

# Community Forums Gather Local Insight to Strengthen Education and Workforce Alignment

November 2025

The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) recently concluded a series of seven Career Education Community Forums across the region, engaging nearly 300 educators, employers and community partners in discussions about workforce trends, student needs and equitable access to education.

Each forum centered on the [Community College District Profiles](#), which are biennial reports developed by the COE that provide a data-driven snapshot of each district's service area. The profiles feature ZIP-code-level data on demographics, labor market trends and concentrations of priority populations, making them valuable tools for educators, policymakers and community-based organizations engaged in grant writing, program development and strategic planning.

*"These profiles are more than reports — they're community resources,"* said Dr. Tina Ngo Bartel, Executive Director of the COE. *"They help colleges and partners see where opportunities exist, who needs support and how we can better align education with workforce needs."*

## A Regional Approach to Perkins V Consultations

The forums also served a second, equally important purpose: fulfilling the expanded consultation requirement of the federal Perkins V legislation. Under Perkins V, every community college must consult with regional stakeholders, including employers, community partners and members of special populations, to inform its Comprehensive Local Needs Assessment (CLNA).

Rather than asking each of the region's 10 community colleges to host its own consultation, the COE coordinated a regional approach through these community forums. This collective effort forms the foundation of the Comprehensive Regional Needs Assessment (CRNA), reducing duplication and strengthening regional alignment.

Through this approach, the COE gathered direct input from attendees who either are or have friends or family who belong to one or more of the following special population groups:

- Individuals living with disabilities
- Individuals from economically disadvantaged families
- Single parents (including pregnant women)
- Individuals preparing for nontraditional career fields
- Individuals who are out of the workforce
- Individuals who are experiencing homelessness
- Current or former foster youth
- Children of active-duty military parents
- Individuals facing other barriers to educational achievement (e.g., language barriers)

## Data Meets Real-World Experience

During each forum, the COE shared data from sources such as the U.S. Census Bureau and California Employment Development Department, explaining that these datasets capture a moment in time and often reflect conditions from a year or more prior. Participants were asked to share how these data points align with what they are seeing today in their communities, helping bridge the gap between lagged data and current lived experiences.

Attendees then joined breakout discussions around key questions, including:

- What is your reaction to the data? Did anything surprise you or confirm what you expected?
- How might the colleges use this data to better support adult learners and other special populations?
- Do you agree with the top jobs identified for the region, and what other occupations are difficult to fill?
- Where do you see alignment — or gaps — between current college programs and workforce demand?
- What emerging changes should we anticipate to ensure students stay ahead?

*“These forums ensure that data isn’t just shared — it’s interpreted, discussed and made actionable,”* said Dr. Ngo Bartel. *“Community insights help us understand what’s happening now, beyond what the numbers alone can show.”*

## Turning Insight into Action

Feedback from the forums will directly inform the CRNA, which colleges can use to meet their CLNA consultation requirement. In addition, the results will help the COE identify new research priorities and professional development opportunities to support the region’s colleges moving forward.

By combining quantitative data with community-driven insights, the COE’s regional forums ensure that the voices of employers, educators and residents are central to shaping the future of Career Education across San Diego and Imperial Counties.