SCAG™

Addressing Barriers to Economic Opportunities

MOBILITY + COMMUNITIES + ENVIRONMENT + ECONOMY

About the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG)

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) serves as a catalyst for a brighter future for Southern California by leading a vision to elevate the region and creating the holistic plan to achieve our unified goals.

SCAG empowers Southern California jurisdictions to work toward regional solutions by creating collaborative resources that help to level the playing field through improved access to data, best practices and tools.

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For over 20 years, Dalberg has worked to build a more inclusive and sustainable world where all people, everywhere, can reach their fullest potential. We partner with communities, governments, nonprofits, and philanthropic funders, providing an innovative mix of advisory, investment support, communications, and human centered design services to create impact at scale. Dalberg has maintained a strong presence in California since 2010, working with city, county, and state government agencies as well as leading foundations, nonprofits and corporations across the state.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary

This report highlights barriers to job training and employment opportunities in Southern California and recommends how workforce and economic development actors across the SCAG region can address those barriers. SCAG commissioned this report because, despite various ongoing state and regional initiatives that have improved employment outcomes, many low-income communities and communities of color across the SCAG region continue to face entrenched barriers to economic mobility.

To better understand this challenge, SCAG commissioned Dalberg to develop this report to determine what specific barriers to accessing training and jobs are driving disparities and to explore solutions to address them. Over several months, Dalberg worked to i) identify the most significant barriers to job training and employment opportunities in the SCAG region and ii) identify potential solutions that SCAG and its partners can explore to remove some of these barriers.

The first phase of research focused on barrier identification and prioritization. To prioritize barriers from a long list of 13 barriers, Dalberg applied criteria to assess worker needs (e.g., how *broadly* and *deeply* this barrier impacts workers) and additionality (e.g., whether there is a clear need for organizations to help address this barrier). Once the highest priority barriers were identified, SCAG selected two of these—lack of access to reliable and affordable transportation and lack of access to information and networks—to focus on in phase two of this report.

The second phase comprised a highly inclusive process to identify potential solutions for these two barriers to be explored further. SCAG and Dalberg convened over 30 experts and stakeholders from across the region to join a series of workshops and interviews. These working groups collectively validated key challenges facing workers and prioritized solutions for future consideration.

To further explore the transportation barrier, SCAG leveraged its regional transportation planning expertise and focused efforts on better understanding how this barrier impacts workers specifically. Key challenges that emerged include i) affordability, ii) time commitment and availability, iii) reliability, and iv) safety. To address these challenges, workshop participants suggested solutions such as strengthening infrastructure, focusing on safety, advocating for universal basic mobility, improving user navigation through better access to information, and designing targeted solutions.

To further explore the *access to information and networks* barrier, SCAG leveraged its existing capabilities in convening and focused efforts on understanding how this barrier affects workforce development actors. Key challenges that emerged include i) lack of access to accurate and timely information on employment and training opportunities and ii) weak networks and relationships within and across the SCAG region. To address these barriers, workshop participants suggested solutions such as aggregating funding opportunities, fostering cross-region and cross-sector collaboration, making it easier for nonprofits and government agencies to collaborate, and improving the ability of workers to access resources across programs.

This initiative deepened SCAG's and other regional stakeholders' understanding of barriers to economic mobility, brought together workforce development actors across the region, and highlighted opportunities for stronger coordination to push forward emerging solutions. SCAG's goal for this report is to provide valuable research that SCAG's six counties and 191 city partners can use as they enact their own policies and programs to support inclusive economic growth across the SCAG region.

1. Introduction and Context

About This Report

This report presents findings on barriers to job training and employment opportunities in Southern California as well as potential recommendations to be further explored on how the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) and key partners can work together to address these barriers. SCAG commissioned this report because, despite many ongoing state and regional initiatives, far too many low-income communities and communities of color across the SCAG region continue to face entrenched barriers to economic mobility.

This report is intended as a resource for SCAG and its stakeholders as they continue to develop pathways for inclusive economic growth in the region. This report is also intended to provide context and research for the six counties and 191 cities in the SCAG region as they enact their own policies and programs to support inclusive economic growth.

To supplement the research and recommendations from this report, SCAG also compiled county-level profiles for Imperial County, the Inland Empire, Los Angeles County, Orange County, and Ventura County—highlighting how key stakeholders in each are working to address barriers and expand economic opportunity.

SCAG's Recent Work in Inclusive Economic Growth

For the last few decades, SCAG has been instrumental to regional planning and policy development in Southern California. Established in 1965, SCAG represents six counties—Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura—covering a diverse population of over 19 million people across 191 cities. Its mission is to improve the quality of life for Southern Californians by fostering equitable and sustainable communities. Over the years, SCAG has focused on issues ranging from transportation and housing to environmental sustainability and economic development, always with an emphasis on meeting the diverse needs of all people and communities in the region.

As a metropolitan planning organization, SCAG guides the region toward addressing these pressing issues through its core work in developing and adopting the **Connect SoCal** Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy. Through Connect SoCal, SCAG plans for a more resilient and equitable future, where residents and workers can adapt to change with safe, affordable, reliable, and sustainable transportation options to access the opportunities and resources necessary to thrive. To advance Connect SoCal goals for a more equitable and prosperous region, SCAG plays an integral role in advocating for policies at the state and federal levels, providing technical assistance, obtaining and distributing funding, convening stakeholders, and conducting research and data analysis.

Recent research conducted by SCAG highlighted the importance of examining access to quality employment opportunities—particularly given disparities in outcomes. SCAG's 2021 Inclusive Economic Recovery Strategy (IERS) report on the disproportionate impact of economic downturns on vulnerable populations recommended bolstering human capital, or "*addressing the barriers that preclude low-income workers' access to emerging economic opportunities,*" as one of the key strategies for inclusive economic growth. Alongside its work on the IERS report, SCAG also conducted a "Racial Equity Baseline Conditions Report" in 2021 to develop a deeper understanding of racial disparities across the SCAG region and monitor progress toward closing them. "The Racial Equity Baseline Conditions Report" and its

2022 update revealed persistent and significant disparities in mobility, communities, the environment, and the economy.

Disparities in employment outcomes—particularly across racial and ethnic lines —are some of the most significant economic disparities identified in SCAG's research. For example, as shown in **Figure 1**, data consistently show that Black, Native American, and Pacific Islander workers face significantly higher unemployment rates compared to the average worker, despite progress in narrowing disparities over the last decade. Additionally, age, disability status, and gender are other critical factors influencing employment outcomes, with youth under 25 years of age, people with disabilities, and women often facing unique challenges in the labor market. This data comes from the 2012 and the 2022 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey (ACS). In reporting the data, 1-year estimates were used where available from the Census data, otherwise 5-year estimates were used. The Census provided labor force estimates by race and age for population 16 years old and over, but by gender and disability status for population 20 years old and over. In addition, Hispanic (Latino) might overlap with other race categories.

Figure 1: Employment outcomes in SCAG region across different population groups: percentage point difference from total unemployment rate, 2012 vs. 2022
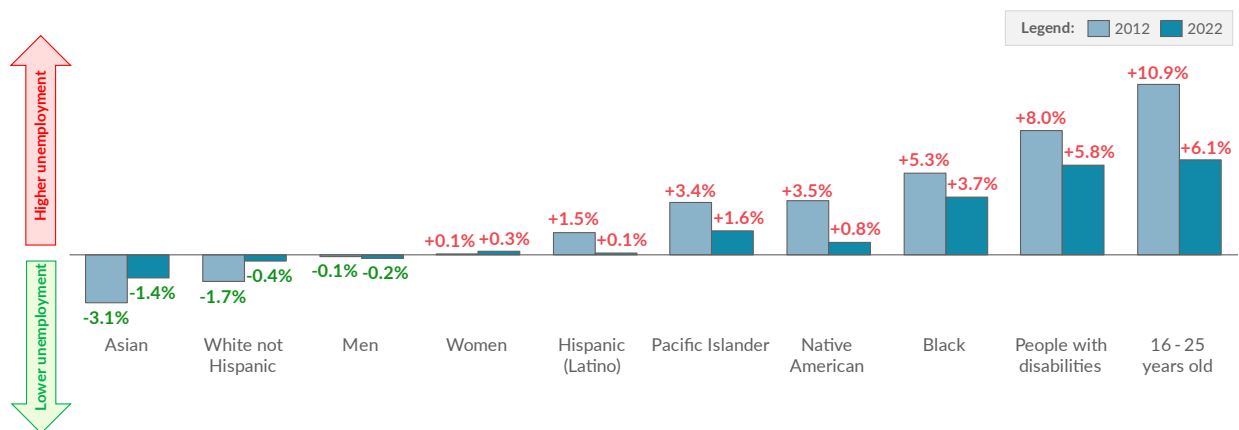
Source: U.S Census Bureau

Racial and gender disparities are also evident when considering access to *high-quality* jobs. While some communities struggle with high unemployment rates and limited access to *any* employment opportunities, others might find employment but remain stuck in low-wage positions that do not offer pathways to economic mobility. As shown in **Figure 2**, Hispanic (Latino), Native American, and women workers disproportionately experience this challenge; in particular, Hispanic (Latino) workers have similar employment rates to White workers but are almost three times as likely to be amongst the working poor, defined as full-time workers who are earning at or less than 200 percent of the federal poverty line. This data comes from the 2012 and the 2022 U.S. Census Bureau ACS, using the closest ACS income threshold. Similar data was not available to estimate working poor rates for people with disabilities and people 16 to 25 years old. In addition, Hispanic (Latino) may overlap with other race categories. Also, although overall Asian workers demonstrate lower levels of employment disparities, certain Asian communities demonstrate disproportionate levels of poverty; for example, 44 percent of Hmong and 26 percent of Cambodian workers are working full-time but in poverty.

Figure 2: Working poor rates by race and gender: Full-time workers earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level as a percentage of all full-time workers in SCAG region, 2012 vs. 2022

Legend: ■ 2012 ■ 2022

	White not Hispanic	Asian	Men	Pacific Islander	Black	Women	Native American	Hispanic (Latino)
2012	8.7%	14.1%	18.5%	15.5%	14.7%	21.7%	24.2%	32.5%
2022	9.0%	13.0%	15.9%	16.0%	17.0%	19.6%	22.9%	24.7%

2012 % of all full-time ◀ 20%

2022 % of all full-time ◀ 17%
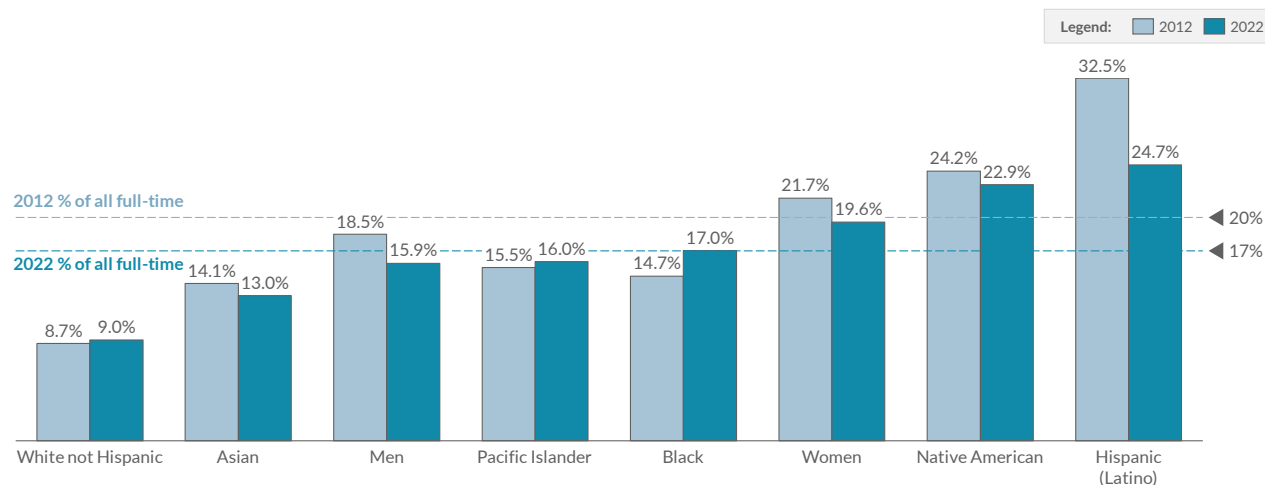
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Defining employment outcomes: Access to *any* jobs compared to access to *high-quality* jobs

While many institutions assess employment outcomes based on access to *any* job (e.g., unemployment statistics), it is important to differentiate between a worker's ability to secure *any* employment and their ability to achieve a sustainable livelihood with potential for upward mobility. The former includes employment in any position, which for low-income workers can often be entry-level or low-wage positions that may not provide sufficient financial stability or growth opportunities.

In contrast, the latter requires a '*high-quality*' job, or a job that offers living wages, benefits, job security, and career advancement opportunities that will lift individuals above the working poor threshold (i.e., full-time workers earning at or less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level). Recommendations that focus on increasing access to *high-quality* jobs might target different types of employment opportunities and pathways. This report provides considerations for both employment outcomes. To highlight current efforts and locally-developed strategies that focus specifically on expanding access to 'high-quality' jobs, SCAG developed supplemental county-level profiles, which provide an overview of the work conducted by the region's California Jobs First collaboratives.

Disparities in employment outcomes are multifaceted and deeply rooted in entrenched and systemic inequalities. The high cost of poverty poses a significant burden on all low-income workers, putting them at a disadvantage for accessing a stable living environment and high-quality employment. Some job seekers or workers face intersectional challenges due to a combination of being low income and their race or gender. For example, Native American women face unique employment disparities compared to women on average in California, with a higher unemployment rate and annual earnings that are nearly $10,000 lower. Similarly, the 2021 IERS report found that students from underrepresented backgrounds in particular "continue to face barriers to accessing paid internships, which are critical to

applying their skills and unlocking future job opportunities." The report also demonstrates that recent economic trends have disproportionately impacted different demographic groups; during the pandemic and the resulting economic turmoil, women, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), and low-income residents in the SCAG region were disproportionately impacted by job losses.

Different factors drive disparities for each demographic group. For example, the 2021 IERS report found that the structural requirements around some existing workforce development programs can limit the ability of providers to serve specific groups: "Within the context of youth, there is a misalignment in when the funds are needed and when the funds can be used. Currently, youth programs with certain types of grant funding cannot enroll high school students as participants [...] Practitioners note that waiting until a student completes high school risks the student becoming disconnected from resources and makes it difficult for trainers to re-engage young people."

Levels of disparity also differ by geography. Even within a county, there might be several different areas with their own unique demographic composition and economic landscape, leading to varied outcomes (e.g., San Bernardino County includes a large metropolitan area and the High Desert, in addition to bordering Coachella Valley). Urban centers like Los Angeles and the Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario metropolitan area can experience different employment challenges compared to more rural areas, such as large portions of Imperial County. These distinctions are demonstrated in the overall unemployment rate for Imperial County (13 percent), which is over two times that of the entire SCAG region per 2022 U.S. Census data. These geographic differences highlight the importance of tailored approaches to addressing employment disparities that consider the specific needs and circumstances of each community—accounting for both identity and geography.

These findings and the recommendation from the 2021 IERS report have led SCAG to take an intentional approach to build on past successes in reducing disparities and further advance inclusive economic growth across the SCAG region. While recent laws address some inequities and there has been clear progress, much work remains to be done. Beyond simply being the right thing to do, the entire region benefits from a more equitable workforce. Recent research conducted by SCAG demonstrated that by closing the racial and gender wage gaps, the difference in pay between white male workers and various racial and gender groups, the SCAG region's gross domestic product could increase up to 17 percent. As such, SCAG believes that the region should consistently push for continued progress toward a vibrant, inclusive economy and thereby, strengthen the region's resilience against future economic downturns and stressors.

SCAG fosters inclusive economic prosperity by considering worker needs and perspectives in its planning work and collaborating with local partners to alleviate workforce challenges. SCAG's effort is visible in Connect SoCal 2024, which includes regional planning policies and implementation strategies focused on workforce development for the first time. Connect SoCal 2024 aims to:

- Foster a positive business climate by promoting regional collaboration in workforce and economic development between cities, counties, educational institutions, and employers.
- Encourage inclusive workforce development that promotes upward economic mobility.
- Support entrepreneurial growth with a focus on underrepresented communities.
- Foster a resilient workforce poised to effectively respond to changing economic conditions (e.g., market dynamics, technological advances and climate change).
- Inform and facilitate data-driven decision-making about the region's workforce.

To further these priorities, SCAG commissioned this report to better understand the specific barriers to accessing training and jobs driving disparities—particularly in lower income communities.

The Methodology

SCAG commissioned Dalberg to i) identify and prioritize the most significant and actionable barriers to accessing job training and employment opportunities in the SCAG region and ii) to identify potential solutions that SCAG and its partners can explore to remove these barriers.

The first phase of work identified and prioritized the most critical barriers to job training and employment opportunities in the region. This phase was intended to bring to light the specific challenges faced by various communities and to establish a clear understanding of the factors that need to be addressed to promote equitable employment outcomes. To carry out the analysis, a literature review of over 100 sources was conducted to understand existing research around barriers to job training and employment. The literature review was complemented by over a dozen one-on-one interviews with experts from various fields related to economic mobility, including academic researchers, workforce development boards, and nonprofit organizations. This phase also included community engagement workshops in five different counties across the SCAG region to hear directly from workers about the top barriers they faced in their own career journeys and the impact these barriers have had on their economic mobility.

Once high-priority barriers were identified, SCAG chose to examine two barriers in more detail to further understand how these barriers affected workers and workforce development and economic development actors and to identify potential solutions that could be explored further. Thus, the second phase of the work shifted toward validating the details of these two prioritized barriers and identifying potential solutions. The intended outcome of this phase was to generate a set of actionable recommendations that SCAG and its partners can expand upon and implement when funding and staffing resources are available over the coming years to address these barriers and, ultimately, reduce employment disparities across the SCAG region.

The potential solutions were identified through a highly inclusive process. SCAG and Dalberg convened over 30 experts from across the region to join a series of workshops and interviews. These experts represented a diverse set of organizations, including workforce development boards, community colleges, job training centers, and community-based organizations. Participants collectively identified specific pain points within each barrier and brainstormed specific policies, programs, or initiatives that would resolve these pain points. They also provided perspectives on 'what it will take' to effectively implement these solutions over the coming years so that they achieve the ultimate objectives of supporting quality employment and reducing economic mobility disparities in low-income and BIPOC communities across the SCAG region.

The research process for this report incorporated equity in the voices included, how the analysis was conducted, and what recommendations were prioritized. The process strove to include a diverse mix of voices from across different demographics and geographies throughout the region, including experts from all six SCAG counties and community-based organizations focused on a variety of specific communities. Where possible, disaggregated data on barriers and outcomes for workers from the 'communities of focus,' or communities with disparate employment outcomes (both in terms of access to *any* job and *high-quality* jobs) listed in **Table 1** below, was included in the analysis. Appendix 1 contains more details (where available) on employment outcomes for communities of focus.

Table 1: Communities of focus in this report

Community of Focus	Definition
Low-income communities	Communities with a higher-than-average proportion of working poor and unemployed workers compared to the rest of the state.
People of Color with disparate employment outcomes	Black, Hispanic (Latino), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and specific sub-groups of Asian populations (e.g., Hmong, Cambodian, and Vietnamese populations).
Women	Women currently in the labor force.
Vulnerable Age Groups	Youth under 25 and older adults over 65.
People with Disabilities	People with one or more of six types of difficulties as per the U.S. Census Bureau definition (hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and independent living difficulty).

This work was conducted at the same time as ongoing work on the California Jobs First program, a statewide initiative to create high-quality jobs and foster inclusive, sustainable economic growth. SCAG is aware of the potential for alignment between this work and California Jobs First (CJF) and has maintained close contact with the high road transition collaboratives in the region. This ongoing collaboration has facilitated knowledge sharing and alignment of efforts, ensuring that both initiatives can leverage each other's strengths and resources. SCAG compiled county-level profiles to synthesize the research and recommendations from the CJF regional collaboratives. These county-level profiles are intended to increase access to the data and recommendations advanced by the collaboratives and ultimately serve as a resource for local jurisdictions to pursue funding and implementation opportunities.

2. Barrier Identification and Prioritization

The Approach

The approach for identifying and prioritizing barriers to job training and employment opportunities involved three steps, as shown in the illustration below. The analysis first identified a long list of the 13 barriers most relevant to workers in the SCAG region. As a second step, eight high priority barriers were identified based on need as defined by *breadth (e.g., how widely the barrier impacts the SCAG population)*, *geographic coverage*, *depth (e.g., how deeply the barrier impacts SCAG communities of focus)*, and *potential for additionality of new solutions*. For the third and final step, SCAG selected two barriers to explore further.

Figure 3: Illustration of prioritization process
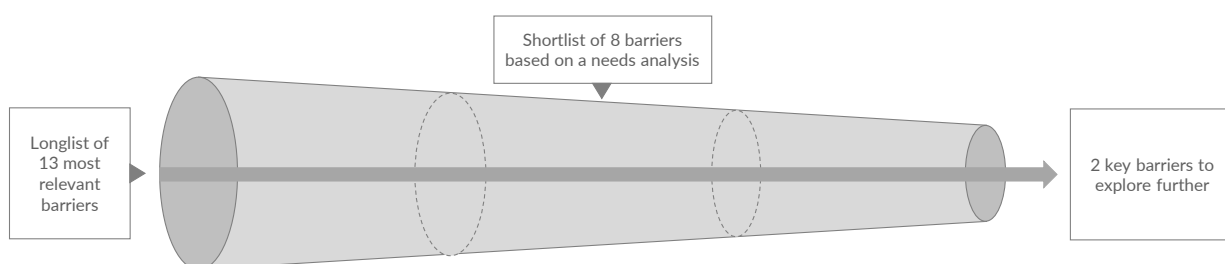
The research and analysis drew upon a range of sources to leverage existing knowledge in the sector while seeking to highlight diverse perspectives. The sources for identifying and prioritizing barriers came from three main categories:

- **Literature review**: The objective of the literature review was to synthesize existing knowledge on the barriers to job training and employment—in general and in the SCAG region specifically (to the extent that region-specific research was available). The review included more than 100 documents, including government strategies and plans, government databases, academic research and insights, public surveys and reports, policy analyses and briefs, and program evaluations.

- **Expert interviews:** Individual interviews were conducted to identify gaps in the literature review, to solicit perspectives on the relative importance of each barrier and to better understand specific community needs. Interviews were held with over a dozen experts from across the six SCAG counties from a mix of government agencies, nonprofits, funders, industry associations, local community-based organizations, continuing education institutions, and job training centers.

- **Community engagement workshops:** Five workshops across the SCAG region assessed whether barriers resonated with people's lived experiences and to understand region-specific challenges. These workshops included individuals in job training programs in Orange County and Imperial County, formerly incarcerated individuals in an employment program in Los Angeles County, residents served by organizations focused on low-income communities in San Bernardino County, and residents served by community organizations in Riverside County.

Identifying the 13 Barriers Most Relevant to the SCAG Region

Barriers to accessing job training and employment opportunities can be categorized into different levels, as shown in Figure 4. These categories represent the different barriers job seekers and workers encounter, requiring different interventions. By understanding the specific level at which a barrier operates, relevant actors can tailor their support and interventions more effectively to address the unique challenges faced by individuals.

Figure 4: Types of barriers faced by jobseekers and workers

Level	Definition	How this shows up for workers	
Direct Barriers	**Immediate obstacles** individuals encounter along the employment or training journey	*Can I succeed along every step of the journey to the job and career I want?*	*Overarching obstacles that intersect across barriers*
Enabling Support Barriers	**Lack of supportive resources** that enable individuals to seek and maintain employment or training	*At this moment, are there support systems in place allowing me to seek and maintain training or employment?*	*Are there disparities in the way society interacts with and perceives me?*
Ecosystem Barriers	**Systemic challenges** individuals encounter rooted in broader societal structures and policies	*Do I live in a society that has positioned me to enter and succeed in the workforce?*	**Cross-cutting issues**

Thirteen barriers were identified as relevant to workers in the SCAG region—particularly workers in the communities of focus. Researchers focused on pinpointing discrete and identifiable obstacles facing workers, rather than broad and abstract issues, to identify actionable areas for SCAG and its partners to address. This focus meant that the list of 13 did not include, for example, socioeconomic laws and policies in this country, which while undoubtably important, are less immediately addressable. Figure 5 lists these 13 barriers, which include four direct barriers, five enabling barriers, three ecosystem-level barriers, and one cross-cutting barrier.

Figure 5: 13 barriers that limit economic mobility in the SCAG region
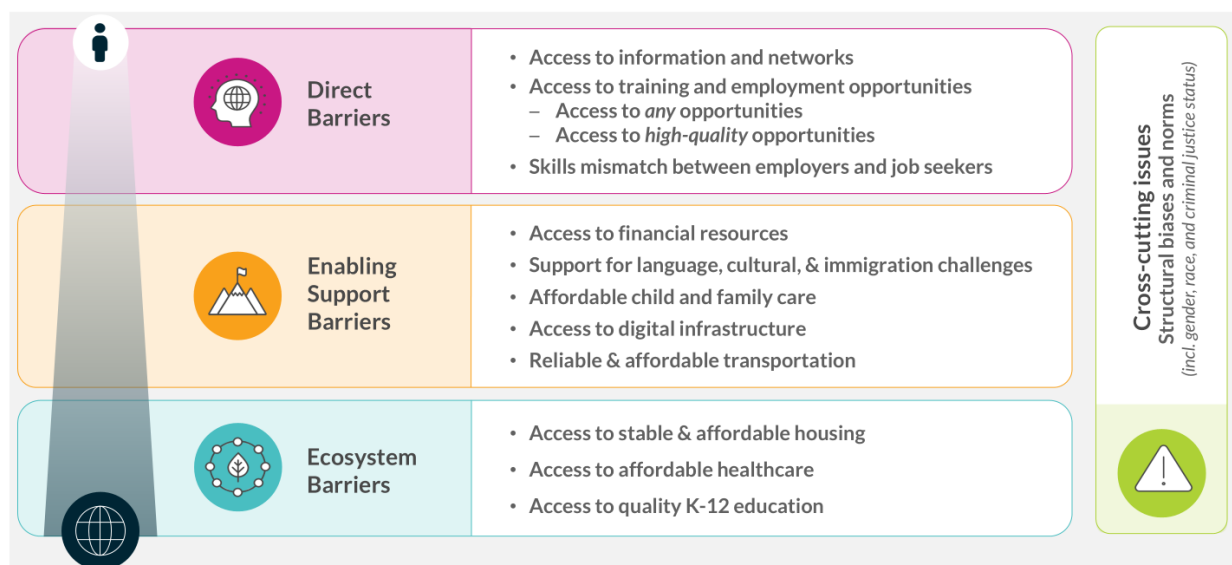
Table 2 contains an explanation of each barrier and how this barrier shows up for workers as they navigate job training and employment opportunities. For additional details on how high-priority barriers might show up for workers, see Appendix 2.

Table 2: Additional details on each barrier from a worker perspective

Level	Barrier	How this barrier shows up for workers
Direct	Access to information and networks	Difficulties navigating or accessing information about training or job opportunities as well as a lack of access to formal or informal networks.
Direct	Access to *any* training and employment opportunities	No or limited local availability of any job opportunities or training programs.
Direct	Access to *high-quality* training and employment opportunities	No or limited local availability of high-quality jobs or training programs leading to high-quality jobs.
Direct	Skills mismatch between employers and job seekers	Workers' specific skills and certifications do not align with what employers are looking for.
Enabling Support	Access to financial resources	Financial constraints limit ability to afford necessary training, afford job search expenses, or take time off to find a new job.
Enabling Support	Support for language, cultural, and immigration challenges	Insufficient English proficiency and lack of support for cultural or immigration needs (e.g., visa support).

Level	Barrier	How this barrier shows up for workers
Enabling Support	Affordable child and family care	Lack of affordable childcare or family care options limit possibilities for time spent away from home.
Enabling Support	Access to digital infrastructure	Limited access to digital tools and broadband internet needed for training or work.
Enabling Support	Reliable and affordable transportation	Traveling to training or jobs is too expensive, too unreliable, too unsafe, or takes too long.
Ecosystem	Access to stable and affordable housing	Housing instability and unaffordability disrupts workers' lives and makes it difficult to live near quality training or job opportunities.
Ecosystem	Access to affordable healthcare	Inadequate access to affordable healthcare leads to poor levels of health and limits ability to work.
Ecosystem	Access to quality K-12 education	Disparities in the quality of K-12 education leads to poor preparedness for a successful job search.
Cross-cutting	Structural biases and norms	Systemic biases and societal norms limit access to training and jobs for certain groups (e.g., race, gender, disability status, age).

All 13 barriers are significant and relevant to workers in the SCAG region, presenting challenges to varying degrees for different communities and workers. Rarely does a single barrier prevent individuals from accessing training or jobs; more often, individuals encounter multiple, compounding obstacles. This complexity underscores the necessity of comprehensively addressing these barriers, recognizing the interconnected nature of the challenges faced by job seekers. The quote below highlights an example of this from a community workshop participant:

> *"Finances lead to transportation, and transportation leads you to your job. Some jobs are 30-40 miles away. I have a car, but I don't have the gas to get there. Dressing for the job is also a challenge. There is a lot of aid out there, but I don't qualify [....] My kids are older now so they don't qualify for social services. [....] So when my son broke his ankle, that wasn't covered. We need housing. We need a place to live."*
> – Orange County resident

While it is important to address all 13 of these barriers, economic mobility actors might need to focus on a few specific areas to make meaningful progress. As a starting point, SCAG identified the highest priority barriers across the region.

Spotlight on *structural biases and norms*— a cross-cutting barrier

Unlike other barriers that might be specific to different levels of the job training or employment process, structural biases and norms underpin and intersect with all other barriers. These biases and norms are deeply embedded within all economic, social, and cultural systems, impacting everything from organizational policies to individual behaviors.

Structural biases and norms manifest in various ways in all the other barriers listed above. For example, a job seeker might face implicit bias during an interview or struggle with limited access to professional networks due to their race (*direct* barriers), be denied access to full banking services and therefore have limited savings for seeking a new career (*enabling support* barriers), or struggle to maintain a stable home in an area with many opportunities for high-quality jobs due to their history with the criminal justice system (*ecosystem* barrier). Interventions targeting any of the barriers should take into consideration the impact of these structural biases and norms.

Identifying the Eight High Priority Barriers

To prioritize barriers from this long list, four criteria were used to assess worker need (e.g., how *broadly* and *deeply* this barrier impacts workers) and additionality (e.g., whether there is an opportunity for organizations such as SCAG and its partners to help address this barrier):

- **Breadth**: The analysis assessed how many people across the SCAG region might be impacted by each barrier to understand the scale of the barrier in the region.

- **Geographic Impact**: The analysis assessed how many SCAG counties are significantly impacted by this barrier to understand the overall relevance of this barrier across the SCAG region. This criterion ensures that the needs analysis accounts for the variation of need across the six counties in the SCAG region; because some counties (e.g., Imperial) have a significantly lower population, they might be otherwise overlooked with only a *breadth of impact* analysis.

- **Depth**: The analysis assessed how deeply each barrier impacts communities of focus to understand whether communities of focus are disproportionately impacted.

- **Additionality**: The analysis assessed whether there is a clear unmet need for coordination, convening, or new initiatives to address each barrier to understand the potential value add of SCAG and its stakeholders.

The needs analysis drew upon the literature review, expert interviews, and community engagement workshops. The literature review fed into quantitative assessments of each criterion where possible; when quantitative data was unavailable or insufficient, literature sources were reviewed to inform a qualitative assessment. Expert interviews and community engagement workshops also provided input into the qualitative evaluation of criteria, providing on-the-ground perspectives and insights directly from the practitioners and job seekers who understand these barriers best.

Figure 6 presents a heatmap summary of this analysis. Each assessment criterion is color-coded: red indicates high impact or disparity, orange indicates medium impact or disparity, and yellow indicates low

impact or disparity. The eight high priority barriers are shown in the top section, with the remainder in the bottom section. These eight barriers were all assessed as high impact or disparity in at least two of the four criteria, and as at least medium impact or disparity in all criteria. For example, "*Access to information and networks*" is a high impact barrier across all criteria, suggesting it has a broad, widespread, and deep impact with higher need for action. Barriers are sorted by highest to lowest overall scoring—though it is again important to acknowledge that all 13 barriers, regardless of scoring, are real impediments to economic mobility across the SCAG region. Note that the average assessment of "Depth" across all communities of focus is presented in this heatmap analysis.

Figure 6: Overview of barrier prioritization assessment by need

Prioritization		
High	Medium	Low

Level	Barrier	Breadth	Geographic Coverage	Average Depth	Additionality
Higher priority **based on need**					
Direct	Access to information and networks	High	High	High disparity	High
Ecosystem	Access to stable & affordable housing	High	High	High disparity	Medium
Enabler	Affordable child and family care	Medium	High	High disparity	High
Direct	Skills mismatch	High	Medium	High disparity	Medium
Direct	Access to high-quality opportunities	Medium	Medium	High disparity	High
Cross-cutting	Structural biases and norms	High	Medium	High disparity	Medium
Enabler	Access to financial resources	Medium	Medium	High disparity	High
Enabler	Reliable & affordable transportation	Medium	High	High disparity	Medium
Lower priority **based on need**					
Enabler	Support for language & cultural barriers	Medium	High	Some disparity	Medium
Ecosystem	Access to quality K-12 education	Medium	Medium	High disparity	Medium
Direct	Access to any training & employment opps	Low	Medium	High disparity	Medium
Ecosystem	Access to affordable healthcare	Medium	Medium	Some disparity	Low
Enabler	Access to digital infrastructure	Low	Low	Some disparity	Low

Several key insights emerge from the heatmap. First, many of the direct barriers emerge as high priority, implying that specific, targeted solutions to these direct challenges can unlock significant potential for workers and their economic mobility. Second, the analysis shows that the lack of availability of *any* training opportunities and jobs is not a major barrier to workers. Instead, workers face a myriad of other challenges to access these jobs. Relatedly, a third insight is that lack of access to *high-quality jobs* that meet workers' needs in terms of living wages, benefits, flexible schedules, and opportunities for career advancement is a major barrier. More details on each of the criteria in the heatmap and examples of the assessment are shared in the sections below.

BREADTH OF IMPACT

Breadth of impact **assesses how many people across the SCAG region might be impacted by each barrier to understand the scale of the barrier in the region.** *High* breadth indicates that over 30 percent of SCAG's population is impacted by the barrier or that experts and workshop participants strongly indicated that the barrier is widespread among workers, *medium* breadth reflects an impact on 10-30 percent of the population or that other qualitative inputs indicated moderately widespread impact, and *low* breadth signifies an impact on less than 10 percent of the population or that experts and workshop participants indicated that this barrier impacted relatively fewer workers. This criterion is crucial for identifying barriers that affect a large portion of the population, thus requiring broader interventions to address systemic issues.

To assess the breadth of each barrier, population data and relevant demographic statistics from the SCAG region were analyzed. This included data from Census reports, labor market information, and other regional studies that provide insights into how widely each barrier affects the population. This quantitative data was cross-referenced with findings from the literature review and qualitative insights from expert interviews and community workshops for a more holistic approach and to ensure results were tailored to the region. Where precise data was unavailable, estimates based on related indicators and qualitative insights to inform the evaluation were used. **Table 3** summarizes the main research inputs into the *breadth of impact* assessments for each barrier, and **Figure 7** presents the estimate of the potential SCAG region population impacted by each barrier where impacts could be estimated either directly or through a proxy indicator. Note that the categorization to high, medium, or low priority in this chart was determined by both the quantitative input on potential SCAG population impacted as well as qualitative inputs from experts and community engagement workshop participants.

Table 3: Main research inputs contributing to breadth assessment (organized from highest overall priority)

Level	Barrier	Research inputs for breadth analysis
Direct	**Access to information and networks**	Economic connectedness (measured by percentage of low-income individuals with friends who are high-income earners) and strong input from workshop participants and expert interviews.
Ecosystem	**Access to stable and affordable housing**	Percentage of renter households in SCAG spending 30 percent or more of income on rent and moderate input from workshop participants.
Enabler	**Affordable child and family care**	Percentage of SCAG population that lives in a household that has a child for whom no childcare spaces are available and moderate input from workshop participants.
Direct	**Skills mismatch between employers and job seekers**	Percentage of individuals 18+ with educational attainment at high school level or below and strong input from expert interviews.
Enabler	**Access to high-quality training and employment opportunities**	Percentage of individuals in the labor force that are either unemployed or quality as 'working poor' in the SCAG region and strong input from workshop participants and expert interviews.
Cross-cutting	**Structural biases and norms**	Percentage of the population in SCAG region that are not white and male and strong input from workshop participants.
Enabler	**Access to financial resources**	Percentage of Southern Californians who do not have full access to the financial system, qualitative research, and strong input from workshop participants and expert interviews.
Enabler	**Reliable and affordable transportation**	Percentage of households that do not own a vehicle in SCAG region, estimate of employment opportunities accessible within 45 minutes of commuting, qualitative research inputs, and strong

Level	Barrier	Research inputs for breadth analysis
		input from workshop participants and expert interviews.
Enabler	**Support for language, cultural, and immigration challenges**	Percentage of people with Limited English Proficiency as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.
Ecosystem	**Access to quality K-12 education**	Percentage of individuals 18+ without a high school degree or GED equivalent and limited input from workshop participants.
Direct	**Access to any training and employment opportunities**	Percentage of individuals in the labor force that are unemployed and limited input from workshop participants.
Ecosystem	**Access to affordable healthcare**	Percentage of Southern Californians who say that financial assistance would greatly assist them in accessing healthcare and moderate input from expert interviews.
Enabler	**Access to digital infrastructure**	Percentage of SCAG individuals that live in a household with no access to broadband.

To demonstrate how this analysis worked in practice, it can be useful to look at the high-breadth *access to stable and affordable housing* barrier. As in the SCAG 2022 "Racial Equity Baseline Conditions Report" report, this analysis relied on a proxy indicator of renter households in the region that spend 30 percent or more of their income on rent. Nearly 56 percent of SCAG renter households are over this threshold. Furthermore, nearly half of community engagement workshop participants reported that experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness made it difficult to maintain stable employment. Therefore, *access to stable and affordable housing* was rated as *high* breadth of impact.

"Housing is everything. I faced homelessness for three years. During that time, it was hard to be expected to get a job while being homeless, which affects your livelihood and ability to get up every day. Getting access to housing changed everything for me."
– Orange County resident

Figure 7: Estimated impacted population by barrier (millions of people)
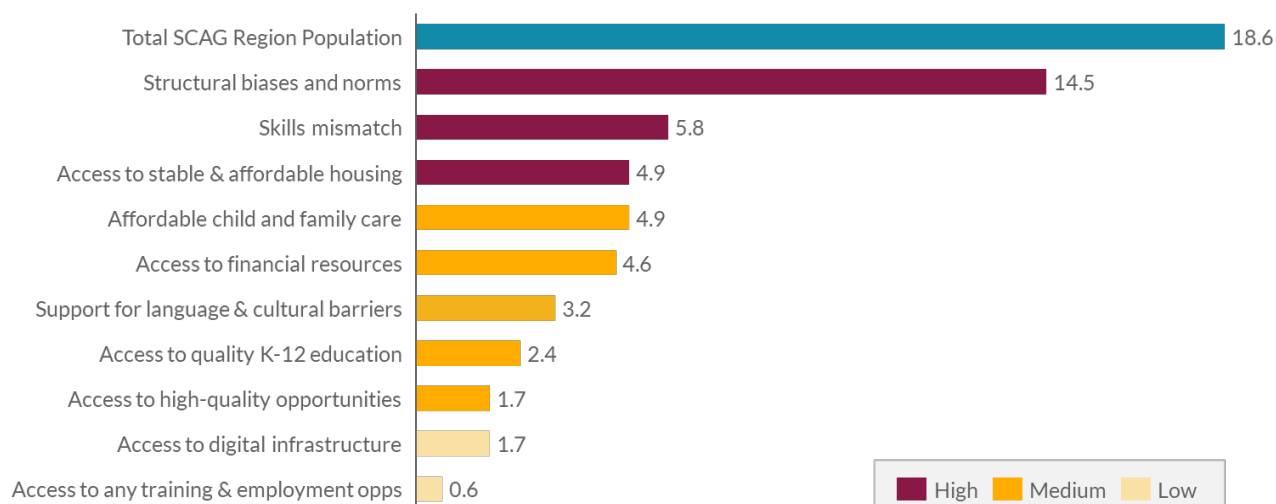
GEOGRAPHIC COVERAGE

Geographic coverage **assesses the number of SCAG counties significantly impacted by each barrier, to understand the overall significance of this barrier across the SCAG region.** *High* geographic coverage indicates that most (five to six) counties are significantly impacted by the barrier, *medium* coverage reflects an impact on three to four counties, and *low* coverage affects one to two counties. This criterion identifies barriers that spread across the region, necessitating regional strategies and interventions.

To evaluate the geographic coverage of each barrier, data was compared for each of the six SCAG counties against average statistics in California or the entire country. To the extent possible, the analysis utilized the same indicators that contributed to the *breadth of impact* assessment—alternative proxy indicators were used only for cases where granular data at the county level was not available. The quantitative data was cross-referenced with findings from the literature review and qualitative insights from expert interviews and community engagement workshops.

To demonstrate how this analysis worked in practice, it can be useful to look at the *access to information and networks* **barrier which was assessed as having high geographic coverage.** For this barrier, a measure of economic connectedness in each SCAG county was used as a proxy indicator. Connectedness is measured by the percentage of low-income earners that have high-income friends. Research has shown that strong social ties—including friendships between people of low and high socioeconomic status—can shape career aspirations and facilitate information sharing and access to job opportunities, thereby enhancing economic mobility. As shown in **Figure 8**, data from the Social Capital Atlas demonstrates that five of the six counties in the SCAG region scored below the U.S. median level of economic connectedness (40.3 percent), suggesting a widespread lack of access to information and networks across the region. This was corroborated by the significant challenges that workshop participants faced with this barrier, especially earlier in their lives, including the example shared by an L.A. County resident that follows.

"When I was younger, I didn't want to work, I wanted to be in the streets with gangs like my friends….Information is out there, but it's hard to know where to look or how to use it without social support. When you look at job posts, they want a million different things for you to apply, so then you just don't."
– L.A. County resident

Figure 8: Economic connectedness of each county in the SCAG region (Percentage of low-income earners that have high-income friends)

US Median:
40.3% of low-income individuals have friends who are high-income

Low: 17.8%   High: 64.6%
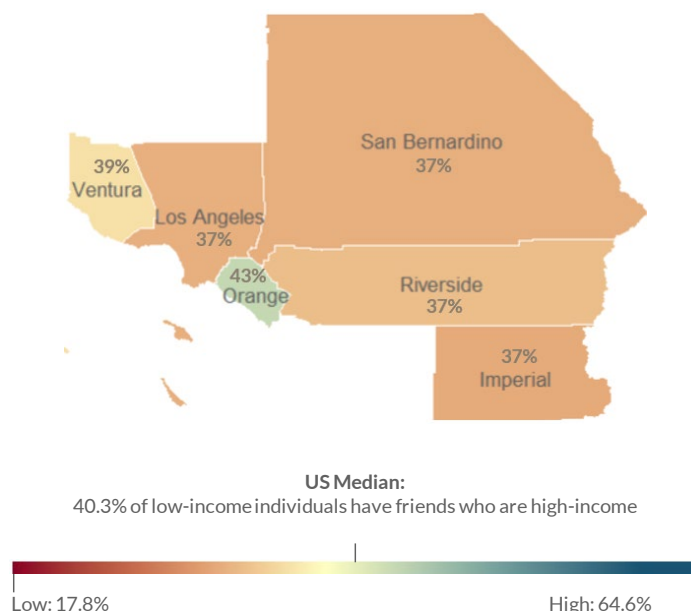
DEPTH OF IMPACT

***Depth of impact* assesses how deeply each barrier impacts communities of focus to understand whether communities of focus are disproportionately impacted.** *High depth or high disparity* indicates severe levels of disparity within communities of focus, *medium depth or some disparity* reflects some disparity, and *low depth or parity* indicates no strong evidence of disparity. This criterion ensures that this work centers the needs of communities facing the most disparate employment outcomes in the SCAG region. For each barrier, the analysis examined whether each community of focus experienced acute levels of disparity beyond the average levels in the population. This analysis included reviewing census data, consulting existing research studies, incorporating qualitative insights for the region from expert interviews, and drawing upon Dalberg's expertise in the sector.

To demonstrate how this analysis worked in practice, it can be useful to look at the *access to reliable and affordable transportation* barrier, which showed high disparity within the communities of focus. As can be seen in **Figure 9**, drawn from 2016-2020 data, Black and Native American individuals are significantly less likely to have access to a vehicle, which is a particular challenge given the long commute times faced by many workers across the SCAG region. Individuals with disabilities are also significantly less likely to have access to a vehicle. In addition, older adults and women face unique transportation challenges. For example, women are more likely to use multiple transportation modes in a

day, which can incur significant time and monetary costs in areas without strong multimodal transportation networks and are also more likely to face transit-related safety concerns.

Figure 9: Households without a vehicle in the SCAG region (SCAG, 2022)

Legend: ■ 2020

5.8%	6.9%	14.1%	7.2%	13.4%	6.5%	6.9%
White	Asian/Pacific Islander	Black	Mixed/Other	Native American	Hispanic (Latino)	SCAG region
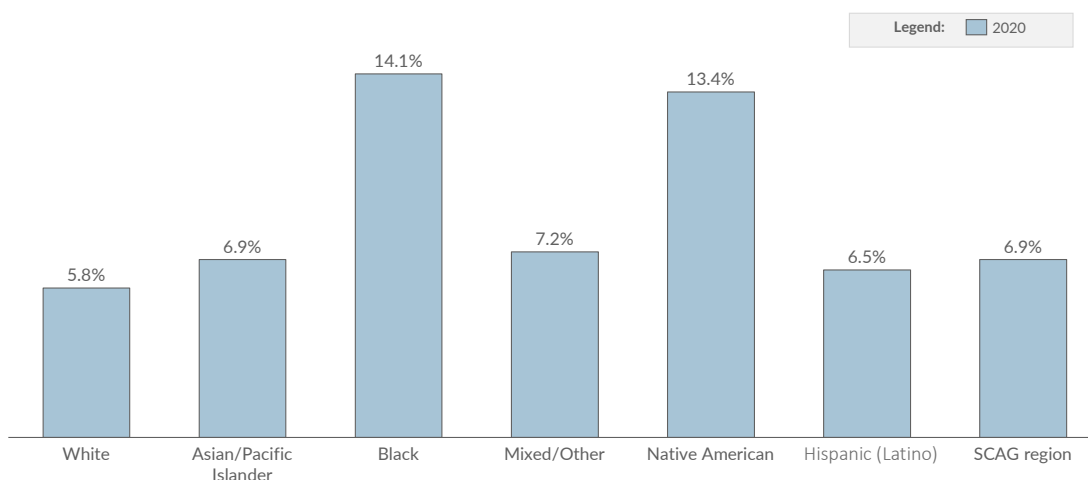
Source: U.S. Census Bureau; American Community Survey (ACS), Five-Year Public Use Microdata (PUMS), 2016-2020

These disparities are further illustrated by personal accounts from community members. The account below illustrates the high depth of impact, necessitating targeted interventions to address significant disparities in transportation access for these vulnerable communities.

> *"I live in South L.A., and often take the bus to come into [my place of work]. I'd rather walk than sit around waiting for the bus. Today, I walked 90 minutes to get here"*
> – Low-income L.A. County resident

ADDITIONALITY

While the prior three criteria focus on worker needs, additionality assesses ecosystem needs to understand SCAG and its partners' potential value add. This criterion assesses the extent to which existing efforts to address these barriers could benefit from greater coordination, additional convenings, or new initiatives. High additionality indicates a significant need for these elements, medium additionality reflects a moderate need, and low additionality indicates that many economic mobility actors are already addressing these barriers in the SCAG region.

To evaluate additionality, the current landscape of initiatives and coordination efforts within the SCAG region for each barrier was analyzed. This analysis involved a high-level desk review of existing programs but relied primarily on consultations with experts to understand where they saw the greatest need.

For example, the *skills mismatch* barrier was assessed as having high additionality. In the SCAG region, numerous workforce training actors exist to support skills building. Yet, the region faces a persistent skills mismatch, with experts pointing to a lack of coordination as a key factor. This issue spans across different types of actors, such as employers and training providers not collaborating on the design

of training programs, and within the same type of actors, like workforce boards in different counties not sharing best practices and effective strategies. The lack of coordination is in part due to the lack of capacity, which hinders workforce service providers' ability to meaningfully coordinate and collaborate outside of their own agencies. Greater coordination could significantly increase the effectiveness of the many organizations and funders already working to address this barrier.

"Everyone is a practitioner and focused on doing something meaningful, but no one is working to make sure that we have a shared baseline to work well together operationally." – Expert Interviewee

Selecting Two Barriers to Explore Further as a Starting Point

By definition, all eight high priority barriers pose a significant impediment to economic mobility in the SCAG region. These barriers all affect a large number of workers, resonate in multiple counties across the SCAG region, have disproportionate impact on communities of focus, and have a clear need for enhanced coordination, convening, and ecosystem support. Workforce development and economic development actors across the region should prioritize addressing these barriers in their own work going forward.

Through this research process, SCAG chose to examine two of the eight prioritized barriers in more detail to further understand how these barriers affected workers and workforce development actors and to identify potential solutions that could be explored in the future. Specifically, the *information and networks barrier* and the *transportation barrier* were selected given they represent different levels of direct and enabling barriers. SCAG has deep expertise in transportation planning, particularly through its work on the Connect SoCal Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy. SCAG also plays an integral regional role in convening stakeholders and conducting research, which positions SCAG to support partners to address information and networks as a barrier. Chapters 3 and 4 go into more detail on each of these barriers.

3. Further Exploration of the Transportation Barrier

Transportation **refers to the ability for workers to reliably commute to job training or employment opportunities within a reasonable amount of time and for an affordable amount of money.** According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, over 75 percent of the SCAG region workforce uses private transportation, with less than 5 percent using public transportation. The remaining 20 percent are likely to walk, bike, or do not regularly commute to work. Although SCAG has a long history in working to strengthen [transportation](#) infrastructure across the region and has in the past examined how transportation initiatives can further connect residents to job centers, there is still more to be learned by centering low-income workers' needs in transportation planning. Thus, SCAG prioritized this barrier for additional exploration.

To further explore the transportation barrier and potential solution areas, SCAG hosted a workshop with participants from across the SCAG region. The primary focus within the transportation barrier is how transportation can be a barrier to economic mobility as it relates to commuting to job training and employment opportunities. Therefore, the workshop engaged not only transit experts, but also workforce development experts who could speak to transportation challenges facing individuals in the workforce. Workshop participants included a wide range of actors in the workforce development ecosystem, providing diverse perspectives on how transportation impacts economic mobility. Organizations represented in the workshop can be found in **Table 4**.

Table 4: Organizations represented in Transportation workshop

	Organization
1	Center for Employment Training
2	Employment Development Department
3	Gafcon
4	Greater Conejo Valley Chamber of Commerce
5	Imperial Valley Regional Occupational Program
6	Norco College
7	Rio Hondo America's Job Center of California (AJCC)/SASSFA
8	Southeast LA America's Job Center of California (AJCC)
9	San Diego Regional Policy and Innovation Center
10	UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies
11	Veterans AJCC
12	Youth Action Project

The purpose of the workshop was to stress-test challenges, gather diverse perspectives on how transportation barriers impact economic mobility, and generate innovative solutions that stakeholders in the region can consider going forward. By leveraging the insights and experiences of a broad range of stakeholders within the workforce development ecosystem, the workshop identified actionable strategies for improving transportation access, affordability, and reliability. Challenges and solutions that emerged from the workshop will be discussed in the following sections.

Key Transportation Challenges

Four key challenges emerged that face workers using both private and public transit options— affordability, availability and time commitment required, reliability, and safety. More details on how workshop participants indicated these challenges affect workers can be found in **Table 5**.

Table 5: Different types of transportation challenges faced by workers

Type of Challenge	Challenge	Most Impacted Workers
Affordability	**Public transit users struggle with fare costs** as one aspect of their challenges and often find the assistance programs complicated and hard to navigate.	Low-income workers
	Workers report that they cannot afford costs associated with purchasing and maintaining a vehicle, such as gas, insurance, and repairs.	Low-income workers
Availability and time commitment required	**Workers experience lengthy, unpaid commutes due to insufficient public transit options**. Due to limited or infrequent schedules, some workers begin their commutes hours before their workdays start. This is particularly challenging for workers that need transit at earlier or later times in the day. Excessive time commitments can be a major barrier to accessing new job and training opportunities.	Agriculture workers, workers that need to cross U.S./Mexico border, warehouse workers
Reliability	**Public transit systems often have limited routes and schedules**, leading to delays and unpredictability that can disrupt workers' schedules. Carpooling options are also not always reliable, with the coordination challenges and frequent vehicle problems causing disruptions for workers that depend on this option.	Rural workers
	The lack of transportation at unconventional hours and availability of different types of options to accommodate various commuting needs is a challenge for workers.	All workers
	A lack of available bus drivers and transit employees makes it difficult to maintain consistent and reliable transit options.	All workers using public transit

Type of Challenge	Challenge	Most Impacted Workers
Safety	**Bus stops without sufficient lighting in the dark** can be a major deterrent for workers needing transit options late at night or early in the morning.	Vulnerable workers (concerns come up for women and younger adults)
	Bus stops without shade in hot regions can become a health risk for all workers, particularly elderly or immune-comprised workers.	Vulnerable workers (e.g., older, immuno-compromised workers)

These four transportation challenges have several implications for workers that commute to their jobs. *Affordability* issues are particularly acute for low-income workers, who may find themselves unable to attend interviews or sustain employment due to financial constraints. The inability to afford transportation and maintain a job can perpetuate cycles of poverty and limit economic mobility. *Time commitment and availability* presents another major challenge. Lengthy, unpaid commutes due to insufficient public transit options force workers to travel for excessive amounts of time, reducing their availability for other essential activities such as caregiving or career-related activities and job training. *Reliability* issues with transit disrupt work schedules, potentially hampering job security. This challenge is especially critical for rural workers who rely on public transit's limited routes and schedules. Finally, *safety* concerns deter vulnerable workers, including youth, women, the elderly, and immunocompromised individuals, from using transit options, further exacerbating their limited access to job opportunities and economic mobility.

Solutions Emerging from Workshops

At the end of the workshop, participants engaged in a collaborative brainstorming session to identify potential solutions to these transportation challenges faced by workers. This process led to the identification of four potential solutions for economic mobility and transportation actors to explore further. These solutions, found in **Table 6,** include details on the solution and the primary barrier it addresses, potential outputs, and the intended outcome of the solution.

Table 6: Overview of solutions that emerged from workshop participants

	1) Strengthened infrastructure focusing on safety	2) Universal basic mobility	3) Improved user navigation through better access to information	4) Targeted solutions
Overview	Enhancing the safety of transit infrastructure is crucial to increasing transit usage and trust. Key improvements such as emergency call buttons and shade	Universal basic mobility (UBM), inspired by universal basic income, is a system where everyone has access to affordable transit (e.g., a monthly	Providing clear and accessible information about transportation options is essential for helping users navigate transportation	Implementing targeted solutions such as last-mile transit partnerships with ride-sharing services, microtransit hubs, and expanded vanpool programs

	1) Strengthened infrastructure focusing on safety	2) Universal basic mobility	3) Improved user navigation through better access to information	4) Targeted solutions
	structures at bus stops can encourage more usage.	mobility wallet that provides access to multiple forms of transport). More information on SCAG's UBM efforts can be found here.	systems effectively.	to address gaps in transit systems.
Barrier addressed	Safety	Affordability	Reliability	Time commitment and availability
Potential Outputs	• Lighting at bus stops. • Shade structures at bus stops (especially in hot regions). • Call buttons at bus stops.	• Working with employers to offer transportation subsidies. • Implementing subsidized transportation programs. • Advocacy to align policy makers on implementing UBM.	• Providing resources to workforce development organizations on transportation options (e.g., vanpool) and subsidization options to share with workers or trainees. • Awareness campaigns for workers on how to use transit or what public options are available (e.g., vanpool). • Improved signage and visuals for transit.	• Last-mile transit partnerships with ride-hailing companies. • Microtransit hubs. • Expansion of vanpool. • Other targeted solutions for high-growth industry employers.
Intended outcome	Improved safety and comfort for transit users, leading to increased usage and trust in public transportation.	Increased accessibility in transportation, ensuring that transportation costs are not a barrier to transit users.	Better informed workers that are aware of and can navigate all the available transportation options (both	Improved convenience and connectivity for last-mile transit, reducing gaps in the transportation network and

	1) Strengthened infrastructure focusing on safety	2) Universal basic mobility	3) Improved user navigation through better access to information	4) Targeted solutions
			public and private).	improving overall mobility.

Key Considerations for SCAG and Stakeholders

While SCAG and its partners will continue to explore the specific solutions in Table 6, all stakeholders can consider concerns raised around *safety* and *improved access to information* as cross-cutting considerations to include in both current and planned transportation programs. In many cases, transportation agencies across the SCAG region are already taking steps to mitigate these concerns. The following are additional cross-cutting considerations that resonate most with workers and can strengthen economic mobility:

- **Equity and accessibility –** Transportation solutions should be accessible and reasonably affordable for all workers. Solutions must consider the needs of diverse populations, including low-income, rural, and marginalized communities (e.g., considering the gendered aspects of transportation barriers such as safety).

- **Stakeholder collaboration –** Successful transportation solutions require the collaboration of various stakeholders, including government agencies, employers, community-based organizations, and transit providers. Engaging these stakeholders in decision-making ensures that solutions are comprehensive, sustainable, and value-adding for workers.

- **Regular assessment and adaptation –** Implement mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation of transportation solutions to identify areas for improvement and ensure that solutions remain effective and responsive to the evolving needs of workers. This will be particularly relevant over the next few years as multiple shocks (e.g., climate, artificial intelligence, and immigration policy) make their way through the economy and transform the nature of work for thousands, if not millions, of workers.

- **Recognize the need for long-term solutions –** Ultimately, participants agreed that many of the solutions explored during the workshop represent short-term fixes and that a more sustainable long-term solution would be to invest in a more robust regional transit system to increase connectivity across the region.

4. Further Exploration of the Information and Networks Barrier

Access to information and networks **is a barrier that both workers and workforce development actors face.** For *workers*, this barrier refers to the availability and quality of resources, connections, and knowledge necessary for individuals to navigate the job market, advance their careers, and ultimately attain economic mobility. For *workforce development actors,* defined as organizations involved in supporting workforce development, such as workforce development boards, economic development agencies, employment training programs, and other related nonprofits, this barrier refers to the ability to access up-to-date labor market information, best practices, and training opportunities to effectively support workers towards employment and career navigation.

The barrier is relevant to workers and workforce development actors in two key aspects:

- *Access to accurate and timely information* about job opportunities, career pathways, training programs, and support services. For workers, this can mean having access to readily available, up-to-date information related to career navigation. For workforce development actors, this involves having access to up-to-date information to provide effective guidance and support to individuals seeking opportunities.

- *Networks and relationships* that facilitate mentorship, peer support, and professional connections. For workers, this means having access to mentors, peer support groups, and professional networks that can provide guidance and leads on training and employment opportunities. For workforce development actors, this involves building connections with employers, educators, and other stakeholders to facilitate collaboration and enable a coordinated workforce ecosystem.

Given SCAG's role as a regional convener, rather than as a direct service provider, SCAG decided to further explore how this barrier shows up for workforce development actors. This targeted focus will ultimately benefit workers because improved support for workforce development actors will lead to more effective and systematic solutions for challenges facing workers.

To dive deeper into these two primary challenges faced by workforce development actors and explore potential solutions, SCAG hosted a series of workshops, bringing together a diverse array of over 20 stakeholders, including community-based organizations, government workforce development agencies, and training institutions, representing all six counties in the SCAG region. The goal was to gather insights that reflect the perspectives of all key stakeholders directly involved with the workforce development space and can meaningfully engage with the multifaceted nature of the challenges related to access to information and networks. This inclusive approach enabled the identification of specific pain points within this barrier and potential solutions that would benefit a range of potential stakeholders. Organizations represented in the workshops can be found in Table 7.

Table 7: Organizations represented in the Access to Information workshops

	Organization
1	Center for Employment Opportunities
2	Chaffey College
3	Chrysalis
4	Cypress College
5	Gladeo
6	Imperial County Workforce Development Board
7	Just SB
8	JVS SoCal
9	Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC)
10	Millionaire Mind Kids
11	Riverside County Office of Economic Development
12	San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership
13	Inland Empire Black Worker Center
14	UCSC Institute for Social Transformation
15	United Way of Greater Los Angeles
16	Workforce Development Board of Ventura County
17	Working Wardrobes

SCAG facilitated a total of three workshops. The first workshop focused on discussing the identified barriers in depth, informing a better understanding of the challenges faced by workforce development actors. The second and third workshops were dedicated to developing solutions and implementation ideas. In these sessions, participants collaborated to brainstorm and co-create strategies to address barriers and strengthen access to information and networks.

Key Information and Networks Challenges

Participants validated the two primary challenges, sharing insights on the various impacts they face due to these barriers in detail. Details on the challenges faced can be found in **Table 8**.

Table 8: How lack of information and lack of cross-region collaboration affects different types of workforce development actors

Type of challenge	Challenge	Workforce development actors most impacted *(drawn from workshop insights)*
Lack of access to accurate and timely information	**Lack of real-time information about specific industry needs or available opportunities.** The shortage of up-to-date information on current industry needs can limit workforce development actors' ability to provide relevant guidance to workers.	Government workforce development agencies and community-based organizations working directly with workers
Weak networks and relationships	**No available structures in place for establishing partnerships with other organizations.** The absence of structured mechanisms (e.g., convenings, networking opportunities) to connect with potential partner organizations makes it difficult for organizations to find and establish partnerships that could enhance service delivery.	All workforce development actors
	Difficulty navigating localized resources for referring workers. Workforce development actors experience challenges using and identifying community-specific resources effectively (e.g., support for youth workers). These challenges can result in an inefficient referrals process and missed opportunities for workers who need targeted support and wraparound services.	Community-based organizations working directly with workers
	Difficulty maintaining communication with other counties due to staff turnover. Reported high turnover rates within workforce development agencies disrupt relationship-building efforts across counties. The lack of continuity can impede collaboration and information sharing between subregions.	Government workforce development agencies and community-based organizations working directly with workers
	No clear framework or pathway for collaboration. The lack of a defined framework and approach for collaboration creates confusion amongst potential partners (e.g., community-based organizations looking to collaborate with government agencies, community-based organizations looking to apply for joint funding opportunities). Without clear guidelines,	Government workforce development agencies, educational institutions, and community-based organizations working directly with workers

Type of challenge	Challenge	Workforce development actors most impacted *(drawn from workshop insights)*
	workforce development actors struggle to establish enduring partnerships.	
	Lack of relationship-building and trust between actors. Insufficient opportunities for building relationships (e.g., convenings, networking opportunities) and fostering trust among workforce development actors can undermine effective collaboration and cooperation needed to coordinate efforts.	All workforce development actors

Participants raised several implications that these challenges present for the workforce development actors working to support communities in navigating the workforce ecosystem. Without *access to timely and accurate information*, workforce development actors often face out-of-date information and struggle to direct workers to the right resources and opportunities that help attain high-quality jobs. Due to the lack of a comprehensive overview of who is doing what, where, and when, marginalized communities, particularly in more remote and rural communities, are often overlooked. As a result, some communities remain underserved, and workers miss out on job access and opportunities. Without *strong networks* to facilitate coordination, services remain siloed and at risk of duplication. Participants largely agreed that there is need for coordination in delivering workforce development services, and funding competition further hinders coordination. Workshop participants shared the perspective that there is a need for better cross-sector partnerships to foster trust and cooperation across the workforce development space.

Solutions Emerging from Workshops

While there are numerous potential solutions to address these challenges, SCAG sought to understand what is top of mind for workforce development actors by engaging workshop participants in a collaborative brainstorming session to gauge priorities and inform potential solutions. This process led to the identification of four key recommendations to address the identified barriers. These solutions are outlined in **Table 9**, along with details on each solution and the primary barrier it addresses, potential outputs, and the intended outcome of the solution.

Table 9: Overview of solutions that emerged from workshop participants

	1) Aggregate funding opportunities	2) Improve the transition across programs, resources, and services	3) Foster cross-region and cross-sector collaboration	4) Enhance collaboration between nonprofits and government agencies
Overview	Centralizing information on available funding opportunities helps organizations and individuals easily identify and access financial resources.	Enhancing coordination and communication between different programs, resources, and services ensures that programs are accessible and not duplicated.	Encouraging collaboration across different regions and sectors promotes the sharing of knowledge, resources, and best practices.	Developing the skills and knowledge needed to effectively engage with government agencies can enhance access to public resources and support.
Barrier addressed	Increased access to information.	Increased access to information.	Stronger networks and relationships.	Stronger networks and relationships.
Potential Outputs	Central actor tracking grant opportunities and notifying potential good fit organizations and programs.	• Universal referral form which will accompany any referral across programs. • Resource knowledge hub.	• Convenings to facilitate relationship building and networking. • Programs to facilitate intentional one-to-one matching for potential partners.	Training on operational details (e.g., grant applications, contracting).
Intended outcome (and target audience)	More efficient uptake of opportunities (for implementing actors).	Improved service to workers and reduced confusion for all parties (for implementing actors).	More partnerships and improved trust and collaboration across the region and across sectors (for all workforce development actors).	Nonprofits are better positioned to receive support from the government and serve workers (especially for less established actors with limited capacity).

Key Considerations for SCAG and Stakeholders Going Forward

While all four recommended solutions are key opportunity areas, SCAG chose to further explore two solutions in the final workshops based on their fit with SCAG's capabilities: 3) fostering cross-region and cross-sector collaboration and 4) enhancing collaboration between nonprofits and government agencies. This section proposes key considerations for how these solution areas can be further explored.

To foster cross-region and cross-sector collaboration, workshop participants recommended regular structured convenings related to ongoing workforce development needs. Underpinning effective convenings are the following considerations:

- **Diverse participant mix –** Convenings should be inclusive of both large and small organizations to ensure a wide range of expertise. Participants can include economic development agencies, government partners, community-based organizations, and education experts from universities, community colleges, and school districts to ensure that insights are comprehensive and up to date.

- **Relevant and engaging topics –** Participants emphasized the importance of keeping the topics relevant to stakeholders (e.g., industry insights on labor trends, best practices, innovative new programs, and technology integration) so that stakeholders find value in regularly attending convenings. Regular attendance is key to fostering and building relationships.

- **Geographical representation –** Convenings should represent the full SCAG region. This ensures that the unique needs of the different regions are considered when designing solutions or identifying collaboration opportunities.

- **Flexible and convenient formats –** Convenings should include both in-person and virtual meeting options. Locations should be accessible to minimize travel.

- **Sensible frequency –** Convenings should occur no more than quarterly, with many participants preferring annual or biannual meetings to avoid "convening fatigue" and encourage participation.

To enhance collaboration between nonprofits and government agencies, participants recommended three actions to help ensure that nonprofits across the region can take full advantage of government resources and partnerships:

- **Provide clear guidelines and processes to streamline collaboration between community-based organizations and government agencies**. This includes standardizing protocols to establish clear pathways for building formal relationships with government agencies and developing guidelines that address the more complicated and challenging requirements for working with government agencies.

- **Open communication channels to enable trust between community-based organizations and government agencies.** Opening communication channels includes creating space for meaningful connections between community-based organizations and government agencies that enable trust and effective working relationships between both parties.

- **Expand community-based organizations' (CBOs) capacity to engage with government resources** by providing comprehensive and relevant trainings to CBOs.

Participants also shared specific training topics that would be most useful to nonprofits. They emphasized the need for sessions on navigating government contracting, understanding government policies and regulations, clarifying available government funding opportunities, setting expectations on

monitoring and reporting, navigating requests for proposals and grant applications, and general programmatic implementation and execution.

Together, these proposed considerations would foster a more supportive and robust environment, where CBOs and government agencies can collaborate more easily and effectively to build a stronger and more inclusive workforce system.

5. Conclusion

SCAG's objectives for this research were to prioritize the most significant barriers to job training and employment opportunities in the SCAG region and to identify potential solutions that SCAG and its partners can explore to remove these barriers. Through comprehensive research detailed in Chapter 2, this research identified 13 relevant barriers and then prioritized eight that present the greatest impediments to inclusive economic mobility across the SCAG region. SCAG then selected two of these prioritized barriers to explore further: *transportation* and *access to information and networks*. In Chapters 3 and 4, two of these barriers were examined in more detail. SCAG strengthened its understanding of each barrier, and generated actionable solutions based on input from industry practitioners.

Going forward, SCAG and its regional partners can consider both these barriers and potential solutions in future workforce, economic development, and transportation programs. This will help ensure that workforce programs are broadly accessible, promote the creation of stronger and more collaborative transportation and workforce systems, and ultimately support greater and more inclusive access to job training and employment opportunities across the SCAG region.

Appendix 1: Employment Outcome Data Tables for Communities of Focus

Tables 10 to **16** summarize 2022 employment outcomes across the six counties in the region covered by SCAG. This data was used to identify demographic groups with disparate employment outcomes, where available based on U.S. Census data. In addition to the demographic groups listed in **Tables 10** to **16**, communities of focus also include: 1) *low-income communities* and 2) *older adults over 65 years of age*.

The following assumptions and analysis notes apply to all tables in this appendix:

- 2022 1-year American Community Survey estimates were used where available. If not, 2022 5-year American Community Survey estimates were used instead.

- 2022 U.S. Census data provide labor force estimates by race and age for population 16 and over, but by gender and disability status for population 20 and over.

- The "Hispanic or Latino origin *(of any race)*" category can overlap other race categories.

- The "White, not Hispanic or Latino" category is a subset of the "White" category.

- "People of Color" is an aggregate total of all non-white single race categories and can exclude People of Color who identify as "Some other race" or "Two or more races."

- "With any disability" includes people with one or more of six types of difficulties, as per the U.S. Census definition (i.e., hearing, vision, cognitive, ambulatory, self-care, and independent living difficulty).

Table 10: 2022 Employment Outcomes for all six counties in SCAG region

	Total Population	Labor Force	Unemployed	Unemployed %
Population age 16 and over				
All	**14,953,686**	**9,589,479**	**578,627**	**6.0%**
Black or African American	941,201	569,573	55,586	9.8%
American Indian and Alaska Native	182,371	123,913	8,435	6.8%
Asian	2,161,628	1,353,183	62,089	4.6%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	42,429	27,696	2,108	7.6%
Some other race	3,221,755	2,159,774	133,807	6.2%
Two or more races	2,402,113	1,600,445	103,001	6.4%
Hispanic or Latino origin *(of any race)*	6,704,709	4,495,051	277,497	6.2%
White	6,002,189	3,754,896	213,601	5.7%
White, not Hispanic or Latino	4,650,128	2,844,524	160,813	5.7%
People of Color	10,032,338	6,569,415	405,715	6.2%
Under 25 years old	2,241,289	1,199,783	145,642	12.1%
Population age 20 and over				
All	**11,226,571**	**8,759,593**	**500,636**	**5.7%**
Male	5,680,346	4,761,140	261,770	5.5%
Female	5,546,225	3,998,453	238,866	6.0%
With any disability	944,941	456,220	52,503	11.5%

Table 11: 2022 Employment Outcomes for Imperial County

	Total Population	Labor Force	Unemployed	Unemployed %
Population age 16 and over				
All	**133,938**	**70,137**	**9,244**	**13.2%**
Black or African American	4,069	1,636	167	10.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native	2,023	959	148	15.4%
Asian	2,185	1,261	50	4.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	48	18	0	0.0%
Some other race	48,128	24,786	3,222	13.0%
Two or more races	26,215	13,894	2,237	16.1%
Hispanic or Latino origin *(of any race)*	111,472	59,526	8,453	14.2%
White	51,270	27,583	3,420	12.4%
White, not Hispanic or Latino	14,841	7,094	489	6.9%
People of Color	119,797	63,399	8,818	13.9%
Under 25 years old	23,737	8,937	2,260	25.3%
Population age 20 and over				
All	**99,285**	**65,558**	**8,632**	**13.2%**
Male	53,019	36,318	4,685	12.9%
Female	46,266	29,240	3,947	13.5%
With any disability	10,123	3,573	729	20.4%

Table 12: 2022 Employment Outcomes for Los Angeles County

	Total Population	Labor Force	Unemployed	Unemployed %
Population age 16 and over				
All	**7,978,462**	**5,191,179**	**302,053**	**5.8%**
Black or African American	620,497	373,539	36,233	9.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native	117,096	81,265	5,363	6.6%
Asian	1,259,393	789,639	33,165	4.2%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	20,764	13,393	1,018	7.6%
Some other race	1,980,338	1,330,787	78,516	5.9%
Two or more races	1,514,130	1,006,896	58,400	5.8%
Hispanic or Latino origin *(of any race)*	3,724,797	2,499,339	144,962	5.8%
White	2,466,244	1,595,660	89,357	5.6%
White, not Hispanic or Latino	2,100,654	1,346,519	76,752	5.7%
People of Color	5,742,547	3,757,175	220,741	5.9%
Under 25 years old	1,132,659	600,271	70,633	11.8%
Population age 20 and over				
All	**6,017,850**	**4,754,345**	**265,514**	**5.6%**
Male	3,039,903	2,559,598	138,218	5.4%
Female	2,977,947	2,194,747	127,295	5.8%
With any disability	527,135	265,149	28,901	10.9%

Table 13: 2022 Employment Outcomes for Orange County

	Total Population	Labor Force	Unemployed	Unemployed %
Population age 16 and over				
All	**2,578,680**	**1,691,375**	**90,821**	**5.4%**
Black or African American	44,359	31,317	2,411	7.7%
American Indian and Alaska Native	16,106	11,371	591	5.2%
Asian	574,084	359,951	18,357	5.1%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	8,137	5,590	408	7.3%
Some other race	331,521	233,391	13,537	5.8%
Two or more races	270,361	189,253	12,491	6.6%
Hispanic or Latino origin *(of any race)*	811,236	573,544	31,545	5.5%
White	1,334,112	860,502	43,025	5.0%
White, not Hispanic or Latino	1,061,318	666,508	33,992	5.1%
People of Color	1,453,922	981,773	53,313	5.4%
Under 25 years old	381,003	205,554	21,301	10.4%
Population age 20 and over				
All	**1,919,516**	**1,530,827**	**76,846**	**5.0%**
Male	967,600	831,168	39,065	4.7%
Female	951,916	699,658	37,782	5.4%
With any disability	119,361	60,874	6,574	10.8%

Table 14: 2022 Employment Outcomes for Riverside County

	Total Population	Labor Force	Unemployed	Unemployed %
Population age 16 and over				
All	**1,904,350**	**1,156,100**	**78,072**	**6.8%**
Black or African American	124,565	76,234	7,242	9.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native	18,933	11,644	1,013	8.7%
Asian	138,141	83,161	4,823	5.8%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	6,417	4,261	362	8.5%
Some other race	437,852	289,858	20,870	7.2%
Two or more races	250,176	164,616	12,182	7.4%
Hispanic or Latino origin *(of any race)*	905,265	597,475	41,226	6.9%
White	928,266	526,327	31,580	6.0%
White, not Hispanic or Latino	677,592	363,189	21,791	6.0%
People of Color	1,193,321	772,774	54,666	7.1%
Under 25 years old	310,350	165,185	22,424	13.6%
Population age 20 and over				
All	**1,402,483**	**1,055,762**	**65,454**	**6.2%**
Male	713,976	586,888	34,040	5.8%
Female	688,507	468,873	31,415	6.7%
With any disability	127,069	56,164	6,908	12.3%

Table 15: 2022 Employment Outcomes for San Bernardino County

	Total Population	Labor Force	Unemployed	Unemployed %
Population age 16 and over				
All	**1,681,263**	**1,044,236**	**75,153**	**7.2%**
Black or African American	134,974	78,555	8,877	11.3%
American Indian and Alaska Native	20,217	12,797	1,049	8.2%
Asian	136,028	85,970	4,298	5.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	5,655	3,517	306	8.7%
Some other race	369,031	243,191	15,321	6.3%
Two or more races	241,134	157,219	12,892	8.2%
Hispanic or Latino origin *(of any race)*	880,641	577,700	40,439	7.0%
White	774,224	462,986	32,409	7.0%
White, not Hispanic or Latino	477,097	269,083	18,567	6.9%
People of Color	1,177,515	758,540	54,970	7.2%
Under 25 years old	292,521	162,766	23,466	14.4%
Population age 20 and over				
All	**1,293,088**	**959,413**	**64,073**	**6.7%**
Male	655,363	531,499	34,547	6.5%
Female	637,725	427,913	29,526	6.9%
With any disability	121,466	50,287	6,990	13.9%

Table 16: 2022 Employment Outcomes for Ventura County

	Total Population	Labor Force	Unemployed	Unemployed %
Population age 16 and over				
All	**676,993**	**436,453**	**23,285**	**5.3%**
Black or African American	12,737	8,292	655	7.9%
American Indian and Alaska Native	7,996	5,877	270	4.6%
Asian	51,797	33,202	1,394	4.2%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	1,408	917	14	1.5%
Some other race	54,885	37,761	2,341	6.2%
Two or more races	100,097	68,566	4,800	7.0%
Hispanic or Latino origin *(of any race)*	271,298	187,467	10,873	5.8%
White	448,073	281,838	13,810	4.9%
White, not Hispanic or Latino	318,626	192,131	9,222	4.8%
People of Color	345,236	235,754	13,207	5.6%
Under 25 years old	101,019	57,071	5,558	9.7%
Population age 20 and over				
All	**494,349**	**393,688**	**20,116**	**5.1%**
Male	250,485	215,668	11,215	5.2%
Female	243,864	178,021	8,901	5.0%
With any disability	39,787	20,172	2,400	11.9%

Appendix 2: Additional Detail on the Eight High-Priority Barriers

In this appendix, for each of the eight high-priority barriers, i) a description of the barrier; ii) an overview of **assessment results** and a breakdown of the *depth* criteria assessment across key communities of focus; iii) commentary on **how barriers show up for workers**, including quotes from interviews and workshops, as well as spotlights on communities of focus; and iv) references for **literature sources** consulted in addition to interviews and workshops are provided.

For the analysis of *depth of impact*, a breakdown for the following communities of focus was included:

- Individuals that identify as Black/African American.
- Individuals that identify as American Indian/Alaska Native.
- Individuals that identify as Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander.
- Individuals that identify as Hispanic (Latino).
- Individuals under the age of 25.
- Individuals with disabilities.
- Individuals that identify as women.

A breakdown was not included for the three communities of focus below, primarily due to data limitations or a lack of variation across barriers:

- **Low-income individuals**: Given how barriers were identified, and the strong link between these barriers and income, low-income individuals are disproportionately impacted by all barriers. Given this lack of variation, the analysis did not break this out separately for each barrier.

- **Individuals over the age of 65**: Limited data was available for this group, limiting a comprehensive analysis across all barriers.

- **Individuals that identify as Asian:** Any assessment of Asians as a single community fails to account for the disparities faced by specific Asian communities (e.g., communities like the Hmong and Cambodians have much higher proportions of working poor than the Asian average) and would result in a misleadingly high number of *parity* assessments across the barriers.

1. Access to Information and Networks

BARRIER OVERVIEW

The direct barrier, *access to information and networks*, captures how individuals struggle to navigate the job training or employment opportunities available to them. This could be due to information not being readily available or presented in a confusing way. A limited access to professional networks (e.g., mentors, role models) who can facilitate their job search can also limit people from learning about or accessing new opportunities.

ASSESSMENT

Overall Assessment: **High impact across all dimensions.** This barrier is fundamental to workers being able to navigate their own careers. While there are several ways that an individual can learn about, plan,

and achieve their desired career path, the consensus is that there are high barriers to doing so—whether due to barriers to finding information, understanding the options, or having access to informal pathways for mentorship and navigation. These barriers are compounded by insufficient information sharing and coordination across practitioners.

Table 17: Assessment for *access to information and networks*

Criteria	Assessment	Description
Breadth	**High**	62 percent of low-socioeconomic status (SES) individuals in the SCAG region do not have friends who are high-SES, which is significantly higher than the U.S. median.
Geographic Coverage	**High**	The SCAG region is less connected than the U.S. median, with three counties (L.A., San Bernardino, and Imperial) in the bottom third percentile of economic connectedness and another two counties (Ventura and Riverside) below the median.
Overall Depth	**High Disparity**	All communities of focus (except for people <25) experience some to high disparity, with Black, Hispanic (Latino), Native American, and Pacific Islander communities in particular facing challenges in economic connectedness.
Additionality	**High**	The field lacks a convener who could drive better coordination amongst workforce development actors, close the information gap for workers on available programs, and create space for practitioners to learn from one another how to best support career navigation.

Table 18: Breakdown of *depth* criteria assessment for *access to information and networks*

Community of Focus	Assessment
Black/African American	High Disparity
American Indian/Alaska Native	High Disparity
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	High Disparity
Hispanic/Latino	High Disparity
Vulnerable Age Groups: Under 25	Parity
People with Disabilities	Some Disparity
Women	Some Disparity

HOW DOES ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND NETWORKS CREATE A BARRIER?

- **Difficulty navigating job opportunities.** Individuals can find it difficult to know where to look for opportunities or how to navigate a lot of information that can be conflicting or overwhelming.

> *"There are so many opportunities out here in L.A. But the **amount of information can be overwhelming**, and it's **hard to know where to begin**...Having the support of [my career navigation nonprofit] was a gamechanger when it came to navigating these opportunities and knowing how to apply for jobs."*
> *– Los Angeles County resident*

- **Lack of professional or social connections**. Without connections to people with higher socioeconomic status or industry knowledge, individuals might lack access to professional development opportunities.

> *"...**I didn't have anyone to talk to when I was 17, I didn't know anything about what was available to me**. So I spent [redacted] years in prison, starting from when I was [redacted]. While I was incarcerated, I got numerous degrees and certificates. But being out now, it seems there's a lot of favoritism, which decides who succeeds and gets the good jobs."*
> *– L.A. County resident*

Spotlight on Black/African American communities

As the quote below illustrates, the legacy of redlining and modern-day segregation have led to significant disparities in accessing information and networks for Black communities across Southern California:

*"I believe the biggest barrier in the Black community is **access to information and social capital**. Even moving to L.A. where people are more likely to be exposed to different opportunities, I was surprised to see the level of segregation and lack of access to city services. A lot of people don't know how to access help. Culturally, I've also noticed that my family members and peers tend to be quieter about looking for a job—making it difficult for them to be connected to the right opportunities."*
– Local community-based organization employee

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2. Access to Stable and Affordable Housing

BARRIER OVERVIEW

This ecosystem level barrier captures how housing instability and unaffordability can disrupt individuals' ability to maintain employment or engage in training programs. In addition, high housing costs in areas with greater quantities of quality job opportunities pose a burden to individuals who cannot afford these costs and must live elsewhere.

ASSESSMENT

Overall Assessment: **High impact across most dimensions.** All six counties in the SCAG region have a higher proportion of residents spending more than 30 percent of their income on rent than the U.S. baseline, which impacts workers' ability to maintain stable employment, attend training programs, and seek new opportunities. The barrier is particularly severe for People of Color, youth under 25, and people with disabilities.

Table 19: Assessment for *access to stable and affordable housing*

Criteria	Assessment	Description
Breadth	High	Over 55 percent of renter households in the SCAG region spend 30 percent or more of their income on rent.
Geographic Coverage	High	All counties in the SCAG region exceed the U.S. baseline for spending 30 percent or more of income on rent.
Overall Depth	High Disparity	People of Color, youth under 25, and people with disabilities all experience high levels of disparity in accessing stable and affordable housing, with disproportionately high rent burdens compared to their income levels.
Additionality	Medium	Many government agencies, organizations, and conveners in Southern California are already working to address issues in housing, including SCAG. However, this area could further benefit from a convener focused specifically on housing challenges from a worker perspective.

Table 20: Breakdown of *depth* criteria assessment for *access to stable and affordable housing*

Community of Focus	Assessment
Black/African American	High Disparity
American Indian/Alaska Native	High Disparity
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	High Disparity
Hispanic/Latino	High Disparity
Vulnerable Age Groups: Under 25	High Disparity
People with Disabilities	High Disparity
Women	Parity

HOW DOES ACCESS TO STABLE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING CREATE A BARRIER?

- **Disrupted employment stability due to housing insecurity.** Housing instability can hinder consistent employment due to frequent moves or threats of eviction.

> *"I have been struggling to pay rent for my apartment and make my car payment. I'm barely making it. I know I'm about to get an eviction notice—so I'm getting ready to live in a van. I've been homeless before and **experiencing housing insecurity again has really beaten me up and made it hard to focus on work**."*
> *– San Bernardino County resident*

- **Financial strain due to high rent or mortgage burden.** High housing costs can strain finances, leaving little for education or career development pursuits.

> *"I'm originally from San Diego. **We moved out here 5-6 years ago due to cheaper rent** [....] At first, it was great, but **lately, it's been more and more expensive**. Our rent is almost $1,100 now. When it was easy to find a place that was $600 when we first got here."*
> *– Imperial County resident*

- **Geographic isolation from economic opportunities.** Housing instability and high costs can force individuals into areas with limited access to transportation or job opportunities.

> *"**It was really expensive living in Anaheim, so I had to move**. The best option can be to rent something more cheap or live somewhere further away. We are humans; we have feet; we can move. Sometimes you have to get uncomfortable, to get comfortable."*
> *– Orange County resident*

- **Impact of housing insecurity on physical and mental health**. Housing instability can harm mental and physical well-being, affecting focus and performance in training or at work.

> *"When I was homeless, a lot of things happened. I broke my hand, and I was out of work for a whole month. I tried to work with my hand broken, but **with the medication, and sleeping in a park, it was hard.** I was lucky to have Medi-Cal, so it healed okay. But this experience was very difficult."*
> *– Orange County resident*

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3. Skills Mismatch

BARRIER OVERVIEW

This direct barrier captures how the specific skills and certifications that individuals possess do not align with what employers or training providers are looking for in candidates, even if candidates have recently graduated from a related training program.

ASSESSMENT

***Overall Assessment:* High impact across most dimensions.** *Skills mismatch* presents a barrier across the SCAG region, including for workers who have graduated from job training programs or community colleges with concrete skills and certifications. However, *skills mismatch* is most acute for individuals with a high school degree or less, who struggle to qualify for most quality job opportunities. This barrier is most severe for People of Color.

Table 21: Assessment for *skills mismatch*

Criteria	Assessment	Description
Breadth	**High**	Experts indicated that *skills mismatch* is a problem for a wide range of residents across the SCAG region. However, as a proxy, the analysis used educational attainment of a high school degree or below, given that this is the population that faces the most severe skills mismatches, which represents over 39 percent of SCAG residents over 18.
Geographic Coverage	**Medium**	Four counties in the SCAG region (Imperial, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernadino) have a higher percentage of the population with a high school degree or less compared to California overall.
Overall Depth	**High Disparity**	All People of Color experience high levels of disparity in educational attainment beyond a high school degree. Individuals with disabilities and youth experience some disparity, although for the latter it is worth noting that this is partially a function of their age.
Additionality	**Medium**	While California is in many ways seen as a model for its workforce development system, stakeholders highlighted the many underserved communities and geographic areas across the SCAG region. There is also a strong sense the lack of knowledge sharing and insufficient collaboration in this area.

Table 22: Breakdown of *depth* criteria assessment for *skills mismatch*

Community of Focus	Assessment
Black/African American	High Disparity
American Indian/Alaska Native	High Disparity
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	High Disparity
Hispanic/Latino	High Disparity
Vulnerable Age Groups: Under 25	Medium Disparity *(though it is worth noting this is partially a function of the age of this group)*
People with Disabilities	Medium Disparity
Women	Parity

HOW DOES SKILLS MISMATCH CREATE A BARRIER?

- **Lack of appropriate skills or certification for desired career path.** Individuals identify quality jobs but fail to qualify due to their skill set and qualifications.

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*"I want to work as a mechanic, but I didn't have experience building or an official certification. During my job interview **I wasn't sure how to explain how my skills were transferrable, and I felt underqualified.** To be able to qualify for these jobs, **I know now that I need to work on improving my skills,** and stay up to date with my math and engineering skills, and to get familiar with the tools on the job and safety requirements."*
– Orange County resident

- **Difficulty translating existing skills or certificates to similar opportunities**, possibly due to a lack of soft skills or knowledge of how to demonstrate these skills to employers.

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*"...I don't know why, **even with all my degrees, I didn't get any jobs**. It maybe is because I don't have no digital background. Employers look me up and say 'who are you?' You have no history on the Internet. **Maybe it's because I don't have the soft skills**; like I've taken computer classes, but they are all out of date. I didn't even know what a PDF was and how to make one."*
– Los Angeles. County resident

Spotlight on *Southeast Asian communities*

Asian Americans are often analyzed as a monolithic group, which can often hide the unique challenges of individual communities. For example, when it comes to levels of postsecondary education, while 55 percent of Asian Americans hold a bachelor's degree, outcomes are disparate for specific communities. Just 14 percent of Laotian, 17 percent of Hmong and Cambodian, and 27 percent of Vietnamese Americans have a bachelor's degree or higher. As a result, *skills mismatch* presents a significant barrier to economic mobility for these communities.

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4. Affordable Child and Family Care

BARRIER OVERVIEW

This enabling support level barrier captures how individuals are unable to find available or affordable child and family care. As a result, they need to stay home full time or during specific hours to take care of their family, which limits their ability to pursue training or job opportunities.

ASSESSMENT

Overall Assessment: **High impact across most dimensions.** Child and family care is an area with high visibility given the continuing lack of affordable and available options across America. While less than a third of the SCAG region's population lives in childcare deserts, this is a higher percentage than in California overall. This barrier is felt even more acutely by most communities of focus—with women, particularly women of color, often bearing a disproportionate burden of child and family care responsibilities.

Table 23: Assessment for *affordable child and family care*

Criteria	Assessment	Description
Breadth	**Medium**	An estimated 20-30 percent of SCAG's population lives in childcare deserts (areas with no affordable childcare options or with very limited supply of childcare spaces).
Geographic Coverage	**High**	All six counties in the SCAG region either have a higher percentage of their population living in a childcare desert than California, have had a much higher rate of loss of childcare centers than California, or spend more of their incomes on childcare than the California average.
Overall Depth	**High Disparity**	Women experience high disparity as the frequent primary caregiver for children and family members. Also, people with disabilities and those from Black, Latinx, and Native American communities experience high levels of disparity.
Additionality	**High**	Despite many existing initiatives, the region has consistently failed to meet the childcare and family care needs of its highest need residents. Both research and interviews confirm that there simply isn't a good enough solution to this problem yet in the SCAG region.

Table 24: Breakdown of *depth* criteria assessment for *affordable child and family care*

Community of Focus	Assessment
Black/African American	High Disparity
American Indian/Alaska Native	High Disparity
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Parity
Hispanic/Latino	High Disparity
Vulnerable Age Groups: Under 25	Parity
People with Disabilities	High Disparity
Women	High Disparity

HOW DOES AFFORDABLE CHILD AND FAMILY CARE CREATE A BARRIER?

- **Workers who are unable to find affordable family care might have to compromise on job or training program quality.** People managing family care might pursue part-time hours, accept lower wages in exchange for more flexibility, or pursue less-intensive training programs.

*"A lot of job opportunities I want require a bachelor's degree, but **I don't have time to pursue a bachelor's as a single mom**. So, I'm pursuing vocational degrees instead—working as an auditor for [a hotel] overnight, then in the morning, attending class, then my internship, **all while also taking care of my six-year-old son**."*
– Orange County resident

- **Workers might choose to stop participating in the labor force or struggle to complete training programs,** despite a desire or need to remain in the workforce.

*"My son has autism. Finding a daycare that understands his special needs and accommodates him is a challenge. I'm currently attending a nursing training program, but **if he is having a bad day, I can't attend the training."***
– Orange County resident

Spotlight on *Women*

The California childcare crisis disproportionately forces women to leave their jobs, which is causing a gender quit gap. According to a 2022 report, 46 percent of unemployed women left the workforce in 2021 due to a lack of available and affordable childcare. While care challenges were particularly acute during the pandemic, they continue to present difficulties for women across the SCAG region, especially as the cost of care has continued to rise.

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5. Access to High-Quality Training and Employment Opportunities

BARRIER OVERVIEW

This direct barrier captures how, while there may be jobs and training programs available, there are no or limited *quality* options that meet workers' needs in terms of wages, benefits, flexible schedules, opportunities for career advancement, or training programs in specific fields of interest.

ASSESSMENT

***Overall Assessment:* High impact across half of dimensions, medium impact in the other half.** While experts and community engagement workshop participants generally agree that it is possible to find available jobs and training programs across the SCAG region, they also agree that finding a *quality* job that meets worker needs remains a challenge. This assessment correlates with high working poor rates across the region, particularly in Imperial, Los Angeles, and Orange counties, and for People of Color, women, and individuals with disabilities. While this analysis focuses primarily on wage levels, our research also highlighted flexibility as a key quality concern for workers.

Table 25: Assessment for access to high-quality training and employment opportunities

Criteria	Assessment	Description
Breadth	**Medium**	15-20 percent of the SCAG labor force are either unemployed or qualify as working poor (working full time but still earning at or less than 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Line)
Geographic Coverage	**Medium**	Three counties (Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange) exceed the California baseline for percentage of the population that qualify as working poor.
Overall Depth	**High Disparity**	Black, Hispanic (Latino), and Native American individuals, women, youth under 25, and people with disabilities face additional barriers in accessing high-quality opportunities and are less likely to earn a living wage.
Additionality	**High**	There are numerous existing efforts in Southern California to advocate for living wage jobs, which has led to a reduction in the working poor rate over time. However, the primary focus of these efforts is wages, and there remains a strong need for coordinated efforts to promote a broader range of job quality elements (e.g., flexibility, benefits) for workers. Experts also emphasized the importance of ensuring that workforce programs do not stop at job placement and include upwardly mobile pathways for workers to reach quality jobs.

Table 26: Breakdown of *depth* criteria assessment for *access to high-quality training and employment opportunities*

Community of Focus	Assessment
Black/African American	High Disparity
American Indian/Alaska Native	High Disparity
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Some Disparity
Hispanic/Latino	High Disparity
Vulnerable Age Groups: Under 25	High Disparity *(though it is worth noting this is partially a function of the age of this group)*
People with Disabilities	High Disparity
Women	High Disparity

HOW DOES ACCESS TO HIGH-QUALITY TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES CREATE A BARRIER?

- **There are limited quantities of *high-quality* employment opportunities for workers**. While workers can find employment, opportunities do not offer living wages or do not have the benefits or flexibility that workers need.

- **Job seekers do not have access to workforce programs that include pathways to high-quality jobs**, which might be due to limited seats in training programs for high-quality careers, or a focus on job placement over upward mobility.

Spotlight on *Youth under 25 years*

- **Young Californians are finding it increasingly difficult to find good-quality jobs:** Approximately 64 percent of California's young workers earn under $18 an hour (two-thirds of the median wage). Young low-wage workers are at risk of being caught in a "circular labor trap," with limited opportunities for growth or skill development. The pandemic was particularly disruptive for young people, who often had to make difficult choices between working, focusing on school, or their health.

- **Even before the pandemic, young workers in California often juggle work and school or job training, particularly as education costs continue to rise:** One report found that over 50 percent of young workers simultaneously attend school, with approximately 40 percent of your workers working 15-29 hours a week. This can make it difficult to complete or fully engage in job training and educational opportunities.

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6. Structural Biases and Norms

BARRIER OVERVIEW

This cross-cutting barrier captures how systemic biases and societal norms, such as discrimination based on race, gender, socio-economic status, or previous involvement with the justice system, can restrict access to opportunities for job training and employment either directly or indirectly (through intersections with the other twelve barriers).

ASSESSMENT

Overall Assessment: **High impact across half of dimensions and medium impact across the other half.** While it can be difficult to measure discrimination and bias, community engagement workshop participants repeatedly highlighted bias—whether overtly negative or unintentional—as one of the top barriers they have faced on their career journeys. This was particularly true for participants more likely to experience discrimination, such as justice-involved individuals. Discrimination clearly continues to restrict opportunity for women, People of Color, and individuals with disabilities across the SCAG region.

Table 27: Assessment for *structural biases and norms*

Criteria	Assessment	Description
Breadth	**High**	Over 30 percent of the population falls into a category that frequently experiences discrimination, such as women, People of Color, and individuals with disabilities.
Geographic Coverage	**Medium**	Using race as a proxy, four counties (Imperial, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino) have higher proportions of the population at risk of discrimination.
Overall Depth	**High Disparity**	Out of the communities of focus, People of Color, people with disabilities, and women are disproportionately likely to face bias and discrimination in their job-seeking journeys—however, there are many more populations that suffer from discrimination.
Additionality	**Medium**	There are already many equity-focused organizations that tackle institutional and systemic discrimination (e.g., racism, criminal justice status). However, expert interviews and community engagement workshop participants felt strongly that there's still a lot of room for improvement in many underserved communities and geographical areas across the SCAG region.

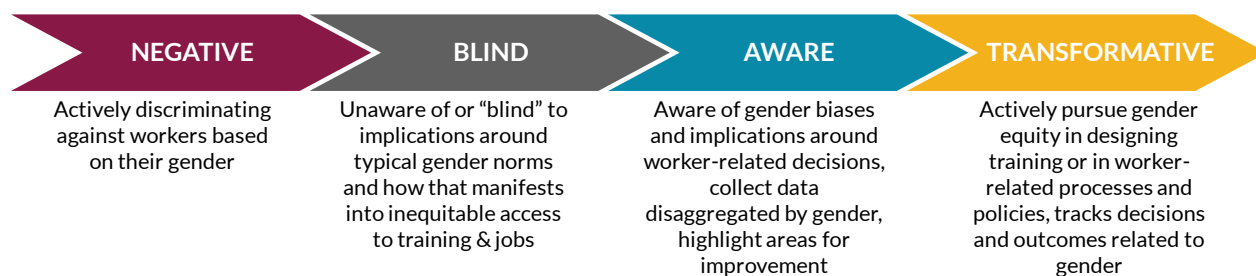**Table 28: Breakdown of *depth* criteria assessment for *structural biases and norms***

Community of Focus	Assessment
Black/African American	High Disparity
American Indian/Alaska Native	High Disparity
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	High Disparity
Hispanic/Latino	High Disparity
Vulnerable Age Groups: Under 25	Parity
People with Disabilities	High Disparity
Women	High Disparity

HOW DO STRUCTURAL BIASES AND NORMS CREATE A BARRIER?

- **There is a range (or spectrum) of ways in which individuals and organizations can make decisions and adopt processes and policies to support communities that experience inequitable outcomes.** To reduce or prevent disparity in employment outcomes, organizations should identify

how communities of focus are impacted by their policies or programs. **Figure 10** presents a brief example of how this might apply to gender (specifically, women) in workforce development. Based on information shared in community engagement workshops, some employers and training providers are still operating at the "negative" or "blind" levels and not actively thinking about how their programs can hurt or benefit women and other communities of focus.

Figure 10: Gender Intentionality Spectrum

NEGATIVE	BLIND	AWARE	TRANSFORMATIVE
Actively discriminating against workers based on their gender	Unaware of or "blind" to implications around typical gender norms and how that manifests into inequitable access to training & jobs	Aware of gender biases and implications around worker-related decisions, collect data disaggregated by gender, highlight areas for improvement	Actively pursue gender equity in designing training or in worker-related processes and policies, tracks decisions and outcomes related to gender

- **In communities of focus:** Racial, gender, and disability status are all barriers to accessing job training and employment opportunities.

> *"Communities with the worst outcomes include **people who are inherently disadvantaged** due to what's happened in society in the past—*
> *think about Black and Latino communities."*
> *– Expert interviewee from a non-government organization*

- **Outside of communities of focus**: Beyond the communities of focus for this report, there are many other groups that experience strong levels of disparity, including justice-involved individuals, veterans, and recent immigrants.

> *"The most underserved communities are those who are **outside of the system**, outside of easy data collection and measurement. Think about disconnected or homeless populations, those who were incarcerated, and immigrants."*
> *– Expert interviewee from a government agency*

> *"After I came back, I wasn't allowed in that area anymore, and I couldn't find any jobs at all. **People judge you**—maybe I'm too honest, but I want to tell them when they ask so they know. But when you have no options, you get desperate. So I was going to do something desperate when [the NGO] called [with an opportunity]."*
> *– Los Angeles County resident*

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7. Access to Financial Resources

BARRIER OVERVIEW

This enabling support level barrier captures how financial constraints can prevent individuals from affording the cost of pursuing training or a new job. This barrier can take the form of real costs (e.g., cost of a training program, transportation and clothing for interviews) or opportunity costs (e.g., time away from work to interview or go to school).

ASSESSMENT

Overall Assessment: **High impact across half of dimensions and medium impact across the other half.** This barrier might be more relevant for the underbanked (about 25 percent of the region's population) and for those under the poverty line (more acute in half of SCAG's counties). Some experts argued that money to meet basic needs is a fundamental constraint that could, if addressed, help unlock other barriers. This accords with information shared by community engagement workshop participants—many of whom mentioned financial resources as a barrier that overlapped and exacerbated other barriers they faced.

Table 29: Assessment for *access to financial resources*

Criteria	Assessment	Description
Breadth	**Medium**	About 25 percent of Californians do not have full access to the financial system (either fully unbanked or only have access to partial services). Qualitative research suggests that this might be slightly higher in southern California than the state overall.
Geographic Coverage	**Medium**	Three counties have a higher poverty rate than California overall (Imperial, Los Angeles, and San Bernadino)—implying a lower level of savings and ability to afford the costs of seeking job training or employment opportunities.
Overall Depth	**High Disparity**	Black, Hispanic (Latino), and Native American communities, and people with disabilities, experience the highest disparity in accessing financial services and resources. Women and youth under 25 experience some disparity.
Additionality	**High**	Numerous organizations in Southern California exist to promote financial wellbeing. However, both experts and community engagement workshop participants highlighted the need for more coordination and regionwide action to ensure that all individuals have access to the financial buffer needed to pursue job training and employment, including exploring innovative approaches like earn-and-learn programs, stipends for attending training programs, etc.

Table 30: Breakdown of *depth* criteria assessment for *access to financial resources*

Community of Focus	Assessment
Black/African American	High Disparity
American Indian/Alaska Native	High Disparity
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Parity
Hispanic (Latino)	High Disparity
Vulnerable Age Groups: Under 25	Some Disparity
People with Disabilities	High Disparity
Women	Some Disparity

HOW DOES ACCESS TO FINANCIAL RESOURCES CREATE A BARRIER?

- **Direct training and job seeking costs limit participation.** Individuals can face challenges paying for job training programs or affording transportation and clothing for job interviews.

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*"I'm currently paying back loans for a career path that I previously pursued as a medical assistant that I am no longer interested in pursuing. The **cost of paying back these loans has made it hard to pursue new training opportunities**." – Orange County resident*

- **Risk aversion to new opportunities due to cost.** The need to prioritize immediate financial obligations can deter individuals from taking time off work to engage in training programs or pursue new career opportunities.

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8. Reliable and Affordable Transportation

BARRIER OVERVIEW

This enabling support level barrier, *reliable and affordable transportation*, captures how challenges related to the affordability, availability, or reliability of transportation can make it difficult for individuals to commute to job training or employment opportunities. This barrier includes challenges like not being able to afford (or maintain) a car, not having access to reliable public transportation, or not being able to afford public transportation.

ASSESSMENT

Overall Assessment: **High impact across half of dimensions and medium impact across the other half.** The specific transportation challenges experienced by workers vary significantly by geographic area and individual situation. However, the data and perspectives from community engagement workshop participants agree that some form of transportation barriers exist in all six SCAG counties. These barriers are faced disproportionately by Black and Native American individuals as well as individuals with disabilities. This area could benefit from a convener that brings a strong workforce-centric lens to transportation planning work across the region.

Table 31: Assessment for *reliable and affordable transportation*

Criteria	Assessment	Description
Breadth	**Medium**	On one hand, only 7 percent of households in the SCAG region do not own a vehicle. On the other hand, nearly 85 percent of jobs in the region are *not* accessible within 45 minutes of commuting. Given that commuting is possible for most SCAG residents, but requires significant cost or time commitment for many, this barrier was assessed at medium.
Geographic Coverage	**High**	There is significant room to improve transportation affordability and commute times in all six counties (e.g., very few employment opportunities are reachable within a 45-minute commute in all six counties)
Overall Depth	**High Disparity**	Black and Native American populations and people with disabilities experience the highest levels of disparity (e.g., are most likely to not own a vehicle), while women and Hispanic (Latino) populations experience some disparity.
Additionality	**Medium**	While many government agencies, nonprofits, and planning organizations in Southern California are working on transportation issues, few are doing so from the perspective of workers. The region could greatly benefit from a convener that brings a robust workforce-centric lens to transportation planning and mobility initiatives, to make it easier and cheaper for residents to access job training and employment opportunities.

Table 32: Breakdown of *depth* criteria assessment for *reliable and affordable transportation*

Community of Focus	Assessment
Black/African American	High Disparity
American Indian/Alaska Native	High Disparity
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Parity
Hispanic (Latino)	Some Disparity
Vulnerable Age Groups: Under 25	Parity
People with Disabilities	High Disparity
Women	Some Disparity

HOW DOES RELIABLE AND AFFORDABLE TRANSPORTATION CREATE A BARRIER?

- ***Affordability*:** Financial constraints related to driving (e.g., purchasing a vehicle, gas, insurance, maintenance) or transit (e.g., not being able to afford fares or not knowing how to access fare subsidies) restrict individuals' ability to access training or jobs. This is particularly acute for people who don't live near a city center.

*"Some jobs are 30-40 miles away. I have a car, but **I don't have the gas to get there."***
– Orange County resident

*"**The real problem is insurance costs**. Because I went for so long without driving while I was incarcerated, they want to charge me $300, $350 for insurance, and I don't have that money. So I have to find other ways to get around."*
– Los Angeles County resident

- ***Availability and time commitment***: Lack of transit availability (e.g., bus routes with inconvenient or infrequent schedules) can contribute to long commute times, among other factors.

Individuals rely on the bus, but buses can run an hour apart or don't show up frequently. *"I live in South LA, and often take the bus to come into [redacted] […] I'd rather walk than sit around waiting for the bus.*
Today, I walked 90 minutes to get here.*"*
– Los Angeles County resident

Some long commute times due to location of employment opportunities **are not compensated,** even when using company-provided transportation. *"When I first came out here, I had to go out to the field for a few weeks and it was too hard. It was out of town—so 2-3 hours by bus. We had to be out there at 1 a.m. to get to the bus stop [for*

the company bus to the fields] at 3 a.m.. And then we get back at 6 p.m."
– Imperial County resident

- ***Reliability***: Reliability of affordability commute options can impact workers' ability to hold a stable job.

(Paraphrased) Many individuals chose to carpool to share the expense of owning and operating a car. However, they are then impacted by other people's life events and schedules (which can adversely impact their jobs). *– Southern Border High Road Training Collaborative researcher*

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Appendix 3: Expert and Workshop Participant Perspectives on Employment Barriers

In one-on-one interviews and community engagement workshops, experts and community engagement workshop participants were asked to rank the 13 employment barriers based on their expertise as practitioners and lived experience as workers and job seekers. The results of these responses generally aligned with the output of the needs analysis. **Figure 11** and **Figure 12** summarize perspectives from community workshops and expert interviews, respectively.
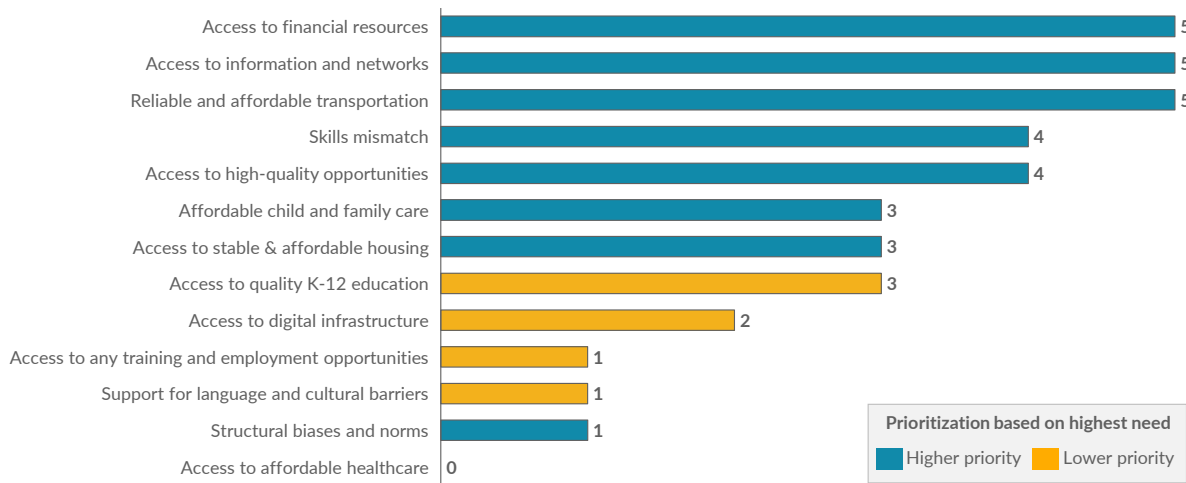
Community engagement workshop participants most frequently encountered the same eight barriers prioritized in the needs analysis in their job-seeking journeys. Participants flagged transportation, information and networks, skills mismatch, access to high-quality training and job opportunities, financial resources, and structural biases and norms as their top barriers. It is worth noting that responses around structural biases and norms might be higher than that of the general population in the SCAG region due to the composition of the workshop participants, which had a higher percentage of justice-involved individuals.

Figure 101: Workshop participants who have experienced barriers throughout their job-seeking journey
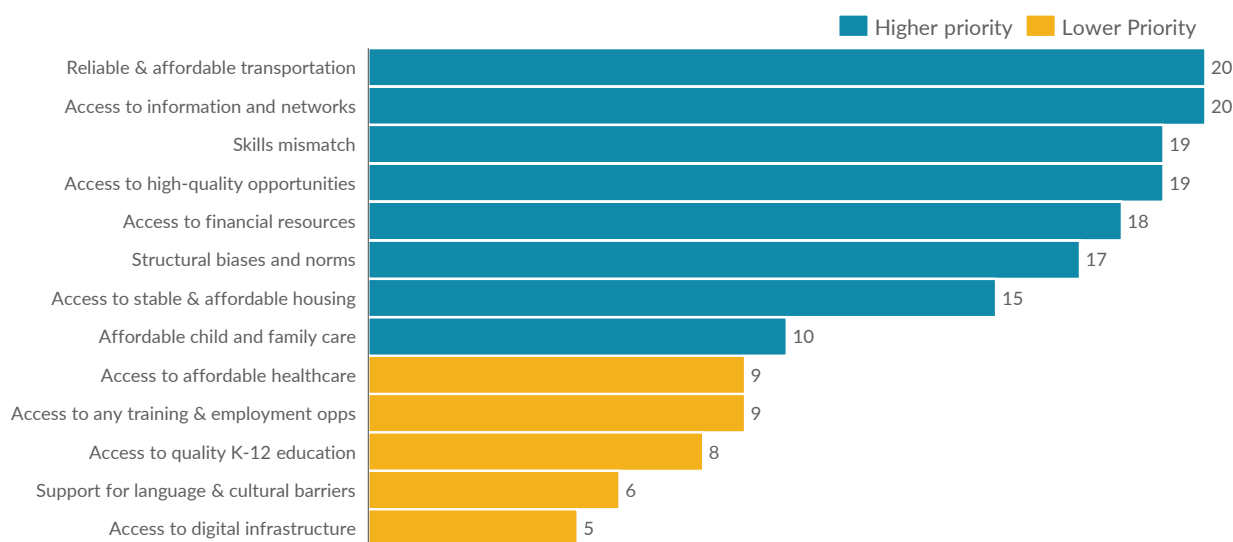
Expert practitioners also prioritized seven of the eight high priority barriers. Experts ranked financial resources, information and networks, transportation, skills mismatch, and access to high-quality training and job opportunities as the top barriers facing workers. Structural bias and norms was the only barrier prioritized by the needs analysis that was not prioritized by experts. However, this could largely be a framing issue, as while few experts explicitly named structural bias as a barrier, it was implicit as an underlying cause of other top barriers described during the interviews.

Figure 1112: Barriers voted by experts as the most significant for workers

Barrier	Value
Access to financial resources	5
Access to information and networks	5
Reliable and affordable transportation	5
Skills mismatch	4
Access to high-quality opportunities	4
Affordable child and family care	3
Access to stable & affordable housing	3
Access to quality K-12 education	3
Access to digital infrastructure	2
Access to any training and employment opportunities	1
Support for language and cultural barriers	1
Structural biases and norms	1
Access to affordable healthcare	0

Prioritization based on highest need
Higher priority   Lower priority

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