

**Strong Workforce Program
Advanced Manufacturing and Transportation
Aviation Careers Advisory
Regional Workforce Advisory Meeting Proceedings
October 30, 2025
Hybrid | Sacramento City College**

Introduction

The Los Rios Community College District, in partnership with Valley Vision and in collaboration with Sierra College, Yuba Community College District, and Lake Tahoe Community College, invests in Strong Workforce funding to organize and convene Regional Advisories. The objectives of the Regional Advisories are to build strong relationships between employers, educators, and the workforce that:

- Provide timely information on skills gaps and workforce needs, informing partners on major industry trend information.
- Improve the efficiency of the advisory process for educators and employers.
- Reflect a regional view of workforce needs and assets.
- Provide opportunities for more systemic, ongoing engagement, including workforce partners in key industry sectors.

Regional Advisory meetings provide crucial insights for guiding investments and improvements in Career Education (CE) programs to meet the rising demand for middle skill positions. This report summarizes the Fall 2025 Regional Advisory meeting, which focused on careers in the Advanced Manufacturing and Transportation sectors, with an emphasis on the growing demand for aviation careers across both private and public industries. It includes key findings, best practices, and detailed minutes from the discussions, highlighting the increasing role of aviation in the regional economy.

Valley Vision supports a robust talent pipeline through our multiple 21st Century Workforce initiatives. We prepare our regional workforce for the future by addressing skills gaps, advancing research, aligning efforts, and strengthening systems. Valley Vision's workforce efforts are supported by the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency (SETA), Golden Sierra Workforce Development Board (WDB), North Central Counties Consortium, Yolo WDB, Los Rios Community College District, and others.

The Strong Workforce program provides Career Education opportunities to increase social mobility and fuel regional economies with skilled workers.

Key Findings

- Greater Sacramento's aviation sector is small but growing, with about 4,300 private-sector jobs in 2024 and 16% projected growth over five years, outpacing the regional average. Wages exceed the regional average by approximately \$8,000 annually, with the highest wages reported in aircraft manufacturing occupations.
- Demand is strongest for middle-skill aviation occupations, which make up approximately 58% of core roles and require postsecondary training short of a four-year degree—positioning community colleges as key providers. Employers across public and private aviation-related industries report strong demand for aircraft maintenance, avionics, airfield operations, and technical support roles, with these skills also valued in emergency services and federal agencies.
- Key subsectors driving employment include support activities for air transportation (maintenance and airport operations), air transportation (scheduled and nonscheduled), and aircraft manufacturing.
- Work readiness gaps persist, with employers relying heavily on internal and on-the-job training due to the limited availability of job-ready candidates. Critical competencies, such as safety culture, situational judgment, and operational decision-making, are often learned through work-based and employer-embedded training models. Shortages of certified flight instructors also impact the region's ability to meet training demand for new pilots.
- Non-traditional schedules remain a major barrier to entry, as night, weekend, and on-call hours are common across operations and maintenance roles and deter otherwise qualified candidates unfamiliar with industry expectations.
- Education pathways are expanding, including programs at Sacramento City College and William Jessup University, but program completers still fall short of regional demand, underscoring the need to scale capacity and alignment with employer needs.
- Targeted pipelines are essential for workforce sustainability, including:
 - 1.) Veterans and adult learners, supported by FAA credit for military experience and bridge programs.
 - 2.) Youth outreach through dual enrollment, summer academies, and exposure to simulators and labs.
 - 3.) Underutilized entry points in business aviation and airport operations (e.g., dispatch, flight coordination, customer service, ground operations) that offer accessible pathways with advancement potential.

Meeting Proceedings

Welcome and Introduction

Valley Vision Project Manager Caitlin welcomed attendees to the Aviation Careers Regional Advisory, held in-person at Sacramento City College and virtually. Blockus acknowledged the support of the California Community Colleges system and Capital Region Workforce Development Boards, whose funding and sponsorship make regional industry advisories possible. She was joined by Julie Muir, Director of Employer Partnerships for Advanced Manufacturing at LRCCD, who highlighted the importance of employer input to ensure students are prepared to meet workforce expectations upon graduation.

Valley Vision Board Member Taylor Toledo provided opening remarks, encouraging participants to consider how regional resources and career pathways can be aligned to strengthen aviation workforce outcomes. She highlighted the need for greater connectivity between workforce initiatives, emphasizing collaboration to retain talent and support regional economic development.

Guest Speaker: Aviation Education and Regional Strategy

Tom Jones, CEO of the Aerospace Museum of California, shared insights on aviation career opportunities and the museum's role as an educational nexus. Tom advocated for a unified, regional strategy to expand aviation training and proposed the development of an Aviation Career Education (ACE) Center at McClellan Park. [This center](#) would address skill gaps in areas such as aircraft maintenance, air traffic control, and aerospace manufacturing by consolidating public and private partnerships and serving as a hub for workforce training.

Tom emphasized the future importance of emerging fields like spaceport operations and the need for cross-disciplinary skills in advanced manufacturing, 3D printing, and CNC machining. His vision included leveraging Sacramento's existing infrastructure to position the region as a national leader in aviation and aerospace education and certification.

Labor Market Information and Job Posting Insights

The meeting featured a detailed [labor market presentation](#) by Ebony Joy Benzing, Director of the North/Far North Center of Excellence for Labor Market Research, which provided up-to-date, regional data on employment trends, wage benchmarks, skill demand, and education supply in the aviation sector. The information was shared to support colleges and

workforce development partners in aligning Career Education (CE) programs to emerging regional priorities.

Benzing began her remarks by contextualizing the aviation workforce as a small but fast-growing segment of the regional labor market. She explained that the aviation sector comprises a variety of subsectors, such as air transportation, support activities for air transportation, and aircraft manufacturing. The support activities subsector includes many of the middle-skill occupations that community college programs are designed to serve, such as aircraft maintenance, ground support, and airfield operations.

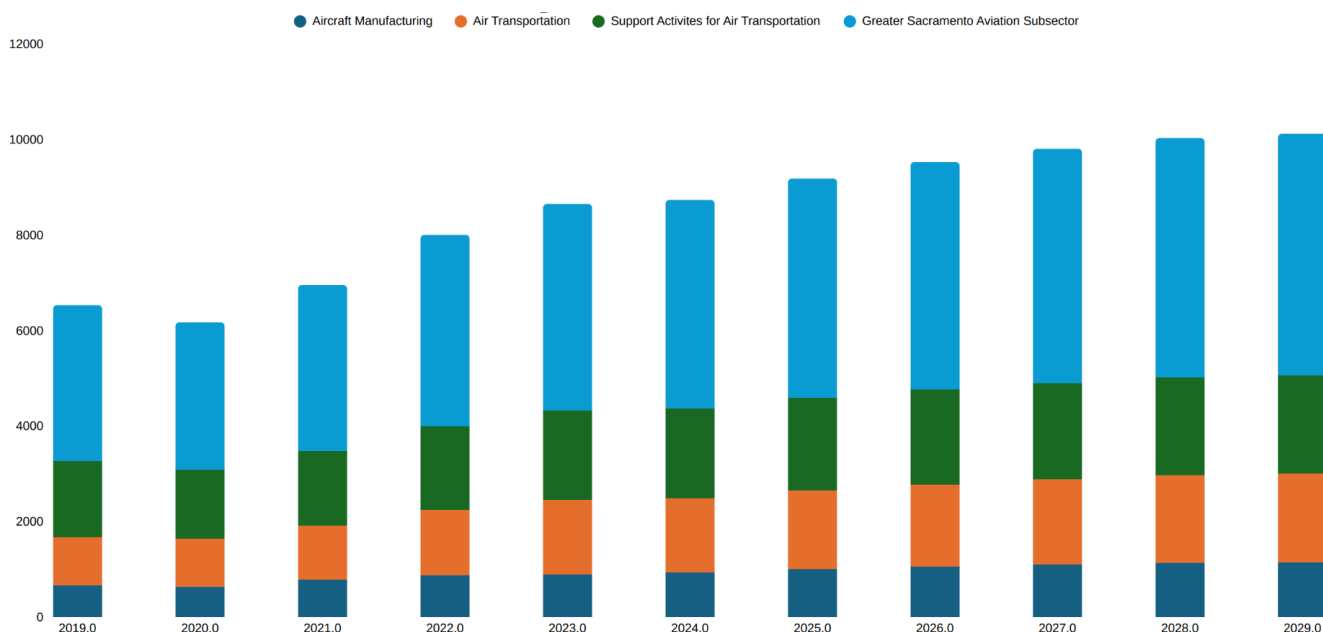


Figure 1.1: Aviation Subsector Employment Breakdown

According to 2024 data, the Greater Sacramento region supports approximately 4,300 private-sector aviation jobs. This figure represents a modest share of the regional economy but is projected to increase substantially in the coming years. Benzing noted that the aviation sector is projected to experience a five-year employment growth rate of 16%, significantly exceeding the regional average across all sectors. These gains are expected to be concentrated in support occupations, including maintenance and logistics, as well as roles in aircraft systems and operations.

- Airports
 - Sacramento International (SMF)
 - Sacramento Executive (SAC)
 - Mather (MHR)
 - McClelland (MCC)
 - ~20 across the region
- Business parks
 - McClellan Park
 - Mather
- Logistics corridors (I-5 and I-80)
- Aerospace Museum
- Aerospace manufacturers
 - Kratos, General Dynamics, Teledyne
 - Gulfstream Aerospace
 - Lancair
 - Small manufacturers

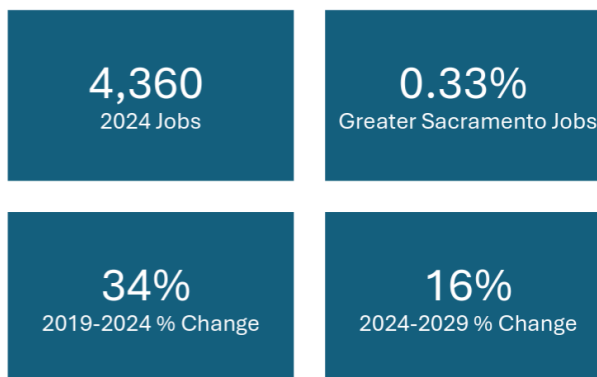


Figure 1.2: Aviation Job Growth Projections

Benzing noted that these trends are encouraging for institutions seeking to expand aviation programming. While the sector’s small footprint currently limits overall headcount, the high projected growth rate signals that new and expanded training pathways are well-timed to address workforce demand. Additionally, many aviation jobs are classified as “middle-skill”, requiring more education than a high school diploma but not necessarily a four-year degree, making them particularly well-aligned with community college offerings.

Wages in aviation occupations are also a significant factor in evaluating the sector’s value to the regional economy. The average annual wage across aviation subsectors exceeds the overall regional average by approximately \$8,000, with the highest wages found in aircraft manufacturing and specialized technician roles. Entry-level aviation roles often provide wages that exceed living wage thresholds for single adults, and many mid-level roles offer long-term economic mobility.

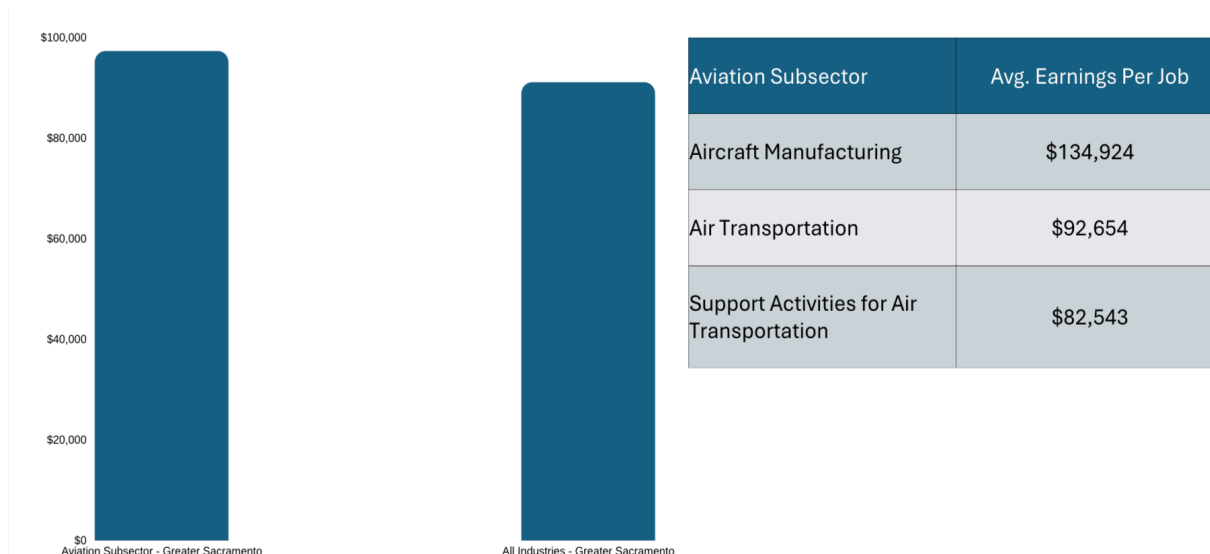


Figure 1.3: Aviation Occupational Wage Comparison

Benzing emphasized that while aviation jobs may not be as large in scale as sectors like healthcare or logistics, they are strategically important because they offer high-quality careers with strong advancement potential. She pointed out that higher-than-average earnings, coupled with rising demand for talent, position the sector as a viable target for regional workforce investment strategies.

The presentation then turned to job posting analytics from the past year. Benzing reported that employers most frequently sought candidates for aircraft mechanics, airfield operations specialists, avionics technicians, and maintenance workers. These roles were spread across both public and private sector employers, including commercial airlines, logistics providers, defense contractors, and airport authorities.



Figure 1.4: Education & Credential Completion Data

At the conclusion of her presentation, Ebony Joy Benzing outlined her most important findings by offering specific takeaways for educators, workforce partners, and industry stakeholders to consider as they plan future aviation workforce development efforts. Aviation careers are growing across multiple occupational categories in the Greater Sacramento Region, especially in middle-skill roles. The sector is not limited to pilots and engineers; it encompasses a wide range of roles in maintenance, logistics, operations, airfield management, and technical support. As aviation activity expands regionally and nationally, these roles are becoming increasingly critical to keeping transportation systems functioning safely and efficiently.

These occupations offer competitive wages and long-term career mobility. Many of these roles exceed the regional average salary and provide clear pathways for advancement with additional certification or hands-on experience. Benzing emphasized that the wage premiums and high-skill nature of many aviation jobs make them strong candidates for inclusion in regional career education strategies, particularly for students and adult learners seeking economic advancement through technical careers. The regional education-to-career pipeline must be

expanded to meet projected workforce needs. Benzing stressed that while training programs exist, the number of program completers remains far below anticipated demand. She underscored the importance of increasing capacity in aviation programs, strengthening partnerships between colleges and employers, and expanding access to FAA-aligned certifications. Additional emphasis was placed on scaling dual enrollment, creating bridge programs for veterans and adult learners, and investing in career awareness and exposure at the high school level. These strategies will be essential to ensuring that the aviation workforce is prepared to meet future labor market demands in the Capital Region and beyond.

Panel Discussion: Employer Perspectives on Aviation Careers and Workforce Development

After the Labor Market data, aviation employers from across Northern California shared insights on workforce trends in aviation maintenance, flight operations, business aviation, and airport support services. Representing both regional and national employers, panelists discussed the most critical workforce needs, hiring challenges, and pathways into aviation careers. They also offered specific suggestions for education and training partners to better prepare candidates for the range of roles available across the sector.

Panel representatives included:

- Gary Pelfrey – Vice President, Davis Flight Support/Woodland Aviation
- Douglas “Bud” Ehrk – Airtanker Lead Mechanic, Amentum/CalFire
- David Freed – CEO, Second Star Aviation
- Amber Pancaro – Flight Coordinator Manager, Axis Jet
- Lori Rucks – Recruiter, Airport Operations Support, Southwest Airlines

Current Hiring Needs and Career Entry Points

Panelists reported growing demand for skilled workers across multiple aviation-related functions, including aircraft maintenance, fueling, dispatch, and customer-facing roles in operations. Entry-level positions in ground operations and flight coordination remain difficult to fill, particularly with candidates who possess aviation-specific experience or training.

Employers shared that mechanical aptitude, professionalism, and reliability are critical foundational traits for new hires, especially in safety-sensitive environments. While certain technical roles require FAA certification or licensure, many entry-level roles offer on-the-job training and clear advancement opportunities.

Skills, Certifications, and Pathway Awareness

The panel identified a misalignment between employer needs and candidate preparation, particularly in maintenance and flight instruction. Employers expressed concern about the

limited number of FAA-certified mechanics entering the workforce, especially those with real-world experience in high-pressure environments such as emergency response aviation. They also noted that shortages of certified flight instructors are impacting the region's ability to meet training demand for new pilots.

In both business and private aviation, employers highlighted the need for logistical, planning, and coordination skills, especially for flight coordinator roles. These positions often require problem-solving, attention to detail, and the ability to manage multiple client and operational priorities simultaneously. Employers also stressed that while technical skills are important, strong communication, adaptability, and situational awareness are essential for success in many aviation careers. In airport operations, employers noted that candidates who demonstrate strong interpersonal skills, schedule flexibility, and a commitment to safety often progress quickly into supervisory or specialized positions.

Expanding Career Awareness and Access

Panelists agreed that awareness of aviation careers is low among students and job seekers, particularly for roles outside of piloting. Many aviation support and operations roles, such as flight coordination, dispatch, aircraft servicing, and scheduling, are not widely promoted in traditional career exploration pathways, despite offering competitive wages and long-term growth.

Employers emphasized the importance of early exposure to aviation settings, suggesting that internships, airport tours, dual enrollment programs, and guest speaker visits could help increase awareness of the full spectrum of aviation career opportunities. They also noted that aviation should be presented as a viable option for students not pursuing four-year degrees, and that increasing access to industry-aligned training could help improve equity in hiring outcomes.

Recommendations for Workforce Development

To support long-term workforce development in the aviation sector, panelists offered several recommendations. These included increasing the availability of FAA-aligned training programs, such as Aircraft Maintenance Technician certifications, and expanding opportunities for hands-on learning through partnerships with employers and public agencies. Employers also recommended recruiting more instructors with direct aviation experience to strengthen training quality and student readiness.

The panel encouraged education and workforce partners to adopt flexible hiring and training models that recognize military experience, support adult learners, and remove unnecessary barriers to entry. Programs that provide paid internships, stackable credentials, and structured career pathways were seen as especially effective for attracting and retaining talent in aviation.

Panelists emphasized the need for stronger coordination among colleges, employers, and regional partners to scale aviation workforce efforts. They stressed that promoting aviation as a dynamic and accessible career field, combined with targeted training and work-based learning, can help ensure a steady pipeline of skilled workers for the Greater Sacramento Region's growing aviation economy.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of the advisory, faculty and employers were encouraged to continue fostering collaboration to strengthen the pipeline into Aviation careers within the region and ensure graduates are well-prepared to enter the workforce.

Please [click here](#) to view the detailed event materials and access a video recording. You can also access comprehensive labor market data on aviation careers compiled by the Center of Excellence for the Greater Sacramento region [here](#). Additionally, if you're interested in staying updated on the latest news, insights, and opportunities in workforce development, you can sign up for [Valley Vision's newsletter](#) here.

For more information about the report and labor market data provided, please contact:

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