

# THE CONSORTIUM CONNECTION



Strengthening Our Workforce, Empowering Our Communities

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*Photo Credit: SDI RC*

## Kicking Off the Academic Year with Regional Momentum

As we begin a new academic year, we are excited to share important milestones and initiatives shaping our region's future. This edition highlights the launch of the New Behavioral Health Apprenticeship Network, a critical step in strengthening our workforce pipeline and supporting community well-being. You'll also find updates on Advancing San Diego and Imperial's Talent Connection – Blue and Green Tech, funded through the Industry Driven Regional Collaborative Grant, which is aligning our colleges and employers around high-demand sectors. We are thrilled to celebrate the Grand Opening of Miramar College's Career and Life Design Center, a hub dedicated to empowering students to design their futures. Finally, don't miss our Partner Spotlight on Vehicles for Change, showcasing innovative approaches to breaking barriers and expanding opportunities for students and families.

*Danene Brown, Ph.D.*  
*Regional Consortium Chair*

## News Center



*Photo Credit: San Diego Miramar College*

## Miramar College Opens Career and Life Design Center

In August, San Diego Miramar College celebrated the grand opening of its new **Career and Life Design Services Center**, a space created to equip students with the tools, perspectives and opportunities to shape purposeful futures and careers. This initiative represents a significant shift in how the college approaches student success, embracing a broader philosophy that recognizes career development as part of a holistic life journey. With many students balancing school, work and family, the center helps them align their goals with their values and lived experiences while expanding access to internships, work-based learning, prior learning credit and industry connections.

Supported through the Regional Strong Workforce program funding, Miramar College's leadership team is piloting a regional framework to strengthen career services across community colleges, helping adapt the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) assessment to better support the unique needs of community college students.

[Link to Full Article](#)



*Photo Credit: SDI RC*

## New Behavioral Health Apprenticeship Network Launches in San Diego

The SDI RC is driving regional solutions to one of the most urgent workforce challenges: the shortage of behavioral health professionals. In partnership with the LAUNCH Apprenticeship Network and San Diego Workforce Partnership, SDI RC has launched the San Diego Behavioral Health Apprenticeship Network (SDBHAN) to expand



*Students participating in Cuyamaca's Water Studies Program*

*Photo Credit: SDI RC*

## Building Blue and Green Tech Talent with New Grant

San Diego and Imperial Counties' blue and green economies are growing quickly, creating demand for skilled workers in marine energy, aquaculture, clean energy and water technology. Employers, however, face an urgent shortage of talent with the technical, digital and sustainability skills needed to keep pace.

career pathways and strengthen mental health services across the county.

Supported by \$6.8 million from the county of San Diego's **ELEVATE Behavioral Health Workforce Fund**, SDBHAN will expand registered apprenticeships and pilot 700 earn-and-learn apprenticeships that combine classroom instruction with hands-on training. Educational partners — including MiraCosta College, Palomar College, San Diego City College, Southwestern College, and Grossmont Adult Education — will align curriculum and training to meet employer needs.

SDBHAN reflects a strong regional commitment to workforce equity, career advancement and building the talent pipeline for behavioral health careers.

[Link to Full Article](#)

To close this gap, the SDI RC is working with the San Diego Regional EDC, Imperial Valley EDC, Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College District and San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) to empower colleges and employers to address these talent needs.

Together, the organizations secured a FY2025-26 Industry Driven Regional Collaborative (IDRC) Grant to launch *Advancing San Diego and Imperial's Talent Connection – Blue and Green Tech*.

Through curriculum co-development, talent demand research, new certificates and degrees, and expanded work-based learning, the initiative will strengthen regional talent pipelines while ensuring students from diverse backgrounds can access high-quality careers.

[Link to Full Article](#)

## Insights & Innovations

### New Report Aims to Improve Military to Civilian Employment Pathways

The COE released a new report in May analyzing the employment transition of “military exiters” — a highly skilled talent pool with valuable experience — to better support veterans as they transition into civilian jobs.

The report uses a mapping tool to match military roles with civilian occupations based on comparable skills, duties and qualifications, while also identifying opportunities where living wages and job demand align with veterans' profiles.

The large concentration of veterans in the San Diego and Imperial region — who accounted for 36% of service members exiting the military in California in 2020 — highlights the opportunity for these highly skilled workers to fill gaps in the labor market.

For military occupations where the civilian equivalent had limited demand or low wages, the COE identified alternative high-demand, high-wage roles that require similar knowledge, skills and abilities. The report also provides several resources, from occupational classification tools to veteran support programs, that can help service members start to explore civilian careers.

[Read the report](#)

## Partner Spotlight





*From Left: Emilio Flores, VFC Director of Development; Joseph Stark, SDI RC Regional Apprenticeship Director; Ivan Corona, VFC Executive Director  
Photo Credit: Joseph Stark, SDI RC*

## Vehicles for Change

The SDI RC is proud to highlight a new partnership with **Vehicles for Change**, a San Diego-based nonprofit dedicated to creating career pathways in the automotive industry.

Vehicles for Change offers short-term, paid automotive mechanic training that prepares graduates for immediate employment at dealerships and service shops across San Diego. Many participants come from justice-involved backgrounds, and this training equips them with technical skills and opens doors to long-term economic mobility.

Together, the SDI RC and Vehicles for Change are building a bridge from skills training to higher education — creating lasting opportunities for those seeking a fresh start and a brighter future.

Through funding from the James Irvine Foundation, this collaboration connects to further education and training opportunities at local community colleges. Participants receive resources, such as tutoring, enrollment assistance and wraparound support, to help them pursue certificates and degrees in fields aligned with their career goals.

## Committee Corner



## From Incarceration to Inspiration: Ashley Gerdo Leads Rising Scholars

Ashley Gerdo doesn't shy away from her past. She is open about being formerly incarcerated. It's a label that carries stigma and creates barriers for many seeking a path into higher education. But for Ashley, her lived experience is the reason she is so deeply committed to dismantling those barriers at the Rising Scholars Network, which exists to ensure that students who are currently or formerly incarcerated have access to higher education, mentorship and career pathways.

"I think it's important for folks like me to be able to claim our narrative and to show others what's possible," Gerdo said. "No matter what we've done in our lives — yes, we've paid the price — but most of us are going to return home. It's very important that we have these pathways and opportunities for our population."

As the San Diego and Imperial Counties regional coordinator for the Rising Scholars Network, Ashley supports the 10 colleges in the region, each with a unique program serving formerly incarcerated students on campus, along with those still currently in jails, prisons or juvenile detention facilities. Her work includes helping practitioners strengthen their programs, expanding enrollment opportunities and ensuring that justice-impacted students receive the resources they need to succeed.

[Read more about Ashley and the program here](#)

## In the News



Career Fair hosted at San Diego City College  
Photo Credit: San Diego Workforce Partnership

### San Diego City College Hosts Successful Career Fair

On Aug. 12, San Diego City College welcomed more than 600 job seekers to a vibrant Career Fair, hosted in collaboration with the San Diego Workforce Partnership and San Diego International Airport. The event brought together nearly 50 employers from a wide range of industries, offering opportunities in hospitality, technology, healthcare, public service and more.

This Career Fair was a testament to the power of collaboration, bringing together community colleges, workforce development leaders and



Maritime Industrial Base Workshop at Cuyamaca College  
Photo Credit: Monica Rosas, SDI RC

### Cuyamaca College Hosts Workshop to Bolster the Maritime and Defense Industrial Base Talent Pipelines

Industry leaders, community partners and workforce experts from across San Diego and Imperial Counties gathered at Cuyamaca College on Aug. 28 for a strategic meeting of the Maritime Industrial Base (MIB) Program.

The event was part of a U.S. Navy initiative to address critical workforce shortages in shipbuilding and repair by focusing on modernizing

industry partners to create direct pathways between talent and opportunity. The event connected attendees with potential employers and showcased the shared commitment of San Diego City College, the San Diego Workforce Partnership and San Diego International Airport to building a strong, inclusive regional workforce. The positive atmosphere reflected the promise of what happens when education, industry and workforce development align to help our community thrive.

[Read more here](#)

shipyards, strengthening supplier networks and building a highly skilled workforce to support national security and economic growth.

“The maritime industrial base faces a critical workforce shortage, and conversations like these lay the groundwork for solutions that benefit students, employers and our region’s economy,” George Dowden, Career Education Dean at Cuyamaca College, said during the workshop.

The workshop was tailored to companies specializing in precision machining, fabrication, component manufacturing and other areas within the defense industry to continue creating pathways to good-paying careers and supporting a resilient workforce for the future.



*Photo Credit: Imperial Valley College*

## Imperial Valley College Recognized for Innovation in Clean Energy Workforce Training

**Imperial Valley College's (IVC)** U.S. Department of Energy-backed lithium workforce initiative is receiving national recognition in the Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges' new paper, **“Building a Future-Ready Workforce: Highlighting Best Practices in ACCJC Member Institutions.”**

The publication highlights five innovative programs that are addressing urgent workforce needs and spotlights IVC as a model. Through partnerships that connect students with hands-on training and industry pathways, IVC is preparing the next generation of clean energy professionals and supporting the region’s emerging role as a global



*Educators participating in a UDL Training activity.*

*Photo Credit: Leslie Wisdom, SDI RC*

## Imperial County Educators Explore Universal Design for Learning

On Sept. 5, 16 Imperial County high school and community college educators participated in a professional development session on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) led by Amanda Bastoni, an expert from CAST Inc.

The training focused on helping participants evaluate barrier rather than in the learner, understand and apply the UDL Guidelines and Principles and identify teaching and learning strategies to better support special populations.

A similar training will be offered for San Diego K14 Career and Technical Education professionals in October.

## Powerful Roots of Justice Garden Initiative Spotlighted on CBS 8

CBS 8 recently featured MiraCosta College's **Roots of Justice** program, bringing well-deserved attention to the transformative growth that gardening and regenerative agriculture have fostered in Transition Scholars, a program aimed at assisting students impacted by incarceration.

The program was made possible with support from the SDI RC's Strong Workforce Program (SWP), which helped fund its development and embed work-based learning directly into paid student positions.

Roots of Justice not only provides Transition Scholars with hands-on experience and leadership skills but also focuses on their mental health with nature-based mindfulness.

The program has recently expanded to host empowerment circles open to the broader campus community to allow populations that often face limited access to green spaces in their communities a chance to focus on mental wellness while immersed in nature.

The news segment is a testament to the power of collaboration and SDI RC's deep commitment to justice and equity.

[Read the full article and watch the segment here](#)

# Announcements

## Save the Date:

### 10th Annual East County Manufacturing Expo, Sept. 30

Leading up to Manufacturing Day in October, the East County Economic Development Council is hosting the 10th Annual East County Manufacturing Expo on September 30<sup>th</sup> from 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at Cuyamaca College.

The expo is the only event of its kind in Southern California, bringing together top manufacturers—including General Atomics Aeronautical Systems, Solar Turbines, and Thermo Fisher Scientific—to showcase career opportunities in this vital sector. Attendees can connect directly with San Diego-based companies, explore exciting career pathways and discover how manufacturing is inspiring the next generation of innovators.

The expo is free and open to the public.

## Learn More

### Work-Based Learning Professional Development Program Extended

After much success with the Regional Work-Based Learning (WBL) Professional Development program, with over 200 faculty completing the course, the SDI RC has adapted the curriculum for counselors and student support

### Grossmont College Earns National Cyber Defense Designation

The National Security Agency has designated Grossmont College a National Center of Academic Excellence in Cyber Defense (CAE-CD), recognizing its leadership in training the next generation of cybersecurity professionals.



professionals to discuss WBL and help facilitate it in a student's journey toward career development.

The professional development course will be available three times a year, asynchronously. Our next cohort begins this Friday, September 26<sup>th</sup>.

[Learn more](#)

Building on this achievement, the college is developing a Baccalaureate Degree in Strategic Cyber Defense Analysis (GSCyber). Expected to launch in Fall 2026, the program will equip students with advanced skills and strengthen the nation's cyber workforce.

[Learn more](#)

## Happenings in 2025

September

26

**Workforce Development Council Meeting: The Role of Community Based Organizations in workforce development**  
10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.  
zoom  
[Register here](#)

September

30

**10th Annual East County Manufacturing Expo**  
11:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.  
Cuyamaca College  
[More information & registration](#)

October  
22-24

**CCCAOE Fall Conference**  
Omni Rancho Mirage  
[Register Here](#)

November

7

**Cuyamaca College Career Education Community Forum**  
8:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.  
Cuyamaca College  
[Register Here](#)

November

13

**Grossmont College Career Education Community Forum**  
8:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m.  
Grossmont College  
[Register Here](#)

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San Diego & Imperial Counties Community Colleges Regional Consortium | 8800 Grossmont  
College Dr | El Cajon, CA 92020 US

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