



**Santa Barbara County**  
*Community Workforce Agreement*  
**Progress Report**  
February 12, 2026



## Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of the County of Santa Barbara's early implementation of the Community Workforce Agreement (CWA), focusing on workforce participation outcomes, stakeholder collaboration, and lessons learned to date. The CWA is intended to strengthen the local construction workforce by promoting local hiring, supporting apprenticeship and training opportunities, encouraging participation by local contractors, and ensuring that projects proceed smoothly through good faith cooperation and dispute resolution.

Initial implementation efforts have successfully established clear compliance protocols, pre-job conferences, and workforce documentation processes. Regular coordination with the Trades Council, contractors, and consultants has helped resolve disputes in good faith and build a stronger foundation for collaboration. Workforce participation data has shown progress toward the 50% local hire benchmark, though the target has not yet been consistently achieved.

Key lessons learned highlight the need for proactive education, stronger contractor support, improved real-time workforce tracking, and the development of collaborative procedures that directly advance the CWA's goals. Future success will depend on the County and the Trades Council working together to refine processes and secure buy-in from both individual labor unions and contractors. It is critical that all stakeholders follow through on these commitments to fully realize the goals of the CWA.

## Program Overview

The County of Santa Barbara's Community Workforce Agreement (CWA) is a strategic labor policy designed to ensure that public construction projects provide meaningful employment opportunities for local residents. The CWA reflects the County's commitment to investing in the local workforce, supporting family-sustaining careers in the construction trades, and strengthening the regional economy through targeted hiring.

Under the terms of the agreement, contractors are required to make good faith efforts to meet the goal that at least 50% of all project work hours are performed by local area workers. In addition, the CWA promotes the use of state-approved apprenticeship programs to provide training and long-term career pathways in the skilled trades.

Key stakeholders in the implementation of the CWA include:

- The County of Santa Barbara – project owner and policy lead
- The Tri Counties Building and Construction Trades Council and Signatory Labor Unions – providing access to skilled labor and apprenticeship opportunities with an emphasis on local workers
- General contractors and subcontractors – submit required compliance documentation and work with unions to meet hiring goals and apprenticeships
- The Community Workforce Coordinator – tasked with monitoring compliance, supporting implementation, and facilitating program alignment



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During this reporting period, the CWA has been applied to the Tajiguas Landfill Groundwater Protection System Phase IVA project, the new Santa Barbara County Probation Headquarters Project, and the Santa Claus Lane Streetscape Improvements project, with initial efforts focused on establishing strong compliance systems, supporting contractor understanding of the agreement’s requirements, and tracking performance against local area worker goals.

## Compliance Monitoring and Oversight

During this reporting period, the primary focus of the Community Workforce Coordinator has been on establishing foundational compliance practices under the County of Santa Barbara’s CWA. The initial phase of implementation has concentrated on documentation review and early-stage coordination with contractors and unions to ensure understanding of agreement requirements.

Key compliance activities have included:

- **Collection and Review of Letters of Assent:** All contractors and subcontractors performing work under CWA-covered projects were required to submit Letters of Assent confirming their agreement to the terms and conditions of the CWA. These documents were reviewed, logged, and organized to ensure proper alignment with project scopes and timelines.
- **Core Worker Documentation:** Contractors seeking to employ core workers were required to submit appropriate documentation, including proof of prior employment and residency status, in accordance with CWA guidelines. This ongoing process involves close review and follow-up to ensure eligibility criteria were met.
- **Pre-Job Conferences:** Pre-job conferences were held with contractors, unions, and County representatives to outline project-specific expectations, review CWA provisions, and confirm reporting and communication protocols. These meetings also served as key opportunities to answer questions and align all parties on compliance responsibilities.

Although achieving full compliance has been challenging, these early activities have been critical in building the administrative framework necessary to monitor and enforce CWA provisions. As reporting systems and contractor engagement processes continue to develop, future efforts will focus on strengthening data collection, improving consistency in documentation, and increasing alignment with local hire goals.

## Workforce Participation Data

Over the past several months, workforce data has been collected from three active projects under the County of Santa Barbara’s Community Workforce Agreement (CWA). Contractors and subcontractors have consistently submitted certified payroll reports, which have been used to calculate estimated local resident participation rates.

Workforce participation results vary by project based on trade composition, labor availability, and project phase. The Santa Claus Lane Streetscape Improvements project concluded with approximately 78% local area worker participation, exceeding the 50% benchmark and demonstrating strong local



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workforce engagement. The Probation Headquarters project has shown steady improvement over time, with monthly participation levels ranging between roughly 30% and 68%, and overall participation currently at approximately 40%, reflecting upward progress from earlier reporting periods. In contrast, the Tajiguas Landfill project has experienced more variability, possibly due to specialized trade requirements and labor availability, with recent monthly participation levels generally ranging between 10% and 30%, and overall project participation trending lower – currently at approximately 25%. These results illustrate both the progress made and the continuing need for proactive coordination to improve consistency across projects.

At this stage, the process for collecting, calculating, and documenting workforce participation data is still being refined. While certified payroll reports are being submitted as required, internal systems for compiling and analyzing this data are in development. This has limited the ability to provide deeper breakdowns, such as participation by trade, classification, or project phase.

Future reporting periods will benefit from improved data management tools and clearer documentation practices, which will allow for more detailed and reliable workforce insights over time.

## Challenges and Observations

As the County of Santa Barbara's CWA program has progressed, several key challenges and observations have emerged that are shaping improvements to our processes:

- **Communication with Stakeholders:** Consistent and clear communication, particularly with the Trades Council, has been a challenge during the early phases of implementation. Recognizing the need for stronger coordination, we have initiated regular standing meetings to maintain alignment, share updates, and address issues proactively.
- **Record Keeping and Tracking:** An important observation has been the difficulty in maintaining continuous, up-to-date tracking of workforce data. Much of the data compilation has occurred at the end of reporting periods rather than through ongoing documentation. This has highlighted the need for a more structured, real-time tracking system to improve efficiency and accuracy.
- **Centralized Data Management:** Currently, documentation and reporting materials are stored across multiple systems and platforms. Establishing a centralized, shared platform has been identified as a necessary step to improve accessibility, streamline compliance processes, and ensure consistent data management.
- **Balancing Compliance with Program Goals:** A major focus during the initial implementation phase has been ensuring compliance with CWA requirements. However, an important observation is that this focus has, at times, limited our ability to prioritize broader program objectives such as promoting local hiring, supporting apprenticeship development, and expanding access to training opportunities. Future efforts will work to better balance compliance needs with these critical community-building goals.



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## Next Steps and Recommendations

Building on the lessons learned and observations made during the initial implementation of the CWA, the following next steps and recommendations are proposed to strengthen and expand the program's impact:

### Next Steps:

- Maintain and reinforce regular meetings with the Trades Council and project stakeholders to support open communication, shared problem-solving, and early identification of challenges.
- Implement a centralized data management platform to organize certified payrolls, compliance documents, and workforce tracking records, improving both accessibility and real-time reporting capabilities.
- Transition toward continuous data tracking throughout each project phase, reducing reliance on end-of-period data collection and improving responsiveness.
- Increase focus on advancing the broader goals of the CWA by promoting local hiring, supporting apprenticeship participation, and facilitating training and career development opportunities for the local workforce.

### Recommendations:

- **Standardize Reporting Tools:** Develop user-friendly templates and tools for contractors and subcontractors to simplify and streamline data submissions.
- **Introduce Mid-Project Reviews:** Establish informal workforce and compliance check-ins during active projects to ensure alignment and provide opportunities for course corrections when needed.
- **Offer Targeted Contractor Support:** Provide brief training sessions or resource guides to contractors, helping to clarify expectations around documentation, workforce goals, and best practices.
- **Create a Shared Progress Dashboard:** Build a secure, real-time dashboard that tracks key participation metrics and shares aggregate progress updates with stakeholders, enhancing transparency and engagement.
- **Strengthen Relationships and Collaboration:** Focus on building strong, collaborative relationships with the Trades Council and union halls. By working together, we will increase opportunities for local area workers to participate in projects and expand access to training and career development pathways.

By taking these steps, the County of Santa Barbara's CWA program will continue to evolve and mature, building on early successes and positioning itself as a model for inclusive workforce development within the region.



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## Alignment with CWA Goals

The Community Workforce Agreement was established to ensure that the County's construction projects strengthen the local workforce, support training opportunities, and proceed smoothly and efficiently. The Agreement emphasizes:

- Identification and retention of skilled labor while creating opportunities for local area residents to enter the construction trades, supported by outreach, training, and apprenticeship programs.
- Encouragement of local area contractors and suppliers to participate fully in County projects without unnecessary barriers.
- Cooperation among all parties to promote high-quality, timely, and uninterrupted construction work.
- Peaceful resolution of disputes to avoid strikes, lockouts, or disruptions to project work.
- A pledge to work together in good faith to effectuate these purposes and enhance opportunities for local workers and businesses.

The County of Santa Barbara's CWA has made measurable progress toward these purposes across the first three covered projects. The upward trajectory of local area worker participation demonstrates progress, and compliance systems are now in place to strengthen reporting and contractor accountability on upcoming projects.

At the Tajiguas Landfill project, the prime contractor faced challenges in sourcing local heavy equipment operators, requiring some Teamsters and operators from outside the Tri-County area. This underscores both the progress made toward compliance and the ongoing difficulty in meeting local hire goals when specialized skills are in short supply. Similarly, Santa Claus Lane has provided early lessons in how new requirements affect bidding, staffing, and administrative processes. Despite these challenges, consultants have adapted well to compliance requirements, and contractors have shown willingness to adjust practices to meet the CWA's standards.

Implementation across the first three projects has highlighted several common lessons regarding how CWA requirements intersect with bidding, staffing, and administrative processes:

- Contractors may initially experience some uncertainty when bidding CWA-covered work until workforce requirements and procedures become more familiar and predictable.
- Staffing approaches require coordination between core workers and union hall referrals, which can present adjustment challenges for contractors not accustomed to union hiring practices.
- Clear and consistent guidance on Letters of Assent, core worker provisions, and reporting expectations reduces administrative delays and supports smoother project mobilization.

These lessons are helping refine procedures and strengthen alignment between CWA requirements and day-to-day construction operations moving forward.



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Apprenticeship participation, however, has not yet been consistently emphasized or tracked across projects. This represents an important opportunity for growth, as stronger integration of apprentices into County-funded projects will help fulfill the CWA's training and career pathway goals. Future efforts will prioritize clearer reporting, closer coordination with unions, and contractor support to ensure apprentices are meaningfully included.

Equitable access has been supported through the hiring hall system required under the CWA, which ensures that qualified workers in the Tri-County region have opportunities to be dispatched to County-funded projects. While contractors are permitted to bring in a limited number of core workers, additional hiring is routed through union halls, creating an open and consistent pathway for local workers to participate. This structure, combined with ongoing oversight, reinforces the County's intent that CWA-covered projects provide fair and inclusive opportunities for the regional workforce.

Good faith collaboration has also been a central focus. Early challenges in communication with the Trades Council and contractors have been addressed through regular standing meetings and proactive outreach. These efforts have improved alignment and problem-solving at the project level. Importantly, when disputes have arisen, the parties have relied on the CWA framework to work through them in good faith. While not every issue has been simple, the fact that disputes have been addressed and resolved cooperatively demonstrates that the Agreement is fostering stronger working relationships. There is still more work to do, but the County has established a foundation for constructive collaboration moving forward.

## Lessons Learned

The early implementation phase of the CWA has provided several important lessons, informed by project-level feedback and County staff experience:

- **Education must be proactive and preemptive:**
  - All parties, County staff, contractors, unions, and consultants, benefit when compliance rules and workforce goals are clearly explained at the outset. Investing time in pre-job education and ongoing guidance reduces confusion, strengthens compliance, and reinforces the CWA's hiring and training goals.
- **Collaboration on procedures is essential:**
  - The long-term success of the CWA depends on all parties working together to design and implement practical procedures that directly advance hiring, training, and apprenticeship goals. Joint ownership of procedures builds accountability and helps transform the CWA into a tool for workforce development as well as compliance.
- **County / Trades Council partnership and commitment are critical:**
  - Sustained progress will depend on the County and the Trades Council working together to act on these lessons. By jointly developing clear processes and tools, and by securing commitment from both the individual labor unions and the contractors, they can reduce uncertainty, strengthen compliance, and ensure that all parties are invested in meeting the CWA's hiring, training, and reporting goals



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- **Communication is critical:**
  - Standing meetings and direct coordination with the Trades Council and contractors has proven essential for resolving issues early and maintaining alignment.
- **Balance compliance and workforce development:**
  - While compliance efforts (Letters of Assent, core worker documentation, pre-job conferences) have been successful across all projects, they sometimes overshadowed broader goals such as promoting apprenticeships and reaching the 50% local hire target. Subcontractor concerns, including union jurisdiction claims and core worker limitations, reinforce the need for a more balanced focus.
- **Centralized data systems are needed:**
  - Dispersed recordkeeping slowed reporting and analysis. A unified platform will improve transparency and responsiveness.
- **Continuous tracking outperforms end-of-period reporting:**
  - Waiting until the end of reporting periods delayed insight into local worker participation. Continuous, real-time tracking allows earlier course corrections.
- **Apprenticeship participation must be strengthened:**
  - To date, apprentice utilization has not been consistently emphasized or tracked across projects. Clearer expectations, closer coordination with unions, and contractor support will be essential to ensuring the CWA fulfills its training and career pathway goals.
- **Contractor support drives results:**
  - Contractors that received clear guidance and support were better able to comply and submit accurate documentation. The inspection consultant's adaptation on the Santa Claus Lane project illustrates how proactive communication and resources can turn challenges into progress.
- **Good faith collaboration is working, but must continue:**
  - When disputes have arisen, parties have relied on the CWA framework to resolve them constructively. While not every issue has been simple, the cooperative approach has strengthened relationships and shown that the Agreement can function as intended when all sides act in good faith.
- **Resource limitations impact outcomes:**
  - As more large projects come under the CWA, labor availability in local halls will become more constrained. Anticipating and planning for these shortages will be critical to maintaining compliance and achieving workforce goals.

By applying these lessons, the County can strengthen the CWA's long-term impact and ensure that compliance efforts remain aligned with the broader vision of building a skilled, inclusive, and sustainable local construction workforce.



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## Conclusion

The Community Workforce Agreement has laid a strong foundation for improving local hiring, supporting workforce training, and fostering good faith collaboration on County projects. Early implementation has demonstrated progress while also revealing areas for growth, including stronger apprenticeship integration, proactive education, and clearer processes for contractors.

Future success will depend on the County and the Trades Council working together to refine these processes, secure buy-in from both unions and contractors, and provide the support needed to achieve the Agreement's goals. With continued collaboration and accountability, the CWA can deliver on its full potential as both a compliance framework and a workforce development tool that benefits the communities of Santa Barbara County.