

UC Labor Centers Provide a Critical Public Good

2025 Impact Brief: Research, Education, and Leadership Development

In 1964, the state legislature and labor leaders established two University of California (UC) labor centers to provide timely research and educational programs rooted in meaningful engagement with workers. A third labor center started a decade ago and then in 2022, a \$13 million state allocation expanded the labor center model—the only one of its kind in the U.S.—to nine total campuses. This brief highlights their 2025 achievements.

Providing Cutting-Edge Research

The UC Labor Centers provide policymakers with research on the most urgent issues affecting California workers. We focus on low-wage industries and topics such as climate, technology, and workforce development.

Unaffordable Housing and Health Care, and Food Insecurity

- **Medicaid and Medi-Cal:** We compiled data on Medi-Cal coverage in **Sacramento County**, showing that 28% of the population, including almost 43% of children, rely on Medi-Cal programs. We created statewide maps showing Medi-Cal usage by district and county. We gave 13 presentations on the projected impacts on workers of HR 1 to union and community members, and state and county officials. We also informed policymakers on federal cuts to Medi-Cal and the state budget cuts affecting immigrants enrolled in the program.
- **Housing Affordability:** Three research studies analyzed the jobs-housing gap in the **Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, and Monterey County** areas; high rent burdens in **Sacramento County**; and the cost-of-living crisis in the **Pajaro Valley**. Key findings were presented to the Sacramento CLC Housing Committee and led to the creation of the Santa Cruz Workforce Housing Working Group.
- **Food Insecurity:** Following HR 1's passage, we analyzed CalFresh usage in **Northern California**. We released a food insecurity report that identifies underreported, outdated, and unreliable data in the USDA's Food Access Research Atlas, which identifies food deserts.
- **General Welfare:** We conducted a comprehensive community needs assessment surveying 4,000 participants in multiple **Central Valley** counties on work, cost of living, and health care access, as well as a "state of the workers" analysis of the **Inland Empire**.



Technology, Green Economy, and the Future of Work

- **Technology and Work:** We conducted research on the impacts of AI and advanced technologies on workers and industries in California's **Southern Border Region**, particularly in **San Diego** and **Imperial Counties**, reaching more than 500 workers. Findings and policy recommendations were presented to state legislators. We produced *Negotiating Tech*, a first-of-its-kind searchable inventory of 650 agreements and union contracts that secure workers' rights in how technology is introduced and used on the job.
- **Green Jobs and Just Transitions:** We provide research and technical assistance for the Green Empowerment Zone (est. by AB 844), an effort to develop a high-road clean energy manufacturing sector in **Contra Costa County**, and for the **Bay Area** High Road Manufacturing Initiative, funded by the CA Jobs First Catalyst Program. We facilitated regional gatherings on high-road jobs and just-transition efforts in **Lithium Valley**. Our research analyzes how green energy infrastructure in **Orange County** influences local employment, job quality, worker safety, and the community. We researched workforce development strategies for the Inland Empire in light of California's broad transition to EVs.

Wages, Benefits, and Unionizing Trends

- **Tourism and Hospitality:** We examined conditions impacting workers in **San Diego** tourism and hospitality, the region's largest low-wage industry. These findings contributed to the city council passing a minimum wage increase for tourism workers.
- **Meatpacking and Food Processing:** We analyzed the labor conditions of the **Los Angeles County** meatpacking and food processing industry, which predominantly employs immigrants.
- **Cannabis:** We released the first-ever comprehensive report analyzing California's cannabis workforce, one of the state's most dynamic and diverse emerging industries.
- **Young and LGBTQ+ Workers:** Our researchers conducted a **Santa Cruz County** survey of 2,000 young workers, highlighting issues such as disproportionate wage theft among LGBTQ+ workers and widespread scheduling unpredictability. We also conducted a study on young adult Latina workers in **Oxnard**, illuminating unique employment trends and challenges.
- **Tribal Workers:** We examined six tribal casinos in the **Greater Sacramento** area, finding that these workers fare better than their non-unionized counterparts.
- **Specialty Coffee Shops:** We collaborated with UFCW Local 5 on statewide research about unionization in specialty coffee shops.

Federal Immigration Raids and Deportations

- **Raids Impact:** We researched the effects of federal immigration enforcement on private-sector employment in **six states** and **Washington, D.C.**
- **Deportations Impact:** We compiled an overview existing of research summarizing the effect of Trump's deportations on California's economy.

Improving the Working Conditions of Californians

The UC Labor Center research has led to initiatives to improve the lives of Californians—especially immigrants, women, and workers of color.

Convening Stakeholders

- **Offshore Wind:** We established the Central Coast Offshore Wind Community Benefits Network, composed of unions, environmental justice groups, and other stakeholders from the **Central Coast**, to provide public education on responsible offshore wind development.
- **U.S.-Canada Labor Relations:** Our researchers convened 250 experts, advocates, and frontline workers in **Visalia** to discuss the unfair treatment of Indigenous farmworkers who sustain the state's agricultural industry.
- **Worker Center Guidance:** We serve on the **Los Angeles** Worker Center Network steering committee, providing evidence-based strategy, policy research, and communications support.
- **Technology and Work:** We provided education and technical briefings on AI and other advanced technologies, including to the **San Diego County** AI Taskforce. We worked with labor partners and **San Diego County** in the development of one of the most comprehensive local AI governance frameworks in the country. We also convened a groundbreaking statewide technology conference with 250 participants from unions, worker centers, labor law experts, and policymakers.

Technical Assistance & Policy Support

- **Testimony and Policy Consultation:** We provide direct testimony and policy consultation to state legislators, county officials, and task forces, ensuring labor perspectives shaped AI governance, workforce development, and regional economic policy.

- **California Worker Outreach Project (CWOP):** We provide coordination and support to 89 organizations statewide with grants from the California Department of Industrial Relations for worker outreach and education under the California Worker Outreach Project.
- **High Road Training Partnerships (HRTPs):** We partnered with the Los Angeles County Department of Economic Opportunity to launch the \$17.8 million High Road Training Partnership Fund. This initiative empowers 20 local employers to launch HRTPs, ultimately creating high-quality jobs for over 1,800 county residents. This was informed by our previous support of California Workforce Development Board initiatives.



Capacity Building for Frontline Workers and Community Leaders

- **Immigration Rapid-Response:** Some 750 workers attended our “Labor Against ICE” panel with presentations from medical residents (SEIU 1021), teachers (OEA and UTLA), and non-profit workers (WU). We also conducted over a dozen nonviolent direct action trainings, one of which engaged over 600 participants in the **Southern Border** region, and another which convened 1,400 people in **Los Angeles**, the largest of its kind in history. These convenings helped launch branch-off efforts, such as a regional community coalition.
- **Leadership:** Twenty-four statewide lead organizers completed a four-day intensive bilingual workshop to strengthen their leadership skills. We also provided facilitation and training support for the **Monterey Bay** Central Labor Council’s Leadership Academy, a 10-month training series for worker-leaders and community organizers.
- **Organizing:** About 1,200 frontline union and community leaders from 87 organizations across the U.S. participated in three multi-session “Skills to Win” workshops to develop organizing skills.
- **Farmworkers:** We provided technical assistance to labor adjacent farmworker organizations amid the growth of the H-2A visa program. We also conducted outreach on workers’ rights at country fairs in **Humboldt**, **Mendocino**, and **Lake Counties**.
- **Black Workers:** We offered specialized sessions on strategic planning and capacity building for the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, Region 10 leadership, the AFL-CIO Leadership Institute, and rank-and-file members.
- **Public Sector Budget Literacy:** We hosted workshops in **Ventura** and **Santa Barbara Counties** for union and community leaders on public sector budgets and local revenue streams. This helped local coalitions successfully avoid cuts to **Santa Barbara** public health programs that would have laid off health workers and transferred immigrant patients to new providers.
- **Serving Economically Marginalized Regions:** We opened a satellite office in **Imperial County**, one of California’s most economically marginalized regions. The office is incubating a worker center and building long-term infrastructure for worker-led research, policy development, and organizing support in the border region.
- **Technology and Work:** We trained over 1,200 stakeholders on worker rights in the age of AI. We launched a “Labor and Technology Education Initiative” that translates complex technological developments for workers, connects academic research with frontline worker experiences, and builds foundational AI literacy.





Creating Pathways into the Labor Movement for New Leaders

The UC Labor Centers host a variety of opportunities for students and workers, connecting them to labor unions, worker centers, law firms, and community organizations to strengthen their hands-on leadership skills.

Experiential Learning Opportunities and Leadership Training for Students

- **Labor Summer:** All nine UC campuses hosted 130 Labor Summer interns, placed at local unions and worker centers to build their experience in organizing, research, and legal clerking. Many program graduates find career placements in labor-related fields.
- **Labor Studies at UC:** Our labor studies academic programs enrolled over 1,500 students during the 2024-2025 academic year. Los Angeles launched the first-ever Labor Studies department in the UC system.
- **Worker Rights for High School Students (AB 800):** We provided extensive workplace readiness training sessions and materials to young California workers. For example, we hosted labor education for 665 **Los Angeles** public school students in 12 schools.
- **Dream Summer:** Our 38 Dream Summer fellows worked full-time to support critical immigrant rights campaigns across the U.S.
- **Black Student Labor Fellowships and Courses:** Our fellowship, courses, and programs connect Black student leaders with labor leaders through partnerships with the **Southern California** Black Worker Hub and CARE at Work's regional Black Worker Center (BWC) partners.
- **Organizing:** Twenty-two undergraduate students participated in the Solidarity Spring program that gives students the opportunity to learn about **Bay Area** labor and community-based organizing campaigns.
- **Applied Research:** We trained undergraduate students in designing and conducting action-oriented research in partnership with workers, revealing key issues in organizing, rising AI use in schools and workplaces, the affordable housing crisis, and federal policy impacts.

Who We Are: Labor Centers

[UC Berkeley Labor Center](#)

[UC Davis Labor and Community Center of the Greater Capital Region](#)

[UC Irvine Labor Center](#)

[UCLA Labor Center](#)

[UC Merced Community and Labor Center](#)

[UC Riverside Inland Empire Labor and Community Center](#)

[UC San Diego Labor Center](#)

[UC Santa Barbara Community Labor Center](#)

[UC Santa Cruz Center for Labor and Community](#)