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# NDN Jobs

**Community Needs Assessment Report**

**Activating the Native Workforce of Southern California**



# MISSION

*NDN's commitment to strengthening tribal communities and urban Indians through economic development and advocacy.*

# VISION

*A future where the original stewards of the land are active leaders in the regional economy.*

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: A TURNING POINT

*60% of respondents report that their current income does not meet basic needs.*

The NDN Jobs “Pathways 2 Prosperity” initiative, led by the Native Development Network (NDN), marks a critical shift in how we understand and activate the Native American workforce in Southern California. For too long, our community has been treated as an asterisk, in economic reports—a population often forced to watch from the sidelines.

This report is our foundation for action. It proves that while our community faces significant hurdles, including a “Time Poverty” crisis where families work multiple unstable “gig” jobs to survive, they are eager and ready to lead in high-growth industries like Green Energy, Healthcare, and Tech.

*It is time for a living-wage strategy that moves us from survival to sovereignty.*



# LEADERSHIP & ORGANIZATIONAL LEGITIMACY: OF THE COMMUNITY, FOR THE COMMUNITY

Mainstream programs often fail to reach our population because they lack cultural trust. NDN is a Native-controlled 501(c)(3) led by Executive Director Joseph Quintana (Kewa Pueblo), a recognized workforce policy expert who has advised the previous two U.S. Secretaries of Labor and served on a commission appointed by LA Mayor Eric Garcetti.

Our leadership and 100% Native-governed Board bring over 20 years of experience navigating the legacies of the Federal

Relocation Act and the boarding school era with lived experience, while providing leadership that has provided physical, behavioral, economic, housing, wellness, youth care, elder care, case management, and much more vital health and human-related services. We provide the cultural legitimacy required to reach the “invisible” urban Native workforce.



# THE LANDSCAPE: AN INTER-TRIBAL REALITY

NDN serves a vibrant population of over 200,000 AI/AN residents across Los Angeles, Orange, and the Inland Empire.

- **A Convergence of Nations:** This region represents over 200 federally recognized tribes, making it one of the largest and most diverse urban Indian hubs in the country.
- **The Methodology:** We used a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) framework, gathering insights through in-person and online surveys and listening sessions at coordinated events, Powwows, and cultural gatherings in Long Beach, Pasadena, Pomona, Torrance, Highland Park, and at the Soboba Band of Luiseno Indians.



## WORKFORCE INSIGHTS

**74+**

*Tribal Nations represented across respondents*

### Regional Concentration

*Los Angeles County*

*Orange County*

*Inland Empire*

### Core Workforce

*Ages 25-54 (Prime Workforce)*

### Education Profile

*Majority hold a High School*

*Diploma or Some College*

# METHODOLOGY: A COMMUNITY-DRIVEN APPROACH

Our methodology is rooted in the fundamental belief that the community must be at the heart of the decision-making process. To honor this, we utilized a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) framework to ensure that the data collected is accurate, protected, and directly beneficial to the people it represents. This approach shifts the community's role from being mere subjects of a study to being active partners and architects of their own economic solutions.

## **Data Collection & Engagement Strategies**

To capture a complete and nuanced picture of the Native experience in Southern California, we utilized a dual-track strategy combining quantitative breadth with qualitative depth.

★ **Quantitative Assessment (Surveys):** We deployed broad-reaching digital and in-person surveys designed to capture measurable data on income, education, health, and housing. These surveys reached residents across Los Angeles County, Orange County, and the Inland Empire. To ensure trust and safety, all responses were treated as anonymous and confidential, with data reported only in the aggregate.

★ **Qualitative Inquiry (Listening Sessions):** To expand upon the survey data, we conducted structured "Listening Sessions" following a culturally respectful, trauma-informed, and strengths-based guide. These sessions utilized breakout discussions and one-on-one interviews to capture "lived experience as expertise".

## **Engagement Channels:**

★ **Cultural & Social Gatherings:** In-person outreach at Powwows and social events in Long Beach, Pasadena, Pomona, and Highland Park allowed us to meet community members in spaces where they already gather.

★ **Regional Summits & Information Sessions:** Direct engagement with working professionals and tribal leaders in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties focused on industry-specific opportunities and regional barriers.

★ **Virtual Listening Sessions:** These structured dialogues allowed participants to share deep narratives regarding employment history, education gaps, and their personal definitions of "stability".

## **Methodology Themes**

Our data collection was organized around five core themes to ensure a holistic understanding of the community's needs:

**Employment & Workforce Experiences:** Understanding the challenges of finding, keeping, and advancing in quality work. Jobs of the Future: Identifying which sectors (e.g., healthcare, renewable energy, technology) feel most realistic and interesting to Native workers.

**Education & Training Pathways:** Mapping the navigation challenges, costs, and support systems required to complete certifications or degrees.

**Barriers to Achievement:** Identifying how overlapping factors like housing, transportation, and childcare get in the way of moving forward.

**Stability & Economic Security:** Defining what it means for Native individuals and families to truly thrive long-term.

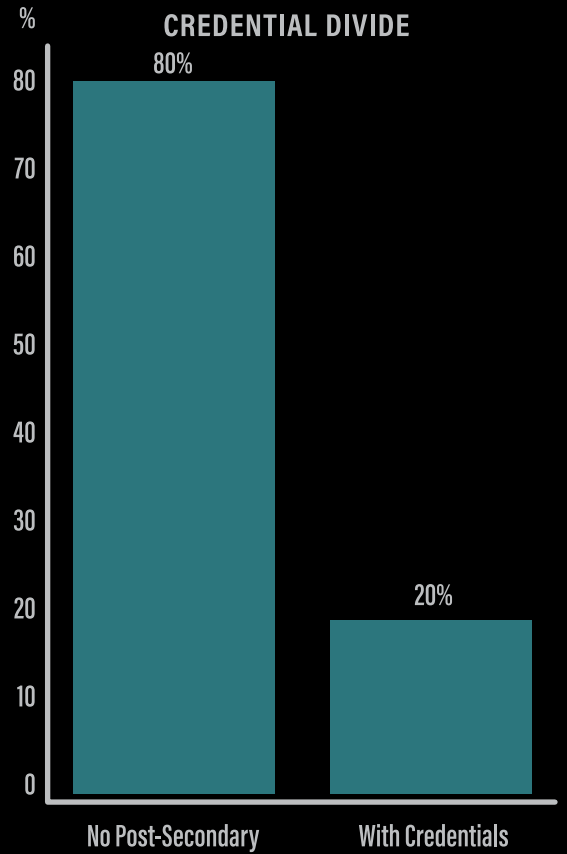
## **Participation as Empowerment and Sovereignty**

We emphasize that community participation is an act of sovereignty. By sharing their truths, community members are not simply "respondents"; they are the primary architects of the Tribal Workforce Hub. Their input on everything from the need for Native mentorship to the design of specific training programs serves as the literal blueprint for our future programming.

This methodology ensures that we are no longer waiting on the sidelines to see what solutions are offered to us. Instead, we are working together to identify our own assets, prioritize our own resources, and become active participants in the regional economy. Every story shared is a step toward a foundation of economic security and collective empowerment.

# KEY FINDINGS: THE PILLARS OF COMMUNITY NEED

*“Workforce development is a vital healthcare intervention. Stabilizing income is a prerequisite for stabilizing mental health.”*



## KEY CHALLENGES



### Education Bottleneck

Degrees started, but not completed



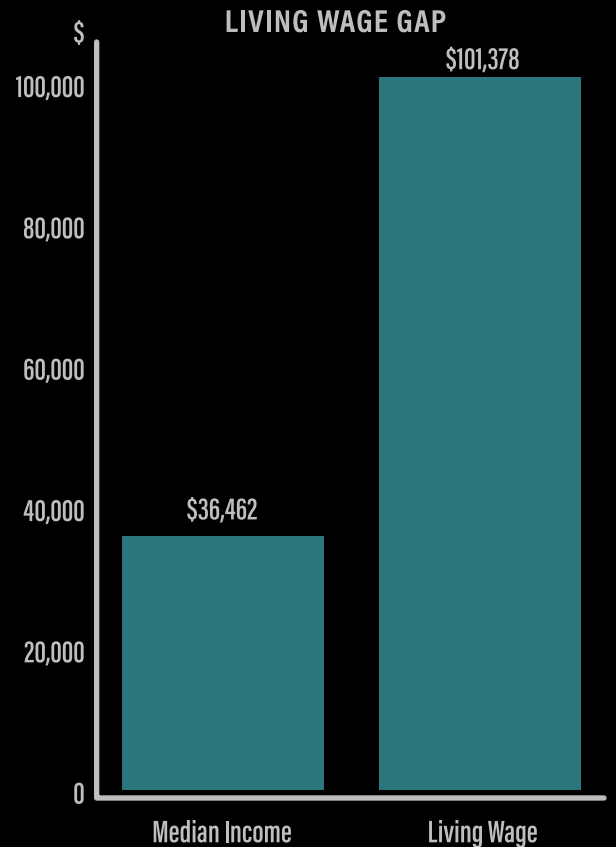
### Underemployment Crisis

Working, but below skill level



### Housing Barrier

Housing cost limit advancement



# THE STRATEGY: THE "PATHWAYS" INITIATIVE

*Driven by demand. Guided by community.*

NDN is implementing the "Pathways" Initiative. This bold workforce transformation is fully aligned with the U.S. Department of Labor's America's Talent Strategy: Building the Workforce for the Golden Age.

By integrating our services directly into the regional workforce system through formal MOUs with state partners (including California Jobs First, GO-Biz, and EDD), we will focus on six vital economic sectors that are hiring now and will define the future:

**Building Trades & Home Construction:** Meeting the urgent regional housing demand.

**Healthcare:** Filling critical gaps in Community Health and culturally relevant care.

**Information Technology:** Building a workforce proficient in AI-integrated systems.

**Aerospace:** Connecting Native talent to Southern California's historic tech-manufacturing base.

**Wildfire & Wildland Management:** Protecting our lands through climate-resilient careers.

**Green Economy:** Ensuring Native participation in the transition to zero-emission infrastructure.

*These sectors not only reflect regional demand, but also align with community-identified priorities such as stability, purpose-driven work, and culturally grounded career pathways.*

## 6 VITAL SECTORS

*Aligned with regional demand & Informed by community voice*

Construction

Green Economy

Healthcare

COMMUNITY VOICE

Stability - Purpose  
Cultural Connection  
Leadership

Wild-land

IT

Aerospace

# TARGETED TALENT POOLS

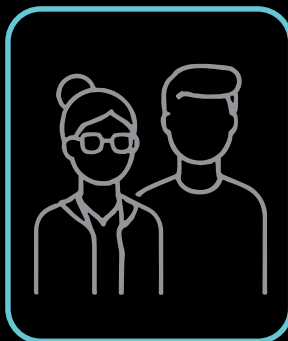
*From survival to stability.  
From opportunity to leadership.*

To address these deep-seated challenges, NDN prioritizes the following “Sidelined Talent” pools, utilizing WIOA and state funds to build bridges where there are currently only barriers:



## **DISCONNECTED YOUTH** (Ages 16-24)

*We target youth “drifting” between systems—* neither in school nor working. By providing culturally resonant career coaching and pre-apprenticeships, we prevent long-term economic detachment and counter the crisis of despair with purpose.



## **SIDELINED OLDER ADULTS** (50+)

*Serving the “Relocation Generation”* and their children. We offer rapid upskilling that honors their decades of lived experience, ensuring they are not left behind by the AI-driven economic transformation.



## **LOW-INCOME URBAN WORKERS**

*Acting as navigators* for those facing “urban invisibility” and trapped by the housing crisis. We provide the “Pathways” to stackable credentials that move them from survival wages to a living wage (\$28+/hr), allowing families to move from overcrowded housing into stable, self-sufficient homes.



# CONCLUSION

The NDN Jobs “Pathways” Initiative is far more than a jobs program; it is a beacon of hope and the foundation for long-term economic stability for three generations of Native families. By working together to break historic cycles of poverty, we are forging a new era of upward mobility where Native workers no longer wait on the sidelines, but instead lead the way in high-growth industries.

As a trusted leader in workforce policy and community advocacy, the Native Development Network (NDN) is uniquely positioned to drive this transformation. However, this Community Needs Assessment is only our first step. Building directly on this foundation, NDN will now proceed with deep sector and industry analysis, comprehensive asset mapping, and strategic program design to fully realize the NDN Jobs “Pathways” initiative.

We know that true, systemic change cannot happen in isolation. This vision is being realized through deep partnership with our community members, political allies, workforce and education professionals, and those steadfastly committed to a brighter, more equitable future for Native people. We extend our profound gratitude to the partners who have already championed this vital work, including California Jobs First, the California Employment Development Department (EDD), the Governor’s Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz), the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC), and all our regional allies.

We possess the data, the community trust, the leadership legitimacy, and the state-level partnerships to execute this vision. NDN will provide the specific, measurable, and achievable bridge to the middle class for a population that has been overlooked for too long.

Together, we will ensure that the original stewards of this land, alongside the vibrant and diverse urban Native community that resides here today, are active, leading architects of Southern California’s economic prosperity

# THE ROADMAP TO IMPLEMENTATION

Together,  
We Build What’s Possible.

Real change doesn’t happen alone. This roadmap connects NDN, our partners, and the community—turning shared vision into lasting impact.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report would not have been possible without the dedicated partnership and collective wisdom of our community. We are deeply grateful to our state and regional partners, whose collaboration made it possible to gather data across Los Angeles and surrounding counties.

We thank California Jobs First and our partners at the State of California, including the Employment Development Department (EDD) and the Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development (GO-Biz). We also recognize the invaluable contributions of the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC), our CERF Los Angeles Regional partners, local Tribal govern-

ments, and the education offices that helped bring this work to life.

A special thank you to our Outreach Team for their tireless efforts in ensuring community voices were heard—your dedication made this research a true reflection of the people we serve. We also extend our gratitude to our project advisor, Mr. Rob Maxim, for his expert guidance and steadfast support.

*Together, we are not only analyzing data—we are building a foundation for the economic prosperity of the original stewards of this land and the vibrant Native community that resides here today.*



# THE PATH TO ECONOMIC SOVEREIGNTY

This report is our first step. Building on this foundation, NDN will move into sector analysis and asset mapping to launch the Tribal Workforce Hub.

We are not doing this work alone. We are grateful for the commitment of our partners: California Jobs First, GO-Biz, EDD, and LAEDC. Together, we are building a future where the original stewards of this land are the architects of their own prosperity.



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