

# New Counselor Institute Strengthens Link Between Data and Student Success

November 2025

The San Diego & Imperial Regional Consortium (SDI RC) launched the next phase of the Strong Workforce Counselor Institute with a kickoff event on Oct. 17 at San Diego Miramar College. The convening brought together counseling faculty from across the region to strengthen their use of data, labor market information and culturally inclusive practices in guiding students toward meaningful career pathways.

The Counselor Institute builds on the success of previous cohorts, offering a structured, yearlong professional learning experience for counselors at San Diego and Imperial Community Colleges. Funded through the Strong Workforce Program, the initiative supports counselors in connecting education to employment by fostering collaboration among counseling, Career Technical Education and institutional research departments at each college.

Throughout the year, college cohorts will meet regularly to complete five key assignments:

1. Examine student data to identify equity gaps
2. Explore student interests and career aspirations
3. Manage day-to-day workflows and student caseloads
4. Strengthen cross-campus relationships
5. Develop and implement an action plan to improve counseling practices

Each college cohort includes up to 25 counselors who receive stipends for completing key program milestones. The San Diego & Imperial Center of Excellence (COE) provides technical assistance through its research experts by supporting cohorts in completing assignments, facilitating monthly meetings and leading data-informed discussions throughout the program. The October event featured a keynote presentation by Dr. Tina Ngo Bartel, Executive Director of the COE, and highlighted findings from the COE's [Student Support Services Study](#), which examined the relationship between student support, counseling and career outcomes across the region's 10 community colleges.

Nearly 300 former students participated in the study. The findings reinforced what many counselors already know: student support services make a measurable difference. Students who used counseling, tutoring, career guidance or basic needs support were significantly more likely to say their college experience was a worthwhile investment and to secure jobs immediately after completing. Approximately 90% of all respondents agreed that support staff cared about them, helped them achieve their educational goals and provided quality services.

The study also revealed that career services play a critical role in improving employment outcomes. Students who used career services were 20% more likely to find jobs related to their field of study compared to those who did not. Importantly, Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) students who used support services were more likely than their peers to say these resources helped them achieve their employment goals, highlighting the impact of equitable access to student support.

The session concluded with an activity that reminded attendees that, while they balance the many demands of work, family and life, they are part of a growing community of educators committed to helping students succeed.

Counselors will now begin monthly cohort meetings to complete assignments before reconvening in May 2026 for the wrap-up professional learning event. At that event, participants will showcase their action plans, share lessons learned and highlight promising practices that can be scaled regionally.

The Counselor Institute reflects the region's ongoing commitment to building a student-centered, data-informed and equity-driven approach to counseling — one that helps every student connect their education to a meaningful career.