including steering investments to sectors with high projected job growth; directly educating workers, small business owners, and entrepreneurs on how to make their labor and products more marketable; expanding programs that expose residents to diverse career fields and offer them work-based learning opportunities; and explicitly building and reinforcing connections between local schools and employers to promote collaboration.

The Sector-Neutral and Economic Mobility Strategy represents a comprehensive approach to community development, specifically designed to address the persistent challenges faced by historically marginalized and disinvested groups. By providing overarching capacity-building education, networks, and resources across educational institutions, nonprofits, workforce development agencies, and individual businesses, this strategy aims to create a more inclusive and sustainable economic landscape. The focus on sector-neutral interventions ensures that benefits are not limited to specific industries but can reach a broader spectrum of community members, particularly those who have been traditionally underserved.

At its core, this strategy seeks to protect and enhance employment and income stability in economically vulnerable areas while fostering long-term sustainability in target sectors. For historically marginalized communities, this translates into increased access to high-quality education and training, improved workforce development opportunities, and enhanced support for small businesses and entrepreneurs. By aligning these efforts with broader community needs such as affordable housing, climate resilience, and respectful cultural engagement, the strategy aims to create a holistic ecosystem of support. This approach not only addresses immediate economic needs but also lays the groundwork for sustained economic mobility and community empowerment, ensuring that disinvested communities are not just included in, but are active participants in and beneficiaries of, regional economic growth.

## Strategies:

### 1. Workforce Investment and Training Opportunities

Investing in the local workforce through targeted training opportunities addresses critical issues faced by low-wage workers, particularly those from historically marginalized communities. By focusing on education, empowerment, and accessible communication, the strategy aims to create a more equitable and sustainable economic environment. This holistic approach ensures that disinvested communities not only gain access to higher-paying jobs and better working conditions but also become active participants in shaping their economic future.

#### *1. Identifying Needs and Challenges*

- **Minimum Wage Violations:** In 2015, 17.2% of low-wage workers experienced minimum wage violations, resulting in over 8 million dollars in unpaid wages. This highlights a significant issue where low-wage workers are not receiving the compensation they are legally entitled to.
- **Workplace Violations:** Low-wage workers, particularly those who are female, workers of color, immigrants, refugees, LGBTQ individuals, and youth, face the highest rates of workplace violations. This indicates systemic issues in the enforcement of labor laws and protections.
- **Distrust in Government Communications:** Workers and business owners from vulnerable communities often distrust government communications, which can hinder the effectiveness of training and outreach programs.

#### *2. Expected Impact*

- **Economic Empowerment:** By educating workers about their rights and how to advocate for themselves, the strategy aims to reduce instances of wage theft and workplace violations. This will help secure fair wages and safer working conditions for low-wage workers.
  - **Data Insight:** Addressing the issue of unpaid wages alone can lead to a recovery of millions of dollars that rightfully belong to the workers, significantly improving their financial stability.
- **Access to Better Jobs:** Training programs tailored to priority and sustainable industries will provide pathways to higher-paying jobs, thus improving economic mobility for historically marginalized groups.
- **Community Trust and Participation:** By building community relationships and using trusted messengers to communicate information, the strategy will increase the efficacy of training programs. This approach will help overcome the distrust in

government communications and ensure better engagement from vulnerable communities.

### *3. Community Engagement and Learning*

- **Outreach through Trusted Messengers:** To effectively communicate the availability and benefits of training programs, the strategy will involve trusted community members and organizations. This could include local nonprofits, community leaders, and cultural organizations that have established credibility within the community.
  - **Example:** Partnering with local immigrant support groups to deliver training sessions in multiple languages and formats that are culturally sensitive and accessible.
- **Feedback Mechanisms:** Regularly collecting feedback from participants to refine and improve the training programs. This can be done through surveys, focus groups, and community meetings to ensure the programs meet the evolving needs of the community.

## **2. Support for Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs**

Supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs through targeted funding, technical assistance, and the development of a community support ecosystem addresses critical economic challenges faced by historically marginalized communities. By ensuring inclusive access to resources and fostering economic empowerment, the strategy helps keep more capital within the community, creates jobs, and improves wages. This approach not only enhances immediate economic stability but also contributes to long-term economic growth and resilience in disinvested communities.

### *1. Identifying Needs and Challenges*

- **Capital and Financial Records:** Small businesses and entrepreneurs from historically disinvested communities often struggle to access the capital and financial resources necessary to qualify for government assistance and support. This is largely due to inadequate financial records and lack of technical know-how.
- **Economic Leakage:** When small businesses in these communities do not thrive, there is a loss of economic activity and investment within the community. Ensuring small businesses are financially stable can keep more money circulating locally.

### *2. Expected Impact*

- **Economic Empowerment:** By providing necessary capital and technical assistance, small businesses will be better equipped to thrive, thus retaining economic activity within the community.

- **Data Insight:** When small businesses in low-income sectors have higher wages, employees can purchase more and reinvest in the economy. For instance, minimum wage violations in California resulted in 40,800 additional families living under the poverty line and significant losses in federal and state income taxes. Addressing these issues through small business support can help reverse these trends.
- **Job Creation and Wage Improvement:** Small businesses that receive adequate support are likely to create more jobs and pay higher wages. This helps improve the overall economic stability of the community.
  - **Data Insight:** A 2014 analysis from the Economic Policy Institute estimated that wage theft could cost workers \$50 billion per year. Supporting small businesses can help ensure fair wages and better economic outcomes for workers.

### 3. Support for Educational Institutions and Non-Profits

Supporting efforts by local educational institutions and non-profits to create and expand work-based learning opportunities is crucial for building career pathways in high-demand industries. By addressing employer concerns and encouraging their active participation, the strategy ensures that individuals from disadvantaged communities gain access to valuable training and employment opportunities. This approach not only enhances individual economic mobility but also contributes to the overall growth and sustainability of the local economy.

#### 1. Identifying Needs and Challenges

- **Workforce Development:** There is a significant need for educational institutions and non-profits, particularly those serving disadvantaged communities, to create and expand work-based learning opportunities. This includes pre-employment training, soft skills training, registered apprenticeships, and internships.
- **Employer Engagement:** Business leaders are critical to these efforts but often feel hesitant to participate due to concerns about regulation, productivity, long apprenticeship periods, and potential turnover. Only 20% of U.S. employers currently feel responsible for workforce training, indicating a gap that needs to be addressed.

#### 2. Expected Impact

- **Career Pathways for Disadvantaged Communities:** By creating robust work-based learning opportunities, the strategy helps individuals from disadvantaged communities gain access to high-demand careers. This fosters economic mobility and reduces employment barriers.

- **Data Insight:** Addressing the low participation rate of employers in workforce training (only 20%) can significantly improve the availability of training opportunities, thus expanding career pathways for marginalized individuals.
- **Economic Growth in High-Demand Industries:** Aligning training programs with the needs of high-demand and just transition industries ensures that the local workforce is prepared for future job markets, contributing to regional economic growth.
  - **Business Benefits:** By participating in these programs, employers can cultivate a skilled workforce that meets their specific needs, leading to enhanced productivity and business success.

### *3. Community Engagement and Learning*

- **Outreach to Employers:** Conducting targeted outreach to local businesses to encourage their participation in training programs. This could involve workshops, informational sessions, and direct engagement with business leaders to address their concerns and highlight the benefits of involvement.
  - **Example:** Partnering with local chambers of commerce and industry associations to promote the benefits of workforce training and share success stories from similar initiatives.
- **Support for Participants:** Providing ongoing support to participants through mentorship programs, career counseling, and continuous skill development opportunities to ensure their success in the workforce.

## 4. Growing Mid-Level Technical Jobs

Growing mid-level technical jobs and developing the necessary training programs to access these jobs is a crucial strategy for improving economic mobility for historically marginalized and disinvested communities. By focusing on occupations that do not require a four-year degree but offer competitive wages and strong growth potential, the strategy creates accessible pathways to stable and rewarding careers. This approach not only enhances individual economic opportunities but also supports the overall growth and resilience of the local economy.

### *1. Identifying Needs and Challenges*

- **Demand for Mid-Level Technical Jobs:** The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects that between 2020 and 2030, about 60 percent of new jobs will be in occupations that do not typically require an associate's, bachelor's, or graduate degree. These include sectors such as construction and installation, maintenance and repair, and transportation, which are projected to grow faster than the 7.7 percent average over the decade.

- **Wage Potential:** In the LA-Long Beach-Anaheim metro area, these occupations offer competitive wages: construction and extraction workers have a mean hourly wage of \$35.28, installation, maintenance, and repair occupations have a mean hourly wage of \$32.00, and transportation workers have a mean hourly wage of \$24.23.

## *2. Expected Impact*

- **Increased Employment Opportunities:** By developing mid-level technical jobs and the necessary training programs, the strategy aims to provide individuals with viable career paths that do not require a four-year degree.
  - **Data Insight:** With 60 percent of new jobs projected to be in occupations that do not require advanced degrees, focusing on these areas can significantly increase employment opportunities for a broader segment of the population.
- **Higher Wages:** These mid-level technical jobs offer competitive wages, which can improve the economic stability and quality of life for workers from disadvantaged communities.
  - **Data Insight:** In the LA-Long Beach-Anaheim metro area, the mean hourly wages for these occupations are significantly higher than the median wage for all occupations, indicating strong earning potential.

## *3. Community Engagement and Learning*

- **Targeted Outreach:** Conducting outreach to inform community members about available training programs and career opportunities in mid-level technical jobs. This could involve partnerships with local schools, community centers, and non-profits.
  - **Example:** Hosting job fairs and informational sessions in collaboration with local employers to showcase the benefits of mid-level technical careers and available training programs.
- **Support Services:** Providing support services such as career counseling, job placement assistance, and mentorship programs to help individuals successfully transition into these careers.

## **5. Training and Entrepreneurial Support for Economic Resilience**

Providing resources and opportunities for individuals to be trained to meet the needs of economic shocks and convert that training into entrepreneurial ventures is a critical strategy for fostering economic resilience and empowerment in historically marginalized communities. By ensuring inclusive access and addressing language, cultural, and other barriers, the strategy helps create a more equitable and sustainable economic landscape.

This approach not only supports immediate economic adaptation but also lays the groundwork for long-term community strength and prosperity.

### *1. Identifying Needs and Challenges*

- **Economic Shock Preparedness:** Economic shocks, such as shifts towards a new carbon economy, require individuals to adapt quickly to changing job markets. Providing training that equips individuals to meet these new demands is essential for economic resilience.
- **Entrepreneurial Development:** Converting this training and experience into the foundation for new businesses can help individuals and communities emerge stronger from economic shocks.
- **Accessibility Barriers:** Ensuring that resources and opportunities are inclusive of language, cultural, and other barriers is crucial for reaching historically marginalized and disinvested communities.

### *2. Expected Impact*

- **Economic Resilience:** By preparing individuals to meet the needs of economic shocks and supporting them in starting their own businesses, the strategy enhances the economic resilience of historically marginalized communities.
  - **Data Insight:** While specific data for this strategy is not provided, the focus on just transition in a new carbon economy aligns with broader trends towards sustainability and green jobs, which are projected to grow in importance and offer new opportunities.
- **Entrepreneurial Growth:** Providing resources and support for new businesses helps individuals turn their training into entrepreneurial ventures, leading to economic empowerment and job creation within the community.

### *3. Community Engagement and Learning*

- **Targeted Outreach:** Engaging with community organizations, local leaders, and cultural groups to promote training and entrepreneurial opportunities. This ensures that the strategy reaches and benefits those who need it most.
  - **Example:** Partnering with community centers and cultural organizations to host informational sessions and workshops in multiple languages and formats that are culturally relevant.
- **Continuous Feedback:** Implementing feedback mechanisms to continuously improve the accessibility and effectiveness of training and entrepreneurial support programs. This includes collecting input from participants and community stakeholders.

## 6. Exposure to Employment Opportunities and Work-Based Learning (WBL)

Ensuring that high school-aged and adult students are exposed to a variety of employment opportunities and expanding Work-Based Learning (WBL) programs is essential for preparing them for successful careers. By integrating real-world work experiences with classroom learning, and engaging parents and families in the process, the strategy enhances students' career readiness, motivation, and understanding of the work environment. This approach not only benefits students but also addresses the need for skilled workers in various industries, contributing to the overall economic growth and resilience of the community.

### 1. Identifying Needs and Challenges

- **Exposure to Diverse Career Paths:** There is a need to expose high school-aged and adult students to employment opportunities across various industries, such as healthcare, construction, manufacturing, education, and hospitality. This includes students on non-college tracks and aims to create awareness among their parents, guardians, and families to support their career pathways.
- **Work-Based Learning (WBL) Systems:** The US lags behind other countries in structured WBL systems due to limited employer-school partnerships and inconsistent quality, which undermines students' acquisition of practical skills and credentials valued by employers.

### 2. Expected Impact

- **Enhanced Career Readiness:** Exposing students to a wide range of career opportunities and integrating WBL into their education helps them develop technical, academic, and employability skills. This increases their readiness for the workforce.
  - **Data Insight:** About 72% of US public high schools offer WBL systems, but these are often limited in scope. Expanding these programs can provide students with valuable practical skills and knowledge.
- **Improved Student Outcomes:** WBL programs have been found to increase motivation, understanding, school attendance, and reduce dropout rates. They also facilitate work readiness and increase job-related skills and knowledge.
  - **Data Insight:** WBL helps students apply classroom learning, explore careers, and develop critical understanding of the work environment, which prepares them effectively for their future careers.

### 3. Community Engagement and Learning

- **Targeted Outreach to Employers:** Engaging with local businesses to create more WBL opportunities and foster strong employer-school partnerships. This includes highlighting the benefits of WBL for employers, such as developing a skilled workforce and enhancing community ties.
  - **Example:** Hosting employer roundtables and informational sessions to discuss the importance of WBL and encourage their participation.
- **Support Systems for Students:** Providing continuous support for students participating in WBL programs through mentorship, career counseling, and additional resources to ensure their success.
  - **Example:** Setting up mentorship programs where students are paired with industry professionals who can guide them through their career exploration and development.

## 7. Establishing Innovation Hubs and Green Zones

Establishing and expanding innovation hubs, green innovation zones, and technology parks is essential for fostering ethical research and development of new technologies by small businesses. By supporting small businesses in their innovative endeavors, particularly in green technology, the strategy not only enhances economic growth but also contributes to environmental sustainability. This approach empowers historically marginalized communities by creating new business opportunities and encouraging eco-friendly practices that benefit both the economy and the environment.

### 1. Identifying Needs and Challenges

- **Encouraging Innovation:** There is a need to establish and expand innovation hubs, green innovation zones, and technology parks to promote ethical research and development in emerging fields, particularly among small businesses.
- **Small Business Contributions:** Small businesses play a significant role in innovation, particularly in green technology. Despite only accounting for 8% of all U.S. patents, they hold 14% of green technology patents, indicating a strong potential for impact.

### 2. Expected Impact

- **Increased Green Innovation:** By supporting small businesses through innovation hubs and green zones, the strategy fosters an environment conducive to developing new green technologies and sustainable practices.
  - **Data Insight:** Small businesses hold about 32% of all patents related to smart grid and solar energy and 15% in batteries and fuel cells. This highlights their crucial role in advancing green innovation.

- **Economic and Environmental Benefits:** Promoting green innovation can help small businesses enhance their sustainability while minimizing their environmental impact. This includes using eco-friendly technologies that can lead to:
  - **Market Distinction:** Businesses that adopt green practices can differentiate themselves in the marketplace, attract new customers, and improve their competitiveness.

### *3. Community Engagement and Learning*

- **Collaboration with Local Universities:** Leveraging the wealth of universities in the Orange County area to support green innovation by connecting small business founders with research and development resources.
  - **Example:** Establishing partnerships with local universities to provide mentorship, technical support, and research collaboration opportunities for small businesses.
- **Workshops and Training:** Offering workshops and training sessions to educate small business owners about green technologies, sustainable practices, and available resources for innovation.
  - **Example:** Hosting regular events focused on topics such as renewable energy implementation, sustainable production techniques, and access to funding for green initiatives.

## 8. Supporting the OC Pathways' K-16 Education Collaborative

### *1. Identifying Needs and Challenges*

- **Building Strong Partnerships:** There is a critical need to foster strong partnerships between high schools, community colleges, public sectors, and local employers to create seamless pathways to living-wage jobs.
- **Youth Employment Challenges:** Many young people (ages 16 to 24) are employed in lower-wage jobs, increasing their vulnerability to wage theft and on-the-job injuries. This demographic requires education on their rights as workers and potential career pathways.

### *2. Expected Impact*

- **Increased Employment Opportunities:** By establishing strong educational and employer partnerships, the strategy enhances access to job opportunities that provide living wages, directly impacting the economic stability of historically marginalized communities.

- **Data Insight:** With 55% of young people employed and often in low-wage jobs, providing pathways to better opportunities is crucial for their future economic success.
- **Addressing Housing Affordability:** By increasing access to living-wage jobs, the strategy can help alleviate the housing crisis faced by low-income residents in Orange County, where many are unable to afford even modest housing.
  - **Data Insight:** Orange County has the third-largest shortfall of homes affordable to low-income families, highlighting the need for sustainable income sources. The average worker needs to work 60 hours per week to afford existing housing, yet in disadvantaged tracts, the average worker works less than 38 hours per week, further compounding their economic challenges.

### 3. Community Engagement and Learning

- **Collaboration with Community Colleges:** Strengthening partnerships with community colleges to ensure students receive the necessary education and training aligned with local job markets.
  - **Example:** Establishing dual enrollment programs that allow high school students to earn college credits while completing their high school education.
- **Family and Community Involvement:** Engaging families and community members in the education process to support students in pursuing career pathways.
  - **Example:** Hosting workshops and informational sessions for families to understand the importance of education and career readiness initiatives.

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### 3.b.iii - Response to Call to Action: Alignment with Job Quality & Access, Equity, and Climate

#### Introduction

The proposed initiatives prioritize family-sustaining jobs, equitable access for disinvested communities, and support for workers in at-risk industries. By integrating these strategies, we aim to enhance job quality, ensure inclusive recruitment practices, and support the transition of workers to emerging, sustainable industries. This comprehensive response outlines the detailed strategies and actions we plan to implement to achieve these goals, providing a robust framework for sustainable economic growth in Orange County.

#### Job Quality and Access

At the heart of our workforce development strategy lies a steadfast commitment to prioritizing family-sustaining jobs that provide essential benefits, opportunities for career advancement, access to ongoing training, consistent scheduling, safe working conditions, and avenues for collective worker input and representation. We believe this approach is essential for not only creating new high-quality jobs but also for retaining existing ones and elevating the overall quality of current jobs within our region. This commitment to equity will be grounded in a data-driven understanding of existing disparities. We will conduct a thorough analysis of workforce and demographic trends to identify significant gaps in job quality and access, disaggregating data by race, ethnicity, income, and other key demographic factors. By pinpointing these disparities, we can develop targeted interventions to address them effectively. This will involve conducting comprehensive workforce surveys, analyzing employment trends using data from reputable sources such as CalEnviroScreen, SCAG, AdvanceOC, and OCHHealthData, and ultimately, developing tailored interventions – including training programs, recruitment initiatives, and support services – designed to close these gaps and ensure that all community members have the opportunity to thrive in a sustainable and inclusive economy.

#### Support for At-Risk Workers

Recognizing that economic shifts and industry transformations can create uncertainty for workers, our strategy prioritizes proactive support for those potentially impacted by at-risk industries. Preventing displacement and ensuring that high-quality jobs are not replaced with lower-quality alternatives requires a forward-thinking approach to workforce development and economic transition. We will begin by conducting a comprehensive analysis to identify industries vulnerable to disruption due to factors such as technological advancements, environmental regulations, or shifting global markets. This analysis will enable us to understand the specific challenges faced by workers within these industries and tailor our support accordingly. Through these proactive measures, we aim to

empower workers to adapt to evolving industry landscapes and thrive in the workforce of the future.

## Creating and Improving High-Quality Jobs

The primary objective is to ensure the availability of family-sustaining jobs in Orange County. These jobs must provide essential benefits such as healthcare and retirement, opportunities for career advancement, access to training, consistent scheduling, safe working conditions, and collective worker input and representation.

### *Key Strategies and Details*

#### **Support Educational Institutions and Non-Profits**

Building a robust and inclusive workforce requires bridging the gap between education and employment, providing clear pathways for individuals to acquire in-demand skills and connect with promising career opportunities. Through these multifaceted efforts, we aim to significantly increase the number of students and job seekers prepared for and able to access quality jobs within these growing industries, fostering a more inclusive and prosperous workforce for the future.

#### **Invest in Workforce Success**

Investing in the success of our workforce means providing comprehensive training opportunities that empower lower-wage employees to advocate for themselves and access higher-paying, sustainable career pathways. Ultimately, our goal is to empower workers with the knowledge, skills, and collective support they need to advocate for improved workplace standards, leading to better working conditions, higher wages, and enhanced job quality for all.

#### **Grow Mid-Level Technical Jobs**

To expand opportunities for individuals seeking fulfilling and well-compensated careers in growing sectors, we will prioritize the development of industry-recognized certification and credentialing programs specifically designed for mid-level technical jobs in emerging industries that do not require a traditional four-year college degree. Through these efforts, we aim to enhance job access and create upward mobility for individuals, fostering a more inclusive and equitable workforce within these burgeoning fields.

#### **Align K-16 Education Collaborative**

Creating a more seamless and effective education-to-employment pipeline requires a collaborative approach that aligns resources and strengthens partnerships across all levels of education and industry. The success of these initiatives will be rigorously measured by tracking student outcomes, including graduation rates, job placement rates, and wage growth, allowing us to assess impact and identify areas for continuous

improvement. Through these collaborative efforts, we strive to create smoother transitions for students from education to high-quality employment, ultimately reducing unemployment and underemployment rates and fostering a more prosperous future for all.

## Equitable Access and Inclusive Recruitment

To ensure equitable access to high-quality jobs for members of disinvested communities through tailored training programs, clear pathways for attaining necessary education or skills, and inclusive recruitment practices.

### *Key Strategies and Details*

#### **Ensure Exposure to Employment Opportunities**

Expanding opportunities for young people begins with ensuring that all high school-aged and adult students are exposed to a diverse range of employment opportunities, including those that don't require a traditional four-year college degree. We will gauge the success of these initiatives by identifying key high schools and training resources within communities primarily represented by historically disinvested populations, evaluating the reach and effectiveness of existing programs, and assessing the overall impact of our outreach efforts on student and family awareness and participation in career development programs. Through these concerted efforts, we aim to empower students to make informed decisions about their futures, leading to higher rates of employment, increased job satisfaction, and a more inclusive and equitable workforce.

#### **Support Small Businesses and Entrepreneurs**

To ensure the effectiveness of these initiatives, we will continuously evaluate existing resources, assess their impact on participating businesses, and identify opportunities to enhance outreach and support for disinvested communities. Through these combined efforts, we aim to fuel job creation, economic mobility, and business sustainability within disadvantaged communities, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and thriving local economy.

#### **Promote Inclusive Recruitment Practices**

Creating an inclusive and equitable job market requires a dedicated focus on ensuring recruitment practices provide equal opportunities for all community members to access high-quality jobs. To guarantee the effectiveness of these efforts, we will continuously monitor and evaluate recruitment practices, identifying areas for improvement and making necessary adjustments to create a more equitable and inclusive hiring landscape. Through these combined efforts, we anticipate seeing increased diversity within the workforce, higher levels of job satisfaction among employees, and ultimately, improved access to high-quality jobs for all community members.

## **Enhance Accessibility to Training and Education**

A core principle of our workforce development strategy is to ensure that training and education programs are accessible to all community members, particularly those from historically disinvested communities. Furthermore, we will actively collaborate with community organizations to leverage their expertise and reach, enabling us to better identify and address the specific needs of disinvested communities. Through these multifaceted efforts, we aim to increase participation in training and education programs, leading to higher levels of skill attainment and ultimately, improved job prospects and economic mobility for individuals from disinvested communities.

## **Support Worker Rights and Workplace Standards**

Our commitment to worker well-being extends to ensuring that all individuals have access to safe and fair working conditions, with full support for their rights to organize and advocate for better workplace standards. This commitment will be upheld through a multi-pronged approach. First, we will empower workers by developing educational programs that inform them of their rights and provide them with the tools to advocate for themselves effectively in the workplace. These programs will cover crucial topics such as labor laws, workplace safety regulations, and collective bargaining. Simultaneously, we will actively support worker organizations, including unions and worker centers, by providing them with resources such as funding, technical assistance, and capacity-building opportunities, enabling them to advocate more effectively for improved workplace standards. Through these concerted efforts, we aim to cultivate safer and fairer working environments, leading to increased worker satisfaction and a more just and equitable job market for all.

## **Preventing Displacement and Supporting At-Risk Workers**

Our objective is to protect workers in at-risk industries, preventing the displacement of incumbent workers and the replacement of high-road jobs with low-quality alternatives.

### *Key Strategies and Details*

#### **Invest in Just Transition Training**

This strategy focuses on equipping workers with the skills and resources needed to navigate economic shifts and transition into new career paths, particularly within the expanding green economy. This will involve developing comprehensive training programs that are inclusive and address potential barriers such as language and cultural differences. The success of this strategy will be assessed by evaluating the effectiveness of programs offered by organizations like OCBC and Centers of Excellence in identifying and promoting in-demand skill sets. Additionally, we will examine how effectively these skill sets are being integrated into the curriculum of high schools, job centers, and community colleges.

## **Enhance Collaboration with Government and Non-Profits**

Recognizing the importance of a strong safety net for at-risk workers, this strategy centers on fostering stronger communication and collaboration between government agencies and non-profit organizations. This collaborative approach aims to create a more robust support infrastructure capable of providing timely and effective assistance to those facing economic hardship, ultimately reducing displacement and offering greater protection. To gauge the success of this strategy, existing support programs will be identified and evaluated for their effective use of resources. Furthermore, opportunities for improving and expanding collaborations will be explored based on identified gaps in service.

## **Promote Apprenticeship Programs**

This strategy emphasizes the creation of more pathways for workers to acquire valuable skills and experience by increasing the number of apprenticeship opportunities available in high-demand sectors. By expanding these opportunities, we aim to equip workers with the skills needed to thrive in a competitive job market. To measure the effectiveness of this initiative, existing apprenticeship programs across various industries will be identified and assessed, specifically focusing on how these programs are promoted and their overall reach and impact at the high school and community college levels.

## **Conclusion**

By prioritizing family-sustaining jobs, equitable access for disinvested communities, and support for workers in at-risk industries, we aim to create a more inclusive and sustainable economy. Through targeted training programs, inclusive recruitment practices, support for small businesses and entrepreneurs, and the promotion of sustainable business practices, we will enhance job quality and ensure that all community members have the opportunity to thrive. By integrating these strategies, we will support the transition of workers to emerging, sustainable industries, promote environmental sustainability, and foster community resilience.

The comprehensive approach outlined in this response provides a robust framework for sustainable economic growth in Orange County. By addressing the needs of all community members and promoting inclusive and sustainable practices, we will create a more equitable and prosperous future for our region.

### 3.b.iv – Workforce Development

## **Response to Call to Action: Alignment with Job Quality & Access, Equity, and Climate**

### *Introduction*

In response to the urgent need for alignment with job quality, access, equity, and climate resiliency, this essay outlines comprehensive strategies aimed at fostering economic mobility and creating a sustainable workforce in Orange County. These strategies prioritize the development of a skilled, adaptable workforce, strong collaborations among key stakeholders, and the promotion of sustainable and equitable growth. The following sections detail the proposed initiatives and their intended outcomes.

### *Objective*

The cornerstone of our strategy is workforce development, which involves matching skills to available jobs, addressing talent and recruitment challenges, and facilitating strategic collaboration among businesses, training and education institutions, and labor organizations.

### *Key Strategies and Details*

#### **Support Work-Based Learning Opportunities**

Preparing individuals for success in the modern workforce requires providing them with practical, hands-on experience that complements traditional classroom learning. Therefore, we will prioritize supporting work-based learning opportunities that bridge the gap between education and employment. By forging strong partnerships with high schools, community colleges, universities, and local non-profit organizations, we aim to create and expand access to a range of programs, including pre-employment training, soft skills development workshops, registered apprenticeships, and internships. These initiatives will focus on building clear career pathways within high-demand and just transition industries, such as artificial intelligence (AI), clean renewables, healthcare, and those aligned with the CERF priority sectors. In the short term, we anticipate seeing increased participation in work-based learning programs and improved job readiness among students and job seekers. Long term, these efforts are expected to yield higher employment rates within high-demand sectors, cultivate a more skilled and adaptable workforce, and foster stronger, more symbiotic connections between education and industry.

## **Invest in Local Workforce Success**

Investing in the success of our local workforce, particularly those in lower-wage positions, is paramount to creating a more equitable and prosperous society. By providing comprehensive training opportunities that not only equip individuals with the skills needed for higher-paying jobs but also empower them to advocate for themselves and their fellow workers, we can foster upward mobility and improve overall job quality. Our approach will begin with conducting thorough needs assessments to identify the specific training needs of lower-wage employees across various industries. Based on these findings, we will develop tailored training programs that focus on both essential technical skills and worker rights education, ensuring that all content is accessible to non-English speakers. To maximize reach and impact, we will establish strong partnerships with trusted community organizations deeply rooted within historically disinvested communities. These partnerships will be essential for ensuring the accessibility of these training programs and fostering a sense of trust and support for participants. Recognizing that training is most effective when coupled with clear pathways for advancement, we will work to create well-defined career pathways within priority sectors, such as clean energy and healthcare, that offer opportunities for growth and increased earning potential. Throughout this process, we will continuously evaluate the effectiveness of our training programs, incorporating participant feedback and analyzing outcomes to make necessary adjustments and ensure we are meeting the evolving needs of our workforce. In the short term, we anticipate increased participation in these training programs, a measurable improvement in job quality, and heightened awareness of worker rights among participants. Long term, these efforts are expected to create enhanced career advancement opportunities, reduce economic disparities, and contribute to a more equitable and empowered workforce overall.

## **Grow Mid-Level Technical Jobs**

Expanding access to well-paying, fulfilling careers requires looking beyond traditional four-year degree pathways and embracing alternative credentials that align with evolving industry needs. Therefore, we will prioritize the development and promotion of training programs that lead to industry-recognized certifications and credentials specifically designed for in-demand, mid-level technical jobs within rapidly growing sectors. These programs will create pathways for individuals to acquire specialized skills and knowledge sought after by employers, opening doors to promising careers without requiring a four-year college degree. In the short term, we aim to increase enrollment in these mid-level technical training programs and raise awareness of these valuable, non-degree career pathways. Long term, we believe these efforts will expand access to fulfilling, well-compensated mid-level technical jobs, create greater career opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds, and contribute to a significant reduction in skill gaps within rapidly evolving industries.

## **Exposure to Employment Opportunities**

Expanding career horizons for young people requires intentional efforts to expose them to the vast array of opportunities beyond traditional college pathways. To that end, we will prioritize initiatives that provide high school-aged and adult students with meaningful exposure to a diverse range of industries and career paths. This will involve organizing engaging career fairs and expos that showcase a variety of fields, including skilled trades, technical professions, and entrepreneurial ventures, highlighting the viability and value of non-college tracks. To provide more immersive experiences, we will arrange industry tours and job shadowing opportunities, allowing students to gain firsthand insights into different work environments and interact with professionals in their respective fields. Recognizing that informed career decisions are best made with guidance and support, we will expand access to career counseling services within schools, helping students identify their interests, explore suitable career paths, and develop actionable plans for pursuing their goals. Because families play a crucial role in shaping career aspirations, we will actively engage parents and guardians through informational sessions designed to educate them about the breadth of career opportunities available beyond traditional four-year college degrees. Finally, we will forge strong partnerships with local employers to create a pipeline of opportunities for students, including part-time jobs, internships, and co-op programs that provide valuable work experience and industry connections. In the short term, we aim to increase awareness of diverse career opportunities among students and their families, leading to higher participation in career exposure programs. Long term, these efforts are expected to result in enhanced career satisfaction, better alignment of career choices with individual interests and skills, and ultimately, a more diversified and robust workforce.

## **Establish Innovation Hubs and Technology Parks**

To position our region at the forefront of technological advancement and sustainable economic growth, we will prioritize the expansion of innovation hubs, green innovation zones, and technology parks. These dynamic centers will serve as catalysts for research and development, fostering collaboration and propelling innovation in cutting-edge fields such as artificial intelligence (AI) and green technologies. By providing state-of-the-art facilities, access to cutting-edge research, and a supportive ecosystem for collaboration, these hubs will empower small businesses to conduct ethical research and development, leading to groundbreaking discoveries and the creation of new, sustainable industries. In the short term, we anticipate a marked increase in the number of innovation hubs and technology parks established, accompanied by a surge in research and development activity. Long term, we envision a thriving landscape of innovation that contributes significantly to economic sustainability and growth, fuels advancements in AI and green technologies, and provides robust support for small businesses driving progress in these critical fields.

## **Supporting the K-16 Education Collaborative**

Creating seamless pathways from education to well-paying, fulfilling careers requires a collaborative, systemic approach that aligns resources and removes barriers across all levels of education and workforce development. To that end, we will champion a K-16 education collaborative support model that prioritizes strong partnerships and strategic alignment of funding to maximize student success. This involves fostering robust collaborations among high schools, community colleges, universities, local employers, and government agencies, ensuring all stakeholders are working together to create a cohesive and effective education-to-career pipeline. We will prioritize curriculum alignment across the K-16 spectrum, ensuring that educational programs at all levels are in sync with industry needs and provide students with the knowledge and skills employers seek. Securing and strategically aligning federal and state funding streams will be essential for supporting these K-16 education initiatives and maximizing their impact. Recognizing that industry needs and economic landscapes are constantly evolving, we will establish mechanisms for continuous feedback and improvement, ensuring that our programs remain agile and responsive to emerging trends and demands. In the short term, we anticipate seeing an increase in the number of partnerships formed, greater alignment of funding streams, and the establishment of more robust and effective educational pathways for students. Long term, these efforts are expected to result in the creation of durable education-to-career pathways that ensure economic stability for students, lead to higher employment rates in living-wage jobs, and foster sustained collaboration among educational institutions and employers.

## **Inclusive Training Resources**

In an era marked by economic shifts and the urgent need to transition to a more sustainable future, providing inclusive training resources is paramount. We recognize that individuals from all backgrounds should have the opportunity to adapt, thrive, and contribute to the new carbon economy. Therefore, we will prioritize the development and delivery of training programs that are not only comprehensive but also accessible to those facing language, cultural, or other barriers. Our approach will begin with conducting thorough needs assessments to identify the specific challenges individuals encounter when attempting to access training resources. Based on these findings, we will develop inclusive training programs that are culturally sensitive, offered in multiple languages, and tailored to meet the unique needs of diverse learners. Recognizing that community-based organizations are often best positioned to reach underserved populations, we will establish strong partnerships with these trusted entities to ensure our programs are effectively delivered and supported. To maximize accessibility, we will utilize a variety of delivery methods, including online, in-person, and hybrid formats, catering to different

learning preferences and circumstances. Furthermore, we will offer specialized training and resources designed to support aspiring entrepreneurs, particularly those interested in launching ventures within the burgeoning green economy. In the short term, we aim to see increased participation in our training programs among diverse populations and a marked improvement in the accessibility of these valuable resources. Long term, these efforts are expected to lead to enhanced entrepreneurial success and resilience, increased economic opportunities for individuals from all backgrounds, and a surge in support for the growth and development of a thriving green economy.

### **Ecosystem of Community Support for Small Businesses**

Cultivating a thriving and inclusive local economy requires fostering an ecosystem of robust support for small businesses, the backbone of our communities. This support must extend beyond traditional financial assistance and encompass a holistic approach that empowers entrepreneurs to not only launch but also sustain and grow successful businesses. Our strategy will center on providing a multi-faceted support system that includes access to funding, technical assistance, local contracting opportunities, and community networking opportunities. We will prioritize equitable access to capital by offering grants, loans, and other financial assistance programs tailored to the needs of small businesses, particularly those owned by individuals from historically disinvested communities. Recognizing that financial capital is most effective when paired with knowledge and expertise, we will provide comprehensive technical assistance programs covering areas such as financial management, marketing, and operations. To further level the playing field, we will develop programs that prioritize local small businesses in the bidding process for government and community contracts. Creating opportunities for connection and collaboration will also be paramount. We will establish networking events and forums where small business owners can connect with potential partners, mentors, and customers, fostering a supportive ecosystem for growth. In the short term, we anticipate increased access to funding and technical assistance for small businesses, coupled with improved financial literacy among small business owners. Long term, these efforts are expected to enhance the financial stability and growth trajectory of small businesses, particularly those owned by historically disinvested community members, ultimately leading to a stronger, more equitable local economy and a significant increase in local contracting opportunities.

### **Strategic Collaboration and Communication**

Ensuring the safety and well-being of our community, especially during times of crisis, requires a coordinated and collaborative approach that leverages the strengths of both government agencies and non-profit organizations. To that end, we will prioritize fostering strategic collaboration and communication between these entities, creating a robust network capable of responding effectively to emergencies and providing a strong safety

net for our most vulnerable residents. Our strategy will focus on clearly identifying and mapping potential partner organizations across various sectors, including health, housing, disaster response, and social services, ensuring that government agencies have a clear understanding of which organizations to engage with during specific types of emergencies. Establishing clear communication protocols and dedicated channels for information sharing will be essential for facilitating timely and effective coordination during critical incidents. To ensure that our collaborative response efforts are well-coordinated and effective, we will conduct joint training exercises and simulations that bring together government agencies and non-profit partners, allowing them to test communication protocols, practice collaborative decision-making, and refine response strategies. Recognizing that efficient resource allocation is paramount during emergencies, we will create mechanisms for seamless resource sharing among partners, optimizing the utilization of available assets, expertise, and personnel. To ensure our collaborative framework remains adaptive and responsive, we will regularly review and update partnership agreements and communication strategies based on feedback from partners, lessons learned from past events, and evolving needs within our community. In the short term, we anticipate an increase in the number of collaborations and partnerships established, accompanied by a marked improvement in overall preparedness for emergency operations. Long term, these efforts are expected to result in a strengthened safety net for vulnerable populations, more efficient and effective emergency responses, and enhanced community resilience in the face of unforeseen challenges.

### **Measurable Outputs and Outcomes**

To ensure accountability and measure the effectiveness of our comprehensive strategies, we will diligently track a range of outputs and outcomes. Our initial focus will be on monitoring key outputs such as the number of new and existing training programs implemented, the number of partnerships formed among educational institutions, businesses, and community organizations, the total number of individuals participating in training, apprenticeship, and internship programs, the number of industry-recognized certifications and credentials awarded, the count of new innovation hubs, green innovation zones, and technology parks established, the total amount of funding distributed to small businesses and other entities, and the number of small businesses receiving technical assistance, funding, or other forms of support. In the short term (1-2 years), we anticipate observing positive changes reflected in increased awareness and participation in our programs, improved job readiness among job seekers and students entering high-demand sectors, and enhanced infrastructure supporting affordable housing and environmental sustainability initiatives. Looking ahead to longer-term outcomes (5 years), our goal is to foster sustained economic development in sectors that offer good wages, benefits, and working conditions, create broader economic opportunities and reduce disparities among diverse populations, and ultimately, improve

the overall quality of life for all residents, evidenced by better employment opportunities, improved housing options, and greater access to essential services.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, the proposed strategies for workforce development are designed to align with job quality, access, equity, and climate resiliency goals. By supporting work-based learning opportunities, investing in local workforce success, growing mid-level technical jobs, exposing students to diverse employment opportunities, establishing innovation hubs, supporting the K-16 education collaborative, providing inclusive training resources, creating an ecosystem of community support for small businesses, and fostering strategic collaboration and communication, we aim to build a robust and sustainable workforce in Orange County.

These initiatives will promote economic mobility, create sustainable jobs, and ensure equitable growth across the region. Through strategic partnerships and continuous evaluation of our efforts, we will adapt to emerging challenges and opportunities, ensuring long-term success and resilience for our community.

By tracking measurable outputs and focusing on both short-term and long-term outcomes, we will monitor the effectiveness of our strategies and make necessary adjustments to achieve our goals. Together, we can build a more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous future for all residents of Orange County.

### 3.b.v – Alignment with State Strategies

#### **Orange County Strategies – Climate Goal and State Policy Alignment**

*Prepared by Egon Terplan for CA Fwd  
July 13, 2024*

##### *Introduction*

The following document provides analysis of the 8 target strategies for Orange County focused on two variables: climate impacts and alignment with various relevant state strategies. Per the state guidelines, the following is the specific language on the two portions of analysis of each strategy:

1. **Climate:** Explain how the Strategy will limit the impacts of economic development activities on the natural environment. The strategy must also avoid exacerbating the effects of climate change and include pathways for mitigating the effects of anticipated climate impacts on targeted industries and occupations. It must also address public health needs, with special attention to the needs of disinvested communities.
2. **Alignment with State Strategies:** An assessment of how the Strategy can align with, support, and be supported by existing state strategies in areas like clean energy, air pollution reduction, transportation decarbonization, climate adaptation, sustainable water management, and natural and working lands.

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##### *Strategy 1 - Career Pathways:*

Improve education and workforce training opportunities that support career pathways to high-road jobs, particularly in priority industry sectors, including:

- Enhance career pathways in priority sectors and create specific onramps for individuals with less than a two- year degree and limited or no work experience.
- Promote the availability of education and training programs that lead to high-road career pathways in priority industry sectors to disinvested communities.
- Fund soft skills and other broad-based transferable skill training programs that support career pathways that lead to high-road jobs in priority industry sectors.
- Build a talent pipeline to meet the specific workforce needs of local employers and significant local and regional projects.
- Create new and enhance existing career pathways in priority industry sectors with paid internships and on- the-job training opportunities.
- Prepare K-16 students and incumbent workers, especially those in disinvested communities, for the future of work, including AI and automation.

**Climate:** Explain how the Strategy will limit the impacts of economic development activities on the natural environment.

- Strategy 1 will not on its own exacerbate impacts on climate except to the extent that the priority industry sectors themselves have climate impacts. For example, to the extent that the region encourages the expansion of AI as a priority industry and pathways into the industry, this expansion would result in an increase energy use which could delay the region's transition to renewables in the electrical grid.
- To mitigate impact on the environment, the sectors themselves should each have a focus on shifting to become carbon neutral.
- To the extent that health care is one of the target sectors it is important to note that health care facilities are major users of energy and decarbonization of the buildings would advance state climate goals. Additionally, the location of health care facilities impacts commute mode choices and other travel choices. Locating these facilities in walkable and transit adjacent places can advance climate goals to reduce auto dominance and shift travel behavior to climate-friendly modes like transit, walking, and biking.
- The strategy notes its focus on supporting existing organizations that are working with and supporting the needs of disadvantaged communities. The various tactics - e.g. soft skill training- can directly provide key transferable lifelong skills for residents in disinvested communities especially to move up within existing industries and programs. A key issue for many workers is the challenge of moving into higher paying jobs within a particular company or employer.

**Alignment with State Strategies:** An assessment of how the Strategy can align with, support, and be supported by existing state strategies.

- Strategy 1 is aligned with the principles of the Labor Agency's High Road Training Partnerships (HRTPS). (See: [https://cwdb.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2020/08/OneSheet\\_HRTP\\_ACCESSIBLE.pdf](https://cwdb.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2020/08/OneSheet_HRTP_ACCESSIBLE.pdf)) HRTPs are partnerships between workers, employers, training providers, unions, and community-based organizations to prepare pathways to quality jobs, in particular for members of the most disadvantaged communities. This comprehensive approach to workforce and career pathways could be pursued and utilized within Orange County as a way to implement Strategy 1 and ensure alignment with state policies.
- Strategy 1 could also align with the State support for the growth of work-based learning, especially through paid internships and on- the-job training opportunities. To further this alignment, the OC strategy should be done in a way that is consistent with the current work-based learning measures in the California School Dashboard College/Career Indicator (CCI). These include: Pre-Apprenticeships; State and Federal Job Programs; Transition Work-Based Experience; and Transition Classroom-Based Work Exploration. (See: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/ac/cm/workbasedcci.asp>).

- The State's K-16 Collaborative system was initially designed to be in alignment with CA Jobs First regional programs. This strategy's emphasis on K-16 will require coordination with the OC K-16 Collaborative.
- To further the alignment, the career pathways should be designed to focus on high quality jobs. For example, health care is a major source of employment for middle wage jobs and as such supports state goals around high quality jobs with upward mobility.
- Identifying better pathways to quality jobs for those in non-college tracks will significantly increase state equity goals. The county already has among the highest share of college graduates statewide.

### *Strategy 2 – Apprenticeships:*

Increase access to apprenticeship opportunities that lead to high-road jobs particularly in priority industry sectors in the region, including:

- Enhancing K-16 CTE offerings that link to state-approved apprenticeships in priority industry sectors, including expanding articulation agreements, pre-apprenticeship programs, preparatory academic work, and internships.
- Aligning federal and state funding to support new and expanded apprenticeship programs and facilities that serve priority industry sectors.
- Promote apprenticeship programs in priority industries to disinvested communities, providing information on how to prepare and apply for apprenticeships.

**Climate:** Explain how the Strategy will limit the impacts of economic development activities on the natural environment.

- The strategy has a direct focus promoting apprenticeships to residents in disadvantaged communities, which can result in those residents and their households entering pathways into higher quality employment.
- Exposing high school and adult students to employment opportunities does not on its own exacerbate impacts on climate and natural environment. To mitigate impact on the environment, the sectors themselves should each have a focus on shifting to become carbon neutral.
- This strategy will directly benefit disadvantaged communities by identifying HS and adult students at institutions in disinvested communities throughout the county.
- To better incorporate public health needs of disadvantaged communities, the region will ensure that the location of investments in the growth of target industries do not disproportionately impact public health.

**Alignment with State Strategies:** An assessment of how the Strategy can align with, support, and be supported by existing state strategies.

- Apprenticeships are a proven strategy to connect people to quality jobs. This is one of the core goals of CA Jobs First and a principle throughout the State.

- In 2018, Governor Newsom set a goal of 500,000 active apprentices by 2029. As of 2020, the State had achieved 100,000 active apprenticeships (See: <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/road-500000-apprentices/>)
- The California Community Colleges has been a leader on this implementation (See: <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Chancellors-Office/Divisions/Workforce-and-Economic-Development/apprenticeship/ca-apprenticeship-initiative>)
- The Community Colleges have embarked on Vision 2030, which includes apprenticeships (as well as work-based learning and earn and learn). A key strategy is where “all California high school students enroll in community college transfer, career or apprenticeship pathways and complete high school with at least 12 units of dual enrollment credit.” (See: <https://www.cccco.edu/About-Us/Vision-2030>)

### *Strategy 3 - Enhance Quality of Life:*

Increase wrap-around services to ensure the health and well-being of all families and neighborhoods, particularly in disinvested communities, foster a sense of inclusivity and support, improving climate resilience and quality of life including:

- Increasing the availability and accessibility of affordable childcare.
- Identifying gaps and increasing access to culturally sensitive and affordable healthcare for members of disinvested communities.
- Revising county disaster and economic shock preparedness, response, and recovery plans to address the needs of disinvested communities with cultural competence. This includes creating a regional fund to provide economic aid to disinvested businesses and individuals to cover gaps in short-term assistance by state and federal governments, such as lease/rent payments, medical bills, a safe and healthy environment, and other basic needs and expenses.
- Developing a culturally responsive delivery system for programs and services to support disinvested communities' health, prosperity, and well-being.
- Form strong partnership with community-based organizations to identify, plan, create, access, and restore lands and waters and designate open space for disinvested communities.
- Greater access to basic needs that are not directly health care services, but that will impact an individual's mental and physical health (I.e. quality food, housing, rental and utility assistance etc.).

**Climate:** Explain how the Strategy will limit the impacts of economic development activities on the natural environment.

- The strategy has an explicit focus on mental and physical health. Such investments will directly benefit and improve public health outcomes, particularly in disinvested communities.
- The strategy will not have a direct negative impact on the natural environment except to the extent that county recovery plans focus on rebuilding in ways that are not sensitive to the natural environment and the investments made to support quality of life focus on transit and non-auto modes.

- Childcare is a specific issue for many communities with particular challenges for disinvested and low-income communities.

**Alignment with State Strategies:** An assessment of how the Strategy can align with, support, and be supported by existing state strategies.

- The strategy should seek alignment and coordination with the State’s Master Plan for early learning and care. See: <https://www.chhs.ca.gov/home/master-plan-for-early-learning-and-care/>. The strategy includes a goal to increase the affordability of childcare. This requires not only funding to increase the purchasing power of parents and caregivers (i.e. demand side strategies) but also a need to increase the number of licensed child care providers (i.e. supply-side strategies). To achieve the state goals and meet the strategy idea of increasing access, the strategy should align with efforts to speed up the licensing time as well as support home-based care providers with modifying their homes to enable them to take on more children. In particular, by enabling more child care providers to have slightly larger facilities for home-based care, the providers are then able to achieve small economies of scale that result in an increase in their income. In addition, the strategy should make sure to directly support efforts in the state master plan such as: “Bring together and align under the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) an array of programs and funding streams for early learning and care, including direct contracted programs (CCTR and Migrant), voucher-based funding streams—including the consolidation of all CalWORKs Child Care stages, Migrant Alternative Payment—and Family Child Care Home Education Networks (FCCHEs).” See: <https://californiaforallkids.chhs.ca.gov/goals>
- To achieve “disaster and recovery plans to address the needs of disinvested communities with cultural competence” the strategy implementation must be in alignment with the State Emergency Plan as. See: <https://www.caloes.ca.gov/office-of-the-director/operations/planning-preparedness-prevention/planning-preparedness/2024-state-emergency-plan/> . The State’s SB 160 (2019) also requires for the next iteration of an emergency operation plans, emergency managers must integrate cultural competence before their next plan update by “incorporating mechanisms and processes that account for the jurisdiction’s population diversity in a meaningful and inclusive manner.” Orange County should ensure that there is a forum for community engagement on these plans to be in alignment with the state.
- The strategy should leverage efforts at the State’s I-Bank and Treasurer’s Office to aid businesses impacted by disaster. Work should also be done in coordination with the Office of Small Business Assistance. <https://outsmartdisaster.calosba.ca.gov/disaster-resources/>
- The strategy’s focus on culturally sensitive and affordable healthcare for members of disinvested communities as well as broad needs that impact mental and physical health with an equity lens is also in alignment with the broad focus of the State’s Health and Human Services Agency.

- The idea of protecting open space is in alignment with the state’s 30 by 30 initiative. See: <https://www.californianature.ca.gov/> and [EO N-82-20 30x30 Strategy](#).
- Restoring land and water aligns with the state goals for centering and prioritizing nature-based solutions. See the following documents: [AB 1757 - California’s Nature-Based Solutions Climate Targets Plan](#), [California’s Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy](#)
- This strategy also aligns with goals for addressing extreme droughts, floods, rising temperatures, declining fish populations, and groundwater reliance as outlined in the State’s [Water Resilience Portfolio](#), [Climate Change Scoping Plan](#) and recently updated [Climate Adaptation Strategy](#).
- Finally, the Quality-of-Life strategies may include an expansion in “safety net”. Expanding the state's safety net is a core state goal and something promoted in the future of work task force as well as a key lesson emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. (See: <https://www.labor.ca.gov/labor-and-workforce-development-agency/fowc/>)
- The vision of this strategy also situates government as a partner with NGOs which requires a form of social innovation that is entirely consistent with the vision of the state and also an opportunity to learn region to region. OC funders should participate in the Governor's annual philanthropy summit, organized with the Governor's Senior Advisor for Social Innovation.

#### *Strategy 4 - Small Business, Worker Ownership and Entrepreneurship:*

Provide capital, technical assistance, and other resources for small businesses, worker ownership and entrepreneurs, including:

- Providing technical assistance and other resources for start-ups and early-stage businesses in priority industry sectors to help remove barriers commonly encountered by women- and minority-led startups.
- Engaging all disinvested community businesses to identify and prioritize the removal of barriers to small business growth and stability, including issues related to accessing capital, hiring a skilled workforce, participating in government opportunities, and negotiating regulatory constraints.
- Encouraging local businesses, nonprofits, and governments to increase small business participation within their supply chains.
- Training small businesses in priority industry sectors on critical business skills, including financial literacy and management, AI, and marketing.
- Removing barriers from disinvested communities to access capital and to the region's experienced financial intermediaries and technical assistance providers. This includes community development financial institutions, community development corporations, chambers of commerce, federally and state-designated technical assistance providers, small business financial development corporations, economic development organizations, community land trusts, and other nonprofits that serve similar purposes in a culturally appropriate manner.
- Funding, technical assistance, and development of an ecosystem of community support for small businesses and entrepreneurs, and resources to ensure they have the financial records to qualify for support/government assistance. This

should be done within language, focused outreach, or other guidelines to ensure resources benefit small businesses owned by disinvested community members.

- Provide more opportunities and resources for employee ownership

**Climate:** Explain how the Strategy will limit the impacts of economic development activities on the natural environment.

- The expansion of AI has considerable impacts on the natural environment primarily through the increase in energy demand from AI applications. For example, some analysis reveals that generative AI (i.e. creating content based on previous data) will increase energy demand by four to five times over a request from a traditional search engine. Given that AI is growing at the same time that there is a goal to decarbonize entire sectors (which also increases demand for electricity), the rise of AI will then invariably compete with other demands for energy. And the need to create significant new clean energy will also result in an increase in consumption of natural resources and greenhouse gas emission.

**Alignment with State Strategies:** An assessment of how the Strategy can align with, support, and be supported by existing state strategies.

- The rise of AI supports state goals to create high quality jobs. At the same time, the rise of AI puts strains on the state's emissions goals and shift to carbon neutrality. Orange County AI firms can better align with state climate and emissions strategies by generating more of their local demand for clean and renewable energy on site or within the county. This will be challenging as OC is already land constrained and does not have significant land following from SGMA to convert from agriculture to clean energy.
- The strategy appropriately focuses on removing for women- and minority-led startups and disinvested community businesses. A key opportunity for alignment and source of resources are the State's I-Bank and its "California Small Business Loan Match" which works with CDFIs and other lenders statewide. The key is that IBank and CDFIs provide opportunities for small businesses to secure capital but might not be able to secure them from traditional (or potentially predatory) lenders. CDFIs and the IBank can benefit small startups but also offering less rigid lending criteria and more flexible repayment plans. See: <https://www.calloanmatch.org>
- The strategy to increase access to local contracting opportunities is consistent with the state goal to provide more opportunities for various types of small, micro, and other specific business types, including not-for-profit organizations. Orange County should consider making local small business purchasing goals and policies consistent with the state goals so that small businesses do not have to produce and fill out entirely different forms and demonstrate consistent with different criteria in order to be eligible for local as well as state requirements. A key distinction between business size is the ability to go after larger contracts and being limited to a small pool of local government contracts limits the upward mobility of small

businesses and startups. This strategy should also be done in a way to ensure access to local contracting for a range of business sizes, including nonprofits.

### *Strategy 5 - Housing:*

Increase the availability and accessibility of affordable and workforce housing to workers in the region, that promotes infill low impact development and sustainability, including rental and ownership including:

- Investing in infrastructure in traditionally marginalized areas to increase affordable and workforce housing availability.
- Integrating and prioritizing affordable and workforce housing needs in local and regional planning efforts, emphasizing the necessity for more affordable units.
- Support affordable housing for workers by addressing the disparities between local wages and housing costs.
- Advancing supportive housing projects to expedite the provision of permanent affordable options for those in need.
- Expeditiously move forward on supportive housing recommendations in the Homeless Service System Pillars Report, created by the Commission to End Homelessness and accepted by the County of Orange Board of Supervisors in 2022.
- Investment and collaboration to create more affordable housing that is spacious for larger families and more innovative solutions like cooperatively owned housing, housing stipends and emphasizing housing in community benefits agreements, to address gentrification and rising prices. Furthermore, these housing developments should connect with the investments in infrastructure and green technology already being made.

**Climate:** Explain how the Strategy will limit the impacts of economic development activities on the natural environment.

- As noted elsewhere in this strategy review, the key to meeting climate goals in infrastructure investment is to ensure that the investments do not expand automobile dependence at the expense of other mobility options. And the location of housing is the key action to its meeting of climate goals and limiting its impact on natural environment.
- In high cost and often stratified regions like Orange County housing is complex and requires the location of housing in high resources communities that are walkable (i.e. near to downtowns and town centers) while not further isolating low-income residents into both low resources areas as well as areas where they will be reliant on driving long distances.
- The appropriate climate-friendly approach is to locate new housing within existing communities in areas that are walkable and have access to transit and other ways of getting around without requiring a car for most trips. These locations should be within close proximity to shopping, schools, services, parks, other amenities, as well as a range of employment opportunities. This land use approach will not only reduce the overall development cost (i.e. less parking) but also the long-term household costs as transportation costs will be lower.

- In California land use planning, each Metropolitan Planning Organization has to produce a Sustainable Communities Strategy is the core regulatory document to achieve greenhouse gas emissions reductions primarily from land use changes and shifting transportation funds and programs and in a way that results in less driving. Orange County's strategy implementation and actions should be consistent with the region's RTP/SCS (even though the plan does not require local alignment). See SCAG's Connect SoCal RTP SCS See: <https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/23-2987-connect-socal-2024-final-complete-040424.pdf?1714175547>)

**Alignment with State Strategies:** An assessment of how the Strategy can align with, support, and be supported by existing state strategies.

- As noted above, alignment with state climate policy necessitates the location of new housing in areas that support lower levels of driving (or vehicle miles traveled / VMT). This approach would support alignment towards the CARB Scoping Plan (25% VMT reduction goal), SB 743 implementation, CAPTI, and SB 375 (i.e. SCAG's Connect SoCal).
- While land use planning is largely a local activity, housing policy is increasingly important at the state level. To be in alignment with state policy, Orange County should ensure that its various local communities implement key adopted state housing policies, including adopted housing elements (which are then implemented) and accelerating accessory dwelling units.
- One method to demonstrate alignment with state housing policy is achieve the state "pro housing" designation. The current list of jurisdictions to have achieved this designation is found here <https://www.hcd.ca.gov/planning-and-community-development/prohousing-designation-program> To increase alignment, this strategy should encourage OC jurisdictions to become designated Pro Housing.
- Pro-housing policies include Housing Element compliance, rezoning to have sufficient sites for 150% of RHNA, "Location Efficient Communities". Pro-housing designation also makes eligible jurisdictions in priority for funding from
  - Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program (TIRCP).
  - Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities (AHSC),
  - Infill Infrastructure Grant (IIG), and
  - Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) programs.
- The State of California Housing Plan also includes a series of analytic steps and strategies critical to meeting statewide goals of affordable and safe homes for all. For example, there is a risk of potential conversion of 22,000 existing subsidized housing to market rate statewide. To be in alignment with the state strategy, Orange County should be assessing the units at risk of conversion within their county See: <https://statewide-housing-plan-cahcd.hub.arcgis.com/> and <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/94729ab1648d43b1811c1698a748c136>

## Strategy 6 - Uplift Community Voices through Respectful Cultural Engagement

Community participation in the creation of strategies and projects to ensure the highest benefit to disinvested communities. Cultural humility and respectful cultural engagement are essential to the implementation of the plan, including respecting workers, residents, immigrants, financially underserved/economically vulnerable, multilingual speakers and business owners by following their community norms and customs when engaging with them.

- Encouraging local governments, foundations, and other funders in the region to use participatory budgeting approaches to ensure that community-determined priorities are being met.
- Setting a best practice for community engagement through proactive written outreach strategies that specifically include historically excluded groups and geographic areas of the region.
- Eliminate barriers for disinvested communities and historically excluded voices to access economic development opportunities and resources.

**Climate:** Explain how the Strategy will limit the impacts of economic development activities on the natural environment.

- The strategy will not have any specific direct negative impacts on the natural environment.
- Community based design and community budget processes are a way to ensure that disinvested communities not only have a seat at the table but also are shaping the specific investment opportunities. To further the linkage to public health outcomes for disadvantaged communities, one specific approach is to develop an investment portfolio of community-identified projects.

**Alignment with State Strategies:** An assessment of how the Strategy can align with, support, and be supported by existing state strategies

- The strategy should look to models of community-based budgeting such as SGC's Transformative Climate Communities. The Strategic Growth Council's Transformative Climate Communities is an example of a community-based budgeting and prioritization process.
- Those funds are targeted at a range of disadvantaged communities.
- However, Orange County has not been traditionally successful in securing resources from SGC but nonetheless should adopt some of the approaches inherent in the various SGC programs. Orange County has been a "desert" of climate investments (according to an SGC board member). This strategy provides an opportunity for OC communities to demonstrate approaches that are in line with the goals of SGC and related climate investment programs.

### *Strategy 7- Green and Emerging Technology and Innovation:*

Invest in innovation, research, and industry cluster development in green and emerging technologies, including energy, transportation, infrastructure, nature-based solutions and climate adaptation including:

- Establishing and expanding innovation hubs and technology parks to encourage research and development of new technologies, such as AI, that support or, at a minimum, do not impede the region's transition to a net zero-powered economy.
- Adapt existing built environment to incorporate cleaner technologies.
- Establishing Green Innovation Zones, where small businesses, especially business owners from disinvested communities, receive wrap-around support in transitioning to cleaner and more sustainable power sources and methods of operation, production, and distribution.
- Investment in infrastructure in traditionally marginalized areas to support an inclusive and cost-effective transition to a zero-emission economy.
- Develop career pathways from traditional lower-wage jobs to careers in high road occupations in priority industry sectors driven by innovation and support the region's transition to a net zero-emission economy.

**Climate:** Explain how the Strategy will limit the impacts of economic development activities on the natural environment.

- Strategy will directly benefit climate focused industries by expanding zones to support innovation. However, attention must be paid to the location of these zones to ensure they support climate friendly travel modes as well as do not result in conversion of greenfield or open space to development.
- The strategy can also directly benefit disadvantaged communities if the zones are located adjacent or near such communities and there are displacement mitigation strategies built in to the creation of the zones.
- The Strategy identifies AI as a potential source of innovation. To the extent that the growth of AI results in localized increases in demand on the energy grid, it could slow the county's transition to carbon neutrality and counteract the goals of the strategy of transitioning to a zero-emission economy. There are instances where existing natural gas power plants and other fossil fuel infrastructure must remain active in order to meet the demands of the grid.
- Additionally, the infrastructure investments into marginalized communities must take into account both approaches such as nature-based solutions (see Strategy 8) and also continue a further shift away from auto-mobility towards fully sustainable modes. As is clear from the analysis by the Air Resources Board, in order to meet state climate targets, there will have to be overall reductions in driving, not just a shift in technology towards zero emissions transportation. For Orange County this means meeting these goals will require not only changes in land use towards more people residing in walkable communities where many daily needs can be taken care of with either very short auto trips or (ideally) with residents using sustainable modes such as biking, walking, and public transit.

**Alignment with State Strategies:** An assessment of how the Strategy can align with, support, and be supported by existing state strategies.

- Overall, this strategy is in alignment with the State’s Scoping Plan. The Scoping Plan has multiple components and pathways to meet climate targets. The following goes into more detail on some of these various components.
- As noted above, to meet the State’s Scoping Plan, there is a need to reduce per capita rates of driving by 25%. This is for a variety of reasons. First, transportation is the single greatest source of emissions in California so reductions in transportation emissions are the most significant local ways to meet climate goals. However, even with a shift towards requiring all new vehicles to be zero emissions by 2035, there will be millions of internal combustion engine vehicles on the road for decades beyond. Additionally (and perhaps more significantly), the way to achieve the climate goals is to shift more trips to non-auto modes (as even ZEV cars require net new renewable energy infrastructure to maintain their carbon neutrality). This means to be fully in alignment with the state climate goals infrastructure investments must also support more compact development walkability, and move in the direction of reducing demand for automobility.
- In specific terms, this means that infrastructure investments towards in marginalized communities to support the shift to a zero emissions economy must not only focus on charging networks and zero emissions vehicles but also on e-bike programs, public transit and shared mobility, as well as bike and pedestrian infrastructure.
- The State also has a Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI) adopted in 2021 and coming from a Governor’s Executive Order. To be in alignment with the spirit of CAPTI, local and county transportation investments should shift from expansion of roadway capacity and towards management of the existing network while shifting more trips and investment towards transit, complete streets, walkability, and a safe and comprehensive bike network. From a job perspective, there is growing evidence that transit investments result in more jobs created per \$1 million in investment relative to highways.
- Strategy 7 notes an action “Adapt existing built environment to incorporate cleaner technologies.” This is directly in line with and supportive of state efforts at building decarbonization, which is a key strategy to meet the State’s Scoping Plan. Residential and commercial buildings are responsible for 25% of California GHG.
- To meet 30 X 30 goals, new renewable energy that is produced in furtherance with this strategy should not be located on high value agricultural lands.
- Finally, these new innovation hubs should partner with existing iHubs through Cal OSBA. The iHubs focus on a range of activities such as identification of market and project opportunities through leveraging of local networks, industry specific workshops on business and innovation development, and direct advising and mentorships with industry experts. There is a cleantech iHubs in Los Angeles. See: <https://calosba.ca.gov/funding-grants-incentives/ihub2/>

### *Strategy 8 - Climate Resilient Environment:*

Taking actions to support a sustainable environment, including preparing for and mitigating climate change, which includes, but is not limited to, making, planning, development, infrastructure and quality of life decisions that provides a net environmental benefit. Note - Recommendations for “Strategy 8” are also integrated into the other strategies.

- Empowering and training residents who live in disinvested neighborhoods impacted by environmental hazards to use nature-based solutions including bioremediation and other methods to address these issues.
- Grow environmental jobs that offer longer-term opportunities.
- Continue to fund research and data to focus on climate impacts in disinvested communities.
- Deep dive studies on the concentrations of pollutants and how they correlate to social economic issues

**Climate:** Explain how the Strategy will limit the impacts of economic development activities on the natural environment. The strategy must also avoid exacerbating the effects of climate change and include pathways for mitigating the effects of anticipated climate impacts on targeted industries and occupations. It must also address public health needs, with special attention to the needs of disinvested communities.

- The Strategy is specifically designed to reduce the region’s current impact on the natural environment.
- Orange County faces a range of climate risks from sea level rise and coastal erosion to wildfire to extreme heat.
- From an economic development perspective, Orange County should consider opportunities to bring principles of the circular bioeconomy to existing industries, especially leverage the biotechnology talent within the region. The notion of circularity supports the co-location of adjacent facilities and industries such that the waste stream of one process can be used as feedstock for another. This is an emerging area of economic opportunity within California, especially for areas with significant forest or agricultural biomass. In a more urbanized area like Orange County, there is still existing biomass to harvest as well as municipal waste. Orange County’s biotech assets could be used to help support the growth of a localized bioeconomy or bioindustrial manufacturing industry that creates high quality employment in “environmental jobs”.
- The strategy also necessitates having more concentrated land development and overall growth patterns in order to limit the ongoing conversion of natural and working landscapes into urban development. As noted in prior strategies, supporting population growth on existing urbanized land through higher density infill is the key to maintaining natural and working lands and meeting climate goals.

**Alignment with State Strategies:** An assessment of how the Target Sector Strategy can align with, support, and be supported by existing state strategies in areas like clean

energy, air pollution reduction, transportation decarbonization, climate adaptation, sustainable water management, and natural and working lands.

- Pursuing high quality jobs and pathways into those jobs is entirely consistent with the original vision of CERF (now CA Jobs First) and written into the trailer bill language creating CERF.
- The State has prioritized climate smart infrastructure “nature-based solutions” as a way to mitigate against a future with more severe climate impacts and has invested nearly \$10 billion into various projects since 2020. This approach can also serve multiple benefits simultaneously, including protecting vulnerable communities from climate crises, mitigating flooding impacts, removing carbon, protecting land from development, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- This strategy should further align with core strategies and investments in the 2022 California’s Natural and Working Lands (NWL) Climate Smart Strategy, which not only identifies nature-based solutions as a strategy to deliver climate outcomes, but also shapes and guides various state programs and investments. Integrated this strategy into the State’s 2022 Scoping Plan to Achieve Carbon Neutrality by 2045.
- Nature based solutions are also included as one of the six priority approaches in the State’s 2021 Climate Adaptation Strategy.
- The State Climate Adaptation Strategy identifies climate risk by region. The state is currently preparing the 5th assessment. From 2024-2026, the state will be synthesizing the original climate research and incorporating into regional studies. The region will ensure information from this strategy is shared with the state analysts preparing the 5th climate assessment.
- As part of the Climate Adaptation Strategy, the State has prioritized partnerships with tribes (See: <https://climateresilience.ca.gov/overview/tribes.html>). The Strategy should identify best practices from the State’s Adaptation Clearinghouse to leverage. A number of these are located within Orange County.
- Orange County should also align with Assembly Bill 1757 (2022), which included a list of actions to focus on nature-based solutions and required targets for natural carbon sequestration and nature-based climate solutions for 2030, 2038, and 2045.
- Additionally, the State of California has set a goal to preserve 30 percent of land by 2030 (30X30) (See: EO N-82-20 30x30 Strategy). This requires an ongoing attention to not only land use and the location of new urban development but also to new strategies to manage existing open spaces. The state's 30X30 initiative has identified pathways for new green spaces in urban areas and disinvested communities. Several key pathways are relevant. For example, the \$97 million acquisition of 387 acres of lowlands and coastal bluffs at Banning Ranch in Orange County is an example of Pathway 8: Align Investments to Maximize Conservation Benefit. In this example there were partnerships between the Trust for Public Land and many funding partners. The benefit of the connection is the ranch now "connects nearly 1,000 acres of conserved coastal lands and waters, creating a contiguous reserve system" of beach wetlands, sloughs, parks, and rivers. See: Pathways to 30X30 Annual Progress Report. <https://www.californianature.ca.gov/pages/resources>.

- A major opportunity for additional alignment would require Orange County working with local funders (philanthropy, local government, voter initiatives) as well as conservation organizations to identify locations within the county to achieve the 30X30 goals which are in coordination with state agencies who are also looking for land preservation locations. This will avoid duplication of efforts and reduction in overall impact. (See: <https://www.californianature.ca.gov/pages/ca-nature>).

# Appendix A - Orange County Jobs First Selected Characteristics of Target/Priority Sector

## Appendix A. Selected characteristics of target sectors

Industry (NAICS code)	Sector (NAICS code)	Occupations <sup>1</sup>	Current (2020) OC jobs <sup>2</sup>	Projected OC jobs in 2030 <sup>2</sup>	Projected growth in demand (OC) <sup>2</sup>	% represented by unions (US) <sup>1</sup>	Unemployment rate, May 2024 (US) <sup>1</sup>	Injury & illness cases per 100 full-time workers 2022 <sup>1</sup>	Median annual salary (OC) <sup>3</sup>	Health benefits		Paid vacation		Paid sick leave	
										private sector	public sector	private sector	public sector	private sector	public sector
<a href="#">1. Ambulatory Health Care Services (621)</a>	<a href="#">Health Care and Social Assistance (62)</a>	Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses Medical and health services managers Medical assistants Medical secretaries	88,200	107,700	22%	8%	3%	2.4	\$58,122	79%	91%	88%	92%	87%	93%
<a href="#">2. Hospitals (622)</a>	<a href="#">Health Care and Social Assistance (62)</a>	Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses Medical and clinical laboratory technologists Radiologic technologists and technicians	32,600	35,900	10%	9%	2%	6.1	\$67,552	79%	91%	88%	92%	87%	93%
<a href="#">3. Social Assistance (62)</a>	<a href="#">Health Care and Social Assistance (62)</a>	Home health aides Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses Medical and health services managers	49,400	59,400	20%	8%	3%	4.5	\$44,520	79%	91%	88%	92%	87%	93%
<a href="#">4. Computer and Electronic Product Manufacturing (334)</a>	<a href="#">Manufacturing (31-33)</a>	Computer hardware engineers Electrical and electronic engineering technicians Electrical and electronic equipment assemblers Semiconductor processors	33,100	32,600	-2%	9%	2%	1.1	\$57,621	91%	n/a	96%	n/a	80%	n/a
<a href="#">5. Miscellaneous Manufacturing (339)</a>	<a href="#">Manufacturing (31-33)</a>	Cutting, punching, and press machine setters, operators, and tenders, metal and plastic Dental laboratory technicians First-line supervisors/managers	149,100	153,400	3%	9%	3%	2.1	\$60,960	91%	n/a	96%	n/a	80%	n/a

		of production and operating workers														
		Inspectors, testers, sorters, samplers, and weighers														
		Sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing, except technical and scientific products														
		Team assemblers														
<a href="#">6. Education Services (61)</a>	<a href="#">Education Services (61)</a>	Education administrators, elementary and secondary school	71,100	79,900	12%	15%	3%	2.0	\$81,752	72%	90%	59%	34%	81%	93%	
		Elementary school teachers, except special education														
		Middle school teachers, except special and vocational education														
		Secondary school teachers, except special and vocational education														
		Teacher assistants														
<a href="#">7. Construction of Buildings (236)</a>	<a href="#">Construction (23)</a>	Carpenters	21,200	25,200	19%	11%	4%	2.1	\$72,070	76%	n/a	81%	n/a	68%	n/a	
		Construction laborers														
		Construction managers														
		Cost estimators														
		First-line supervisors/managers of construction trades and extraction workers														
<a href="#">8. Specialty Trade Contractors (238)</a>	<a href="#">Construction (23)</a>	Carpenters	70,700	82,000	16%	11%	4%	2.6	\$65,507	76%	n/a	81%	n/a	68%	n/a	
		Construction laborers														
		Electricians														
		First-line supervisors/managers of construction trades and extraction workers														
		Plumbers, pipefitters, and steamfitters														
<a href="#">9. Accommodation (721)</a>	<a href="#">Accommodation and Food Services (72)</a>	First-line supervisors/managers of housekeeping and janitorial workers	16,300	23,900	47%	8%	4%	n/a	\$35,621	32%	n/a	40%	n/a	48%	n/a	
		Hotel, motel, and resort desk clerks														
		Lodging managers														
		Maids and housekeeping cleaners														
		Waiters and waitresses														

<a href="#">10. Food Services and Drinking Places (722)</a>	<a href="#">Accommodation and Food Services (72)</a>	Combined food preparation and serving workers, including fast food Cooks, fast food Cooks, restaurant First-line supervisors/managers of food preparation and serving workers Waiters and waitresses	115,600	162,800	41%	2%	6%	2.4	\$35,713	32%	n/a	40%	n/a	48%	n/a
<b>TOTAL: All industries</b>		--	<b>1,639,300</b>	<b>1,939,100</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>\$36,542</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>92%</b>

**Note:** Statistics are presented for the industry when available and for (broader) sector otherwise. NAICS = North American Industry Classification System. n/a = not available.

**Sources:**  
<sup>1</sup> National. US Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Industries at a Glance*, <https://www.bls.gov/iag/home.htm>. Missing values for union representation are estimated from US Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Table 3. Union affiliation of employed wage and salary workers by occupation and industry*, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t03.htm>. Overall incidence of benefits are from US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual summaries of benefit coverage, <https://www.bls.gov/ebs/publications/annual-benefits-summary.htm>, March 2023.

<sup>2</sup> County-specific. California Employment Development Department, *Long-Term Industry Employment Projections*, [https://data.ca.gov/dataset/long-term-industry-employment-projections/resource/5642307f-30c2-4ddb-b811-507b338e0b4d?view\\_id=42172502-e37f-46fa-9c3c-fbaf254a9aac&filters=Area%20Name%20\(County%20Names\)%3AAnaheim-Santa%20Ana-Irvine%20MD%20\(Orange%20County\)](https://data.ca.gov/dataset/long-term-industry-employment-projections/resource/5642307f-30c2-4ddb-b811-507b338e0b4d?view_id=42172502-e37f-46fa-9c3c-fbaf254a9aac&filters=Area%20Name%20(County%20Names)%3AAnaheim-Santa%20Ana-Irvine%20MD%20(Orange%20County))

<sup>3</sup> County-specific weighted average of occupations within industry. California Employment Development Department, *Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics*, <https://data.ca.gov/dataset/oews-2009-2023/resource/aef4c53a-7e17-418c-acc1-d189e39b6caa?filters=Area%20Name%3AAnaheim-Santa%20Ana-Irvine%20MD>