

Community Needs Assessment Report

NATIVE DEVELOPMENT NETWORK
NDN JOBS “PATHWAYS 2 PROSPERITY” INITIATIVE

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary: A Turning Point for Native Workforce	4
<i>The Changing Economy and the Workforce Perception</i>	4
<i>Capacity for Information and Education</i>	4
<i>From the Sidelines to the Center</i>	5
<i>Our Foundation for the Future</i>	5
Alignment with California Job First & RII Goals	5
Advancing Equity-Centered Economic Development	6
<i>Inclusive Workforce Participation and Visibility</i>	6
<i>Informing the Labor Market and Sector Analysis</i>	6
<i>Workforce Resource Mapping and Gap Analysis</i>	6
<i>The Workforce Development Framework: A Model for the Future</i>	7
<i>A Partnership Worth Investing In</i>	7
Methodology: A Community-Driven Approach	7
<i>Data Collection & Engagement Strategies</i>	7
<i>Methodology Themes</i>	8
<i>Participation as Empowerment</i>	8
Community Participation Profile: A Demographic Summary	9
<i>Representation Across Age Groups & Lived Experiences</i>	9
<i>Geographic Distribution</i>	9
<i>Education & Employment Status Overview</i>	9
<i>Tribal Diversity</i>	10
The Community Profile: A Geographic and Cultural Mosaic	10

<i>A Convergence of Nations</i>	10
<i>Geographic Reality and Socioeconomic Conditions</i>	11
<i>The Demographic and Educational "Bottleneck"</i>	11
<i>Participation as Sovereignty</i>	11
Key Findings: The Pillars of Community Need	12
<i>Employment & Workforce Barriers</i>	12
<i>The Crisis of Despair</i>	12
<i>The "Time-Poverty" and Credential Divide</i>	12
<i>Socioeconomic Demographics</i>	13
<i>Workforce Development & Barriers</i>	13
From Data to Strategy: Our Roadmap for Systemic Change	13
The Native Workforce Access Hub: Operationalizing the Community's Vision	14
Strategic Implementation: Unlocking Our Sidelined Talent	15
Community Assets & Strengths	15
<i>Cultural Resilience & Intergenerational Wisdom</i>	16
<i>Strong Relational Capital: Family & Community Networks</i>	16
<i>The "Trust Dividend": High Willingness to Engage</i>	16
<i>A Mandate for Service: Community & Climate Resilient Careers</i>	16
Sustainability & Long-Term Impact	17
<i>The Role of the CNA in Long-Term Workforce Planning</i>	17
<i>Contribution to Scalable and Replicable Workforce Models</i>	17
<i>Integration into Future Proposals and Pilot Programs</i>	17
<i>Braided Funding and Resource Evolution</i>	18

<i>Continued Community Engagement Beyond the Grant Period</i>	18
Community Accountability & Report-Back	18
<i>Plan for Transparent Sharing</i>	19
<i>Data Sovereignty, Safety, and Protection</i>	19
<i>Validation and Feedback Incorporation</i>	19
<i>Strengthening Partnership with Decision-Makers</i>	20
Conclusion	20

Executive Summary: A Turning Point for Native Workforce

The NDN Jobs "Pathways 2 Prosperity" (P2P) Initiative, a pre-development research project led by the Native Development Network (NDN), a 501c (3) nonprofit community-based organization serving tribal and urban Indian communities, marks a critical shift in how we understand and activate the Native American workforce in Southern California. Our community has been made to feel invisible, seen as an "asterisk" or in combination with other racial ethnic minorities in another category in economic reports. A population watching from the sidelines, rather than as active participants, as regional economies continue to evolve around us, and as we watch others attain the economic stability we long for.

This NDN Jobs Community Needs Assessment (CNA) report serves as a foundation for building, organizing, and establishing a proactive hub. It is a community-driven initiative that moves tribal communities and urban Indian programs from observation to active leadership across sectors of the economy.

The Changing Economy and the Workforce Perception

The economy of Southern California, particularly the Los Angeles region, is undergoing rapid transformation, driven by technology, green energy, and the rise of independent/ on-demand "gig work." Our data shows that Native workers are not just aware of these changes; they are eager to lead them. However, a significant gap exists between interest and access.

The "Time Poverty" Crisis: Many of our community members are currently engaged in flexible but unstable roles, such as driving for Uber or DoorDash, or working in seasonal retail positions. While these jobs offer the flexibility needed to care for families, they lack the benefits, retirement security, and "living wage" status necessary for long-term stability.

The Perception Gap: Our listening sessions revealed a community that feels the "reality of the work" is often ignored by traditional education systems. There is a strong desire to move beyond "shortcut" education (like an AI-only focus or grade-centric models) toward hands-on, culturally grounded career paths in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), Healthcare, and Tribal Government.

Capacity for Information and Education

Do we have the capacity to build the skills of Native workers? The answer is thunderous, yes! The capacity lies in our people's resilience and intergenerational wisdom, the foundation of culture and intergenerational knowledge sharing, but based on community responses, there is a perception that the current delivery of education is failing us.

Exploring Education: Native workers are seeking more than just a degree; they are seeking a "bridge." 60% of our respondents are currently in "survival mode," making education feel like a luxury they cannot afford.

Building the Infrastructure: We are working to ensure that education is not an "exploration" done in isolation. Through the proposed Tribal Workforce Hub, we are creating the capacity for "Native-to-Native" information sharing, ensuring that training is accessible, affordable, and aligned with the high-growth sectors of tomorrow.

From the Sidelines to the Center

The era of waiting for external systems to "include" us is over. This report highlights that economic security is a form of sovereignty. This unique relationship between governments allows them to address issues and challenges as they see fit, while also carrying the responsibility to their citizens or members.

Active Participation: We are no longer content with "entry-level" visibility. The community has voiced a clear need for Natives in Leadership, in student services, as professors, and as industry executives.

Empowerment through Participation: This assessment is a testament to the power of our collective voice. Every survey completed and every story shared in our listening sessions has been an act of empowerment. By participating, our community members have moved from being "subjects of study" to decision-makers who are building the solutions themselves.

Our Foundation for the Future

This report not only identifies needs; it also identifies assets. Our community's deep connection to culture, our commitment to "tough love" and tribal structure, and our desire for intergenerational mentorship are the tools we will use to build the Tribal Workforce Hub.

Together, we are creating a future where Native workers are both participants in the economy and the architects of regional stability and security. We are moving off the sidelines and into the center of the workforce, ensuring that Southern California's prosperity includes the original stewards of tribes and the diverse Urban Indian community that calls this land home.

Alignment with California Job First & RII Goals

The design of the NDN Jobs "Pathways" Initiative aligns with the vision of California Jobs First and the Regional Investment Initiative (RII), by positioning the American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) workforce as a central pillar of Southern California's economic future. This project transforms regional planning from a top-down exercise into an equity-centered, high-road economic engine.

Advancing Equity-Centered Economic Development

At the heart of California Jobs First is the commitment to inclusive growth. Historically, Native communities have been overlooked in regional economic datasets, often relegated to an “asterisk” due to small sample sizes or geographic dispersion. This Community Needs Assessment (CNA) corrects that erasure. By collecting over 150 deep-dive survey responses and facilitating hub-based listening sessions, we have generated the primary data necessary to ensure that "Equity" is not just a buzzword, but a data-driven reality. We are moving beyond mere participation toward Economic Sovereignty, ensuring that Native workers are not just filled into low-wage roles but are leading in sectors that define the state's future.

Inclusive Workforce Participation and Visibility

For regional planning to be truly inclusive, it must recognize the "Invisible Urban Indian" population. This CNA serves as a powerful visibility tool for policymakers. It maps the presence of over 250,000 Tribal members across the Los Angeles Region and adjacent counties, including Orange County and the Inland Empire, providing GO-Biz, the EDD, and regional coalitions with a clear picture of a "Sidelined Talent Pool" that is ready and willing to work. It also shows what inspires the community, shares their concerns, shows population shifts impacted by low wages and the housing crisis, and lets us hear their voices. By establishing this visibility, we ensure that Tribal voices are structural partners in the regional planning process, rather than an afterthought.

Informing the Labor Market and Sector Analysis

A robust Labor Market Analysis requires more than just job vacancies; it requires an understanding of the *talent supply*. This CNA provides the "human side" of the labor market. It finds that while industry demand is high in sectors such as IT, Healthcare, and the Green Economy, the Native workforce is currently hitting a "Credential Ceiling." Our findings inform sector analysis by highlighting talent availability. Still, the pathway to achieving the skills necessary to be competitive in certain sectors faces several critical barriers, including "Time Poverty" and a lack of stackable, culturally grounded certifications.

Workforce Resource Mapping and Gap Analysis

The CNA report serves as the foundation for our Workforce Resource Mapping. We have identified where our community is, concentrated in Gateway Cities, Central LA, and movement into or the outskirts of the Inland Empire, and matched that against existing training resources. The resulting Gap Analysis is grim: mainstream workforce centers often lack the cultural competency, legitimacy, and holistic support (transportation, childcare, and connections to Native providers) required to sustain Native participation. This project identifies exactly where the "leaks" in the pipeline occur, allowing our partners to invest in targeted, high-impact interventions rather than broad, ineffective programs.

The Workforce Development Framework: A Model for the Future

The ultimate deliverable of this pre-development phase is a Workforce Development Framework that is scalable and replicable. The "Pathways" model, centered on a Native Workforce Access Hub, is the direct operationalization of RII goals. It creates a "High-Road" pipeline that:

- I. Prioritizes the Worker: Through earn-while-you-learn models.
- II. Meets Industry Demand: By aligning with the six strategic growth sectors.
- III. Fosters Regional Resilience: By building a climate-ready, tech-proficient workforce.

A Partnership Worth Investing In

The Native Development Network is proud to stand alongside California Jobs First, GO-Biz, and the EDD. This Community Needs Assessment proves that the NDN Jobs "Pathways" initiative is more than a research project; it is a strategic investment in the state's human capital. We are providing evidence, community trust, and an operational roadmap to turn sidelined talent into regional leaders. By funding the implementation of the "Pathways" Hub, our partners are not just supporting a project; they are anchoring a new era of inclusive, sustainable, and equitable prosperity for the original stewards of this land.

[Stability means] *not living paycheck to paycheck. The ability to save money, put money away. The ability to think about retirement... and the benefit of saving money.*” - Respondent, Listening Session 2026

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 only subjects of 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 used a dual-track strategy that combined 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 the Los Angeles County Region, including adjacent Orange County, and the Inland Empire. To ensure trust and safety, all responses were collected anonymously and confidentially, with data reported only in the aggregate.

Qualitative Inquiry (Listening Sessions): To expand on the survey data, we conducted structured "Listening Sessions" guided by a culturally respectful, trauma-informed, and strengths-based framework. 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, education, and regional barriers.
- Virtual Listening Sessions: These structured dialogues allowed participants to share deep narratives about their employment histories, educational gaps, and their personal definitions of "stability".

Methodology Themes

Our community outreach team organized our data collection along with the advisor and project lead around five core themes to ensure a holistic understanding of the community's needs:

- I. Employment & Workforce Experiences: Understanding the challenges of finding, keeping, and advancing in quality work.
- II. Jobs of the Future: Identifying which sectors (e.g., healthcare, renewable energy, technology) feel most realistic and interesting to Native workers.
- III. Education & Training Pathways: Mapping the navigation challenges, costs, and support systems required to complete certifications or degrees.
- IV. Barriers to Achievement: Identifying how overlapping factors like housing, transportation, and childcare get in the way of moving forward.
- V. Stability & Economic Security: Defining what it means for Native individuals and families to thrive long-term.

Participation as Empowerment

At the core of the NDN Jobs "Pathways" Initiative is the belief that community participation is a profound act of sovereignty. By sharing their lived experiences, our community members are far more than "survey respondents"; they are the primary architects of the Native Workforce Access Hub. Their input on everything from the critical need for Native mentorship to the specific design of technical training programs serves as the literal blueprint for our future programming.

This methodology ensures that our community is no longer waiting on the sidelines for external solutions. Instead, we are active participants in identifying our assets, prioritizing our resources,

and defining our place in the regional economy. Every story shared and every survey completed is a strategic step toward a foundation of collective economic security and empowerment.

Community Participation Profile: A Demographic Summary

To ensure the "Pathways" initiative is established and grounded on a representative and inclusive foundation, NDN engaged a diverse cross-section of the American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) population across Southern California. The following summary provides an aggregated, non-identifying overview of the 150+ individuals who served as the consultants for this assessment.

Representation Across Age Groups & Lived Experiences

Our outreach successfully captured voices across the entire life course, ensuring that our workforce models account for every stage of a career:

- The Next Generation (18–24): Youth seeking their first meaningful career steps and looking for alternatives to the "disconnected" cycle.
- The Core Workforce (25–54): Mid-career professionals and parents who are the primary drivers of the current economy but face the "Credential Ceiling."
- The Relocation Generation & Elders (55+): Individuals with decades of lived experience who provide the cultural grounding for the project and require rapid, high-touch upskilling in the digital age.

Geographic Distribution

The assessment reached a widely dispersed urban and suburban population, reflecting the unique geography of the Southern California Native diaspora. Responses were received and centered in the Los Angeles County Region, with several respondents also living in or adjacent to Orange County, and the Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino). Key geographic hubs included the Gateway Cities, Central Los Angeles, and high-density areas such as Northeast Los Angeles, Norwalk, and Long Beach. This distribution highlights the regional need for a "Hub and Spoke" service model to address the transportation barriers inherent in such a vast service area.

Education & Employment Status Overview

The data reveals a community that is highly motivated but systemically bottlenecked:

- Education: Participants hold a wide range of credentials, from High School Diplomas/GEDs to Graduate and Professional degrees. However, the most significant cluster is "Some College," signaling a clear "service gap" in which financial barriers and "Time Poverty" prevented degree completion.

- Employment: Our participants represent the full spectrum of the modern workforce, including full-time employees, self-employed entrepreneurs, and students. Notably, a significant portion identified as "Underemployed" or "Gig Workers," working multiple roles to survive the high cost of living. This data directly informs us of our focus on transitioning workers from "survival roles" into high-growth, living-wage sectors (\$28+/hr.).

Tribal Diversity

Reflecting the inter-tribal nature of the region, respondents represent over 74 unique Tribal Nations. The number of diverse Tribal Nations members includes those historically connected to the local area, as well as members of nations from across the continent, ensuring that the Native Workforce Access Hub is a truly inclusive space for all Native people residing in the region.

The Community Profile: A Geographic and Cultural Mosaic

The NDN Jobs "Pathways 2 Prosperity" initiative serves a population that is both historically rooted and dynamically diverse. Our data reflect a community that spans a massive geographic footprint, encompassing the high-density urban corridors of Los Angeles County, the size of two small states combined (Rhode Island and Delaware), and the vast, rapidly expanding Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino Counties), where, due to housing costs, many AI/AN are migrating and seeking refuge.

A Convergence of Nations

The Native community in Southern California is not a monolith; it is a vibrant "melting pot" of over 74 unique tribal nations identified through our survey and listening sessions.

- Ancestral Stewards: We acknowledge the foundational presence of the original stewards of these lands, including the historically state-recognized tribes: Tongva, Tataviam, Kizh, Chumash, and Cahuilla, whose ancestral ties to the region provide a deep sense of place and historical continuity.
- The Urban Indian Experience: In addition to local tribes, the region is home to one of the largest concentrations of Urban Indians in the United States. Our respondents represent nations from across the continent, including the Navajo (Diné), Choctaw, Apache, Cherokee, Lakota, Sac & Fox, and Pueblo tribes.
- Census Context: According to U.S. Census data, Los Angeles County alone is home to over 111,000 individuals identifying as American Indian or Alaska Native (AI/AN), the highest concentration of any county in the nation. When combined with the Inland Empire, where San Bernardino County stands as the largest county in the United States by land area (over 20,000 square miles), the scale of the community we serve is immense.

Geographic Reality and Socioeconomic Conditions

The region's geographic size presents a unique set of challenges. Unlike communities concentrated on reservation land, Native Americans in Southern California are dispersed across thousands of square miles.

The Transportation Gap: In our listening sessions, transportation emerged as a critical barrier. Participants described the high cost of car registration, insurance, and gas as "great responsibilities" that often outweigh the benefits of a low-wage job. Public transportation is frequently cited as "inconvenient and time-constrained," making it difficult to maintain the rigid schedules required for traditional employment or job training.

Economic Insecurity & "Time Poverty": While 1.7% of the regional population identifies as AI/AN, they experience deeper and more persistent poverty than the general population. Our survey revealed that nearly 60% of respondents struggle to meet basic needs like housing and food. Many are trapped in the "Gig Economy," working for platforms like Uber or DoorDash. While these roles provide necessary flexibility for childcare or family needs, they lack the stability, benefits, and long-term security required for economic mobility.

Food Deserts and Basic Needs: The struggle for stability extends to the kitchen table. Qualitative data from our listening sessions highlighted that *"parents are overworked"* and that *"some food may be limited in the homes,"* pointing to the reality of food insecurity and food deserts in disinvested neighborhoods. One participant noted that school meals are often the only reliable source of nutrition for children, emphasizing the precarious nature of the *"survival mode"* many families currently navigate.

The Demographic and Educational "Bottleneck"

The Working Core: Most of our participants fall within the 25–54 age range, representing the vital heart of the regional workforce. These are individuals who are highly motivated to contribute to high-growth sectors like healthcare, renewable energy, and technology.

The Educational Paradox: Our data shows a high level of educational attainment that is not translating into high-wage roles. Many participants have some college experience, Associate degrees, or even Graduate degrees, yet they face a persistent "bottleneck." This barrier is often composed of a lack of professional networks, "Time Poverty" that prevents additional certification, and a traditional education system that feels "isolated" from Native cultural values.

Participation as Sovereignty

This community profile is more than just a list of statistics; it is a snapshot of resilience. The fact that members of over 74 tribes came together to share their stories is an act of community

empowerment. By identifying these specific challenges, from the vast geographic distances to the lack of Native representation in leadership, our community is no longer watching from the sidelines. They are actively defining the parameters of the Tribal Workforce Hub, ensuring that future solutions are as diverse and expansive as the people they serve.

Key Findings: The Pillars of Community Need

Employment & Workforce Barriers

Top Identified Needs

Data collected from 158 survey respondents and multiple listening sessions identified the following critical needs:

- **Education & Training:** 80% of respondents identify Cost/Tuition as the primary barrier to completing education. There is high demand for professional certifications and culturally based training.
- **Housing & Economic Stability:** Most respondents struggle with the "Living Wage Gap." Many reported that their current income is insufficient to meet basic needs in high-cost areas like Los Angeles.
- **Healthcare & Wellness:** While physical health has been identified and rated as "good," there is an urgent need for Mental Health services, Dental care, and access to Traditional Healing Practices.
- **Transportation:** Geographic dispersion across Southern California makes transportation a top-tier barrier to maintaining consistent employment.

The Crisis of Despair

Financial instability contributes directly to a burgeoning mental health crisis. We are addressing a "crisis of despair", as reported by a study where 40% of our young Native women have reported thoughts of suicide by the age of 25. NDN views workforce development as a vital healthcare intervention, stabilizing income is an absolute prerequisite for stabilizing mental health and stopping the cycle of intergenerational trauma.

The "Time-Poverty" and Credential Divide

This 80% lack of post-secondary credentials represents a divide that excludes our talented workforce from the modern "Golden Age" of high-tech careers. Workers are trapped working multiple low-wage gigs just to keep a roof over their heads, leaving zero time or resources to pursue traditional education.

"Workforce development is a vital healthcare intervention. Stabilizing income is a prerequisite for stabilizing mental health."

Socioeconomic Demographics

Demographic Profile

- **Inter-Tribal Representation:** Respondents represent diverse nations, including the Navajo (Diné), Choctaw, Apache, Comanche, and local California tribes such as the Tongva and Cahuilla.
- **Age Ranges:** A robust cross-section of the workforce, including Disconnected Youth (18-24), the Core Workforce (35-54), and Sidelined Older Adults (55+).
- **Geographic Reach:** Survey responses with a targeted focus across Los Angeles County, the Inland Empire (Riverside/San Bernardino), and Orange County.

The Economic Reality: Reported annual incomes range from less than \$15,000 to over \$100,000. Despite this range, a clear trend emerged: the "Living Wage" required for regional stability is perceived to be between \$75,000 and \$100,000+.

Workforce Development & Barriers

Education & Workforce Gaps: Educational attainment varies from High School/GED to Graduate Degrees, yet many are trapped by the "Credential Ceiling."

- **Financial Barriers:** *"I would love to get my BA, but I just can't afford it."*
- **The Experience Trap:** *"Jobs require experience, but no one provides the experience so you can learn new skills."*

Social Determinants of Health: Environmental factors and mental health are mutually dependent on workforce participation:

- **Environmental Quality:** Concerns regarding water quality and air pollution in local communities were identified in our survey as direct health impacts.
- **Mental Health:** Survey comments indicate that "life events" and mental health challenges frequently drain the energy required to pursue training or maintain employment.

From Data to Strategy: Our Roadmap for Systemic Change

The findings of this Community Needs Assessment are more than just statistics; they are the blueprint for the next phase of the NDN Jobs "Pathways" initiative. We have heard the community's call for dignity and stability, and we are leveraging this data to drive four critical outcomes:

First, we are prioritizing high-growth, culturally aligned sectors. Our data confirms that the most viable path to a family-sustaining living wage (\$28+/hr.) lies in six strategic industries: *Building Trades, Healthcare, IT/AI, Aerospace, Wildfire Management, and the Green Economy*. We are directing our resources exclusively toward these sectors to ensure our community moves from survival wages to true economic sovereignty.

Second, we are dismantling the “Credential Ceiling.” The CNA exposed a crisis of “Time Poverty”, where workers cannot afford to stop working to study. To bridge this gap, our future deliverables center on “Stackable Credentials” and “Earn-while-you-learn” models. By integrating training into the workday, we ensure that educational advancement is accessible to everyone, regardless of their current financial obligations.

Third, we are designing low-barrier pathways specifically for our sidelined talent pools. These are not one-size-fits-all programs; they are culturally grounded entry points that provide holistic support, such as transportation assistance, mental health navigation, and digital access.

Finally, we are leading through accountability. This data serves as our "shared truth" in every meeting with state partners like *California Jobs First, GO-Biz, and the EDD*. We are using these findings to hold our coalitions accountable for addressing the real-world barriers, such as housing instability and the shortage of Native providers, that have historically hindered our community’s participation in the workforce.

The Native Workforce Access Hub: Operationalizing the Community’s Vision

In direct response to what we learned, NDN is establishing the Native Workforce Access Hub. The NDN Jobs “Hub” is the physical and digital nerve center of the initiative, designed to act as both a premier service provider and a strategic partnership incubator.

The Hub is where we develop curated resources that our community identified as "missing." We are moving beyond general job placement to offer specific, high-impact services: digital equity infrastructure to bridge the tech divide, expert resume and interview coaching, and culturally safe mental health navigation.

Furthermore, the Hub is where we cultivate the partnerships necessary to solve complex challenges.

- To address Housing & Stability, we are partnering with local housing authorities to ease the anxiety voiced in our surveys.
- To ensure Cultural Competency, we are working with tribal education offices and elder councils to ensure every certification is community-led.

- To conduct Economic Integration, we are maintaining formal agreements with regional leaders, such as the *LAEDC*, to ensure our "Pathways" pipeline feeds directly into the region's active job orders.

Strategic Implementation: Unlocking Our Sidelined Talent

We recognize that the Native community is diverse, and a "one-size-fits-all" approach often fails. By utilizing WIOA and state funding, NDN is deploying specific surgical interventions to unlock the potential of our most vital, yet often overlooked, talent pools:

- **Disconnected Youth (Ages 16–24):** For our youth drifting between systems, we are providing a bridge back to purpose. By offering pre-apprenticeships that provide immediate income and culturally resonant coaching, we are turning a "crisis of despair" into a lifetime of economic opportunity.
- **Sidelined Older Adults (50+):** We honor the lived experience of the “Relocation Generation.” Our goal is to ensure that the rapid AI-driven transformation of Southern California’s economy sees our elders as assets, not liabilities. We provide rapid, high-touch upskilling that respects their history while preparing them for the future.
- **Low-Income Urban Workers:** For those trapped by “urban invisibility” and the housing crisis, we act as professional navigators. We provide the stable, stackable credentials necessary to move from overcrowded housing and survival wages into the security of a permanent, self-sufficient home.

Community Assets & Strengths



The Pathways to Prosperity Model: Grounding Southern California's economic future at the roots of Tribal wisdom and the strength of community trust.

While this assessment identifies significant systemic barriers, it also reveals a community rich in "Cultural Capital", pre-existing strengths that make the Native workforce uniquely resilient and ready for the 21st-century economy. The Pathways 2 Prosperity initiative does not seek to "fix" the community; rather, it seeks to unlock and resource the following core assets:

Cultural Resilience & Intergenerational Wisdom

The Southern California Native community possesses a profound depth of intergenerational knowledge that serves as a professional asset. In our listening sessions, participants consistently identified Elder guidance and traditional wisdom as their primary tools for navigating adversity.

- Asset in Action: This resilience translates into an adaptable workforce that possesses high emotional intelligence and an understanding of long-term stewardship, qualities essential for leadership and management roles.
- Community Voice: *"In the native culture, wisdom is taught through the elders... Best way to learn wisdom is to learn from other people's mistakes. Having leaders with integrity."*

Strong Relational Capital: Family & Community Networks

Despite being geographically dispersed across the Los Angeles region, the Native community maintains exceptionally strong informal networks. These "Kinship Maps" provide an unofficial safety net that handles childcare, transportation sharing, and job lead dissemination.

- Asset in Action: NDN will leverage these existing networks to drive recruitment and retention. When one family member enters a "Pathways" career, the entire network/support system is mobilized to support their success.

The "Trust Dividend": High Willingness to Engage

Our data proves that the perceived "disengagement" of Native workers in mainstream systems is not a lack of interest, but a lack of trust. When a Native-controlled entity like NDN leads engagement, participation rates soar.

- Asset in Action: The 150+ detailed responses and attendance at listening sessions demonstrate a community that is eager to participate in regional economic planning when they see themselves reflected in the leadership. This "Trust Dividend" ensures that NDN-led programs have higher-than-average enrollment and completion rates.

A Mandate for Service: Community & Climate Resilient Careers

Native respondents showed a disproportionately high interest in careers that "give back" or protect the environment. There is a natural alignment between Indigenous values of land stewardship and the emerging Green Economy and Wildfire Management sectors.

- Asset in Action: Native workers are not just looking for a paycheck; they are looking for purpose. This information makes our community the ideal workforce for "climate-resilient" careers. By connecting Native workers to Forestry, Water Management, and Renewable Energy, we are matching the region's most urgent needs with the community's deepest values.
- Community Voice: *"Seeing native events and activities... Do things for the community that benefit all natives."*

Sustainability & Long-Term Impact

The NDN Jobs "Pathways" Initiative is designed not merely as a time-bound project, but as the catalyst for a generational shift in the economic landscape of Native Southern California. By moving beyond a traditional social service model toward a strategic workforce development framework, NDN ensures that the \$5.7 million investment serves as the foundation for a permanent, scalable, and self-sustaining ecosystem of prosperity.

The Role of the CNA in Long-Term Workforce Planning

This Community Needs Assessment (CNA) is the dynamic baseline for all future regional planning. Rather than a static document, the findings regarding the "Living Wage Gap" and the "Credential Ceiling" will function as a long-term compass. By establishing a clear data set on where our community is starting, economically and educationally, NDN and its partners at California Jobs First and LAEDC can measure progress over decades. This data allows regional planners to move beyond anecdotal evidence, ensuring that Native American workforce needs are permanently integrated into Southern California's broader economic development strategies.

Contribution to Scalable and Replicable Workforce Models

The "Pathways" initiative is built on a "Human-Centered and Culturally Grounded" model that is inherently replicable. By documenting the success of our six strategic sector pipelines, such as the transition of "gig workers" into the Green Economy or Aerospace, NDN is creating a blueprint for other urban Indian centers and tribal nations across the United States. This model proves that when workforce training is paired with cultural legitimacy and holistic support, sidelined populations can successfully pivot into high-growth industries.

Integration into Future Proposals and Pilot Programs

The depth of this CNA, fueled by over 125 community voices, provides the "Evidence of Need" required to secure future competitive funding. These findings will serve as the core justification

for future pilot programs targeting specific sub-populations, such as Disconnected Youth or Sidelined Older Adults. By having a ready-to-use data set that identifies specific service gaps (such as the need for Native mental health providers or mobile digital equity labs), NDN is positioned to respond rapidly to federal (WIOA), state, and private philanthropic opportunities, ensuring a continuous pipeline of resources.

Braided Funding and Resource Evolution

Sustainability requires moving beyond a single funding stream. NDN's long-term strategy involves "braiding" diverse resources to support both the program infrastructure and the individual job seeker. These resources include:

- I. Public-Private Partnerships: Cultivating direct investment from industry leaders in sectors like Aerospace and IT who are seeking to diversify their talent pipelines.
- II. WIOA and State Integration: Aligning our Workforce Hub with existing EDD and State of California workforce dollars to ensure sustainable operational funding.
- III. Employer-Sponsored Training: Working with sector partners to create "Paid Apprenticeship" models where the industry shares the cost of upskilling the Native workforce. By diversifying our financial base, we ensure that the support for workers, including transportation subsidies and childcare, does not disappear when a single grant period ends.

Continued Community Engagement Beyond the Grant Period

The trust established during this assessment is our most valuable asset. Continued engagement is built into the DNA of the Native Workforce Access Hub. We will maintain the "Listening Session" model as a permanent feedback loop, ensuring that as the economy evolves (e.g., the continued rise of AI-integrated systems), our training programs keep pace. The Hub will serve as a permanent community asset, a place for mentorship, elder guidance, and professional networking, ensuring that the Native community remains at the center of Southern California's economic future long after the initial implementation phase is complete.

"Success is already there. We just need the collaboration and the visibility to bring it to the surface." - Respondent/ Listening Session 2026

Community Accountability & Report-Back

The Native Development Network (NDN) operates under the fundamental principle of "Nothing About Us, Without Us." We recognize that the data contained in this report is not merely a collection of statistics; it is a repository of our community's lived experiences, struggles, and aspirations. As such, NDN is committed to a transparent and iterative "Report Back" process that ensures the community remains the primary owner and beneficiary of this work.

A Plan for Transparent Sharing

We believe that transparency builds trust. NDN will disseminate the findings of this Community Needs Assessment through a multi-channel approach designed for maximum accessibility:

- I. **Community Action Summaries:** We will produce "At-a-Glance" visual summaries and infographics that distill complex data into actionable insights for community members and local grassroots organizers.
- II. **Communal Presentations:** Our outreach team will return to the spaces where our data was born at Powwows, tribal centers, and cultural gatherings across Los Angeles, Orange County, and the Inland Empire, to present our findings in person and facilitate open dialogue.
- III. **Digital Accessibility:** Full reports and summaries will be hosted on a dedicated community portal, ensuring that any tribal member or partner can access the evidence needed for their own advocacy.

Data Sovereignty, Safety, and Protection

NDN holds the unwavering position that community data is protected. Strict protocols govern our work to ensure the safety and privacy of every participant:

Safeguards Against Identification: We have implemented rigorous data-masking and anonymization techniques. Our research team has sought to mask identifiable information. Making it a priority to ensure that personally identifiable stories will not be shared publicly with external partners or decision-makers without explicit prior consent.

Secure Stewardship: All raw data is stored in encrypted, secure environments. Our commitment is to protect the community from "extractive research" and to ensure that our data is not used to stigmatize or harm the populations we serve.

Validation and Feedback Incorporation

This report is a "living document." Before finalizing strategic implementation plans, NDN will engage in a Validation Phase, working to ensure we are not only capturing information, but we also offer an opportunity to share in the definition and whether we heard them correctly:

Learning What We Got Right (and Wrong): We will present our initial findings to focus groups to ask: *"Does this reflect your reality?"* These responses allow us to identify where we may have missed nuances and where we can improve our analysis.

Incorporating Voices: Feedback gathered during these report-back sessions will be directly incorporated into our secondary deliverables, ensuring the final "Pathways" workforce models are as accurate and effective as possible.

Strengthening Partnership with Decision-Makers

While our primary accountability is to the community, our role is also to act as a powerful bridge to leadership. We are committed to sharing these community-validated findings with our partners at California Jobs First, the EDD, and regional policymakers. By providing these decision-makers with high-quality, community-vetted data, we ensure that the actual needs of Native people inform the use or development of state resources and regional policies.

We don't just ask for a seat at the table; we bring the community's voice to the table, ensuring that the work we do in partnership with the state is always a direct reflection of the people we serve.

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 in which Native workers no longer wait on the sidelines but instead lead the way in high-growth industries.

As a legitimate and trusted leader in workforce policy and community advocacy, the Native Development Network (NDN) has the experience and cultivated community connections that uniquely position it 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 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, community trust, leadership legitimacy, and 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 vibrant and diverse tribal and urban Indian communities that reside here today are actively engaged and working alongside partners in the Los Angeles region and across Southern California to advance economic prosperity.