



LIFE SCIENCES & HEALTHCARE

REGIONAL WORKFORCE SUMMIT
EVENT RECAP

JUNE 18, 2026

ADVANCING HEALTHIER FUTURES TOGETHER



SUMMIT OVERVIEW



The Gulf Coast Workforce Board continued its 2026 Summer Regional Summit Series with the Life Sciences & Healthcare Futures Summit, held June 18, 2026, in partnership with San Jacinto College. The event brought together healthcare leaders, life sciences professionals, educators, workforce partners, and community stakeholders to explore the future of one of the region's fastest-growing and most innovative industries.

With 99 attendees, the summit reflected the growing regional interest in strengthening the workforce ecosystem that supports healthcare delivery, biotechnology innovation, biomanufacturing, and life sciences advancement.

Throughout the event, employers, educators, and workforce professionals explored how stronger partnerships, industry-responsive training, and sustainable talent pipelines can help meet rapidly evolving workforce demands while expanding access to rewarding careers across the Gulf Coast region.

SUMMIT AT A GLANCE

 **99 ATTENDEES**

 **7 PANELISTS**

 **SAN JACINTO COLLEGE
PASADENA, TEXAS**

 **JUNE 18, 2026**



WELCOME AND OPENING



The summit opened with welcoming remarks from Danielle Knotts, Career Pathways Manager for the Gulf Coast Workforce Board. She challenged participants to think beyond traditional workforce development approaches and consider the interconnected systems needed to support the future of healthcare and life sciences.

The keynote presentation was delivered by Dr. Robyn Cardwell, Assistant Vice Chancellor and Vice President for the Center for Biotechnology at San Jacinto College. Dr. Cardwell highlighted Houston's emerging role as a national leader in life sciences innovation and discussed efforts to expand biotechnology and biomanufacturing training through strategic industry partnerships.

Her presentation emphasized that the future of life sciences depends not only on scientific discovery, but also on developing a highly skilled workforce capable of supporting research, manufacturing, clinical innovation, and healthcare delivery. Strong industry partnerships, workforce investments, and accessible educational pathways will be essential to meeting the sector's rapidly changing needs.



INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES

WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED



The employer panel explored the broad and interconnected workforce that supports healthcare and life sciences organizations throughout the Gulf Coast region.

Panelists emphasized that the industry extends far beyond clinical and laboratory careers. Employers also need skilled workers in:

- Construction and infrastructure development
- Facilities management and maintenance
- Logistics and operations
- Human resources and administration
- Technology and technical support
- Patient care and organ donation services
- Biotechnology and biomanufacturing

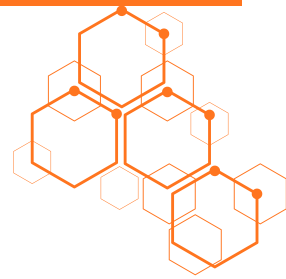
Every advancement in healthcare and life sciences depends on a complex workforce operating behind the scenes. Employers need talent across multiple disciplines and skill levels to construct and maintain specialized facilities, support healthcare operations, advance biotechnology manufacturing, and deliver essential services.

The discussion reinforced the need for workforce and education systems to prepare individuals for both traditional and nontraditional career pathways within this growing sector.



INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES

KEY MESSAGES



The Workforce Ecosystem Is Broad

Healthcare and life sciences depend on workers in clinical, scientific, technical, operational, administrative, and infrastructure-related occupations.

Every Role Supports the Mission

Patient care, organ donation services, biotechnology manufacturing, and healthcare operations rely on a complex workforce working behind the scenes.

Employers Need Talent Across Skill Levels

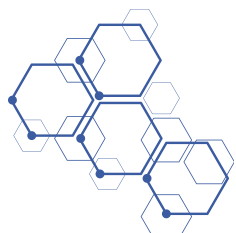
Organizations need qualified workers from multiple disciplines and experience levels to maintain operations, support innovation, and respond to continued industry growth.

Career Pathways Extend Beyond Clinical Roles

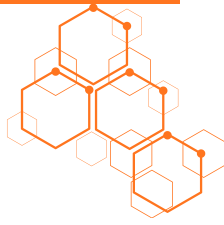
Construction, facilities management, maintenance, logistics, human resources, technology, and administration provide additional pathways into the healthcare and life sciences sector.

Workforce Preparation Must Reflect Industry Demand

Education and workforce systems must prepare individuals for both traditional and nontraditional careers that meet the evolving needs of regional employers.



APPRENTICESHIPS AS A REGIONAL STRATEGY



The Life Sciences and Healthcare Summit intentionally incorporated information on apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, and Registered Apprenticeships as a key workforce development strategy for addressing the Gulf Coast region's current and future talent needs. During the summit, the Gulf Coast Workforce Board staff provided valuable insight into the Board's efforts to expand work-based learning opportunities, strengthen career pathways, and increase employer engagement through apprenticeship models. Participants gained a deeper understanding of how apprenticeships serve as a proven workforce solution that allows individuals to earn while they learn, develop industry-recognized skills, and access careers that offer long-term economic mobility.

The Gulf Coast Workforce Board (GCWB) emphasized its commitment to advancing Registered Apprenticeship Programs as part of its broader mission to help employers meet their workforce needs and assist individuals in building careers that allow both to compete in the global economy. As outlined in the Board's Strategic Vision for 2024-2029, GCWB is focused on supporting business-forward strategies that fuel the regional economy, strengthening partnerships between education and industry, developing clear career pathways, and expanding work-based learning opportunities, including pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, internships, and on-the-job training programs. These strategies are designed to ensure the region has a skilled workforce that can meet the demands of high-growth industries while creating opportunities for residents to access family-sustaining careers.

Summit attendees learned how apprenticeships align with GCWB's strategic priorities to strengthen workforce solutions, foster strategic partnerships, and support employers in building sustainable talent pipelines. The Board's strategic plan specifically calls for investment in and expansion of pre-apprenticeship, apprenticeship, internship, and on-the-job training initiatives to meet industry demand and create stronger alignment between workforce skills and employer needs. Through these efforts, GCWB seeks to increase awareness of career pathways, improve workforce readiness, support economic growth across the 13-county region, and ensure employers have access to the skilled workers necessary to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving economy.

By highlighting apprenticeship models throughout the summits, GCWB reinforced its role as a regional convener that brings together employers, educational institutions, workforce partners, and community organizations to create innovative talent development solutions. The information shared demonstrated how Registered Apprenticeships can address workforce shortages, support the development of future talent in high-demand industries, and provide clear pathways for individuals to advance from entry-level employment to high-skill, high-wage careers. These discussions aligned with the Board's vision of creating thriving, inclusive communities where all individuals have opportunities to earn, learn, and prosper while supporting the long-term economic vitality of the Gulf Coast region.

WORKFORCE SUPPORTS AND OPPORTUNITIES



Attendees connected with Workforce Solutions teams and learned about services for individuals, families, employers, and community partners.

Child Care

Provides access to quality, affordable child care so parents can participate in education, training, and employment opportunities.

Hire Gulf Coast Youth

Connects young people with career exploration, work-based learning, and early exposure to high-demand industries.

Business Engagement

Partners with employers to understand workforce needs, develop talent solutions, and strengthen connections between hiring and training.

Career Pathways

Helps individuals identify education and workforce opportunities that lead to long-term career success and economic mobility.

Workforce Innovation

Uses labor market data to identify emerging occupations, forecast demand, uncover skill gaps, and guide workforce investments.



TRAINING PERSPECTIVES

BUILDING TOMORROW'S TALENT



The afternoon education and training panel focused on preparing individuals for high-demand careers in healthcare and life sciences.

Moderated by Madeline Chaisson of Jobs for the Future, the panel featured:

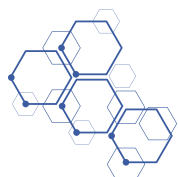
- Dr. Mischelle Hopper, Lone Star College
- Dr. Peggy Smith, Baylor College of Medicine Teen Health Clinics
- Dr. Nicole Bradley, San Jacinto College

Panelists discussed how educational institutions are adapting programs, expanding access, and developing innovative training models to meet changing workforce needs.

The discussion emphasized:

- Strong partnerships between employers and educators
- Experiential and work-based learning opportunities
- Stackable credentials that support career advancement
- Pathways that allow students to work while continuing their education
- Curriculum aligned with evolving employer demand

By working closely with employers, educational institutions can create stronger pathways and help ensure graduates are prepared to succeed in today's labor market.



CAREER EXPLORATION TOOL



Wen Zheng introduced two interactive resources designed to help students, job seekers, educators, career advisors, and workforce partners make informed career decisions using local labor market information.

The Career Exploration Tool turns local labor market data into practical career-planning information. Users can explore Gulf Coast occupations, including job descriptions, employment outlook, wages, education requirements, and eligibility under Workforce Solutions' High-Skill, High-Growth scholarship criteria.

The Career Lattice Dashboard identifies related occupations that share similar skills, knowledge, and job duties. It helps users see how they may progress from entry-level positions into higher-skill and higher-paying careers.

For individuals exploring healthcare and life sciences, these tools can help compare clinical, scientific, technical, and support occupations, understand training requirements, identify related career pathways, and plan for long-term advancement.



FROM CONVERSATION TO ACTION: BUILDING THE FUTURE WORKFORCE OF THE GULF COAST



The 2026 Gulf Coast Workforce Board Summer Regional Summit Series was more than a collection of events. It was a regional call to action.

Across three summits, Construction Futures in Wharton County, Life Sciences & Healthcare Futures at San Jacinto College, and Education Futures at Lone Star College, nearly 360 employers, educators, workforce leaders, community organizations, students, and economic development partners came together around a common purpose: preparing our region for the future.

Throughout the summer, participants explored the workforce challenges and opportunities shaping the Gulf Coast economy. They heard directly from industry leaders about workforce shortages, emerging occupations, evolving skill requirements, and the importance of developing talent pipelines that can meet the demands of a rapidly changing world. They learned from educators and training providers who are creating innovative learning models, expanding access to credentials, and building pathways that connect students and workers to meaningful careers.

More importantly, these summits moved beyond discussion. They showcased real solutions. They highlighted partnerships already making a difference. They demonstrated how workforce development, education, industry, and community organizations can work together to create opportunities that change lives.

Whether discussing apprenticeship expansion in construction, biomanufacturing workforce development in life sciences, or educational pathways that increase economic mobility, one message emerged consistently:

The future workforce will not be built by any one organization alone. It will be built through collaboration, innovation, and shared commitment.

The Summer Summit Series also reinforced a broader vision for the Gulf Coast region. Workforce development is no longer simply about filling jobs. It is about creating experiences that inspire people, exposing individuals to opportunities they may never have considered, and ensuring that every learner can see themselves in the future economy.

That vision is now leading us into the next phase of this work.



LOOKING AHEAD:

THE 2026-2027 SCHOOL YEAR CAREER EXPLORATION SERIES

Beginning in October 2026, the Gulf Coast Workforce Board will launch its School Year Career Exploration Series, transforming the conversations from the summer into direct engagement opportunities for students across the region.

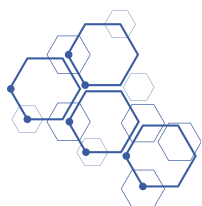
Building on the momentum created through the summit series, students will have access to a combination of in-person and virtual micro-experiences designed to introduce them to high-demand careers, emerging industries, and educational pathways that exist right here in the Gulf Coast region.

These experiences will allow students to:

- Explore careers across multiple industries and occupations.
- Hear directly from employers and industry professionals.
- Learn about innovative training models and education pathways.
- Discover apprenticeship, certification, and degree opportunities.
- Gain exposure to workforce trends and future careers.
- Connect classroom learning to real-world career opportunities.
- Understand how education leads to economic mobility and career success.

Most importantly, students will have the opportunity to see possibilities for themselves.

For many young people, career exploration begins with a single conversation, a single experience, or a single interaction with an employer who opens a door of opportunity. Through these micro-experiences, we hope to spark curiosity, build confidence, and inspire the next generation of workers, innovators, educators, healthcare professionals, technicians, skilled trades professionals, entrepreneurs, and leaders.





AN INVITATION TO GET INVOLVED

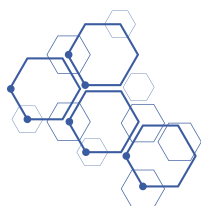
The success of this work depends on all of us. We invite employers, educators, workforce professionals, community organizations, and industry leaders to join us as we continue building stronger connections between education and workforce development. Together, we can create experiences that help students discover their passions, understand the opportunities available to them, and develop the skills needed to succeed in the careers of tomorrow.

The Summer Regional Summit Series proved that our region has the expertise, partnerships, and commitment necessary to address workforce challenges. The School Year Career Exploration Series is our opportunity to take the next step by bringing those insights directly to students.

Because when we connect learning to opportunity, education to employment, and students to their future, we do more than prepare a workforce.

We build pathways to purpose. We expand economic mobility. We strengthen communities. And together, we create a future where every student can see a place for themselves in the success of the Gulf Coast region. The conversations have started.

Now it is time to turn those conversations into action, those partnerships into opportunities, and those opportunities into futures. The work continues, and the future begins with the students we inspire today.





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