



## COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ HUMAN SERVICES

1000 Emeline Avenue, Santa Cruz, CA 95060  
(831) 454-4130 | [www.santacruzhumanservices.org](http://www.santacruzhumanservices.org)  
RANDY MORRIS, DIRECTOR



# News Release

**Date:** June 16, 2026

**Contact:** Adam Spickler

[Adam.Spickler@santacruzcountyca.gov](mailto:Adam.Spickler@santacruzcountyca.gov) | (831) 588-0692

### SANTA CRUZ COUNTY'S 2026 WORKFORCE REPORT RELEASED

The Santa Cruz County Workforce Development Board (WDB) is offering its annual snapshot of local employment trends, wage data, and the affordability pressures shaping the region's economy, via release of its [2026 State of the Workforce](#) report.

The report, which measures three years of economic pattern for our region, comes at a time of significant economic change, as advances in artificial intelligence or "AI" and automation coincide with major federal and state policy decisions shaping labor markets, industry growth, healthcare access, and economic opportunity now and into the future.

Key findings in this year's report include a mix of growth and challenges for our region, economically. Positive signs as measured from 2022 to 2025 reveal a modest 0.9 percent increase in job growth, as well as a modest home ownership affordability improvement of 1.3 percentage points. Also observed were continued growth in lower-wage tourism, hospitality, and recreation occupations; expansions of middle-earning career opportunities in healthcare and education, and increased opportunities in high-earning information technology and aerospace/transportation fields during this period.

However, our region also saw the retail sector decline by 5.5 percent, as well as high-earning clusters contract during this same time frame, with finance and business services falling by 11.2 percent and 10.5 percent, respectively. These trends likely reflect a combination of factors, including the county's 3.3 percent population decline over the past five years, broader economic uncertainty, and technological changes that are reshaping how work is performed across many industries.

A key finding on local job quality shows that Santa Cruz County is unfortunately outpacing the state average on low-wage occupations. Nearly 3 out of 5 local jobs, or 57.4 percent, fall into the lowest paying occupational category, as compared to the state's average of 54 percent. This may help explain why many residents look beyond county boundaries for higher-paying career opportunities.

Further, the report shows that the median wage for our county's workforce is just \$68,399 compared with the \$89,398 for an individual to earn a living wage in Santa Cruz County.

With these in mind, the report recommends stakeholders focus on 5 key considerations:

- Expand apprenticeships and internships to build job readiness and strengthen career pathways
- Develop upskilling programs that improve worker AI literacy in the highly automated job sectors
- Collaborate and centralize resources to identify and secure workforce development funding
- Build stronger, industry-specific training pipelines with neighboring counties, to support high-growth industries
- Address uncertainties facing businesses, such as technology changes, supply chain issues and rising energy costs, to support local business growth and regional entrepreneurship

“This year’s State of the Workforce Report shows that Santa Cruz County has both real opportunities and real challenges ahead,” said Andy Stone, Director of the Santa Cruz County WDB. “AI and automation are changing jobs faster than ever, while issues like housing affordability and job quality continue to affect our community. As a result, the future will depend on how well employers, educators, policymakers, and community partners work together to help people adapt, learn new skills, and connect to opportunity.”

[Click here](#) for the full report, or visit Workforce Santa Cruz County’s website: [Workforcescc.com](http://Workforcescc.com)

#####