

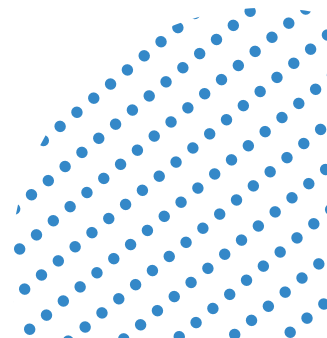
EDGE 2025

Annual Report



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A Message From the Executive Director

As we reflect on 2025, I am proud of how far the California EDGE Coalition has come, not only in advancing meaningful policy change but in deepening our shared commitment to inclusive prosperity for all Californians. This year marked a pivotal moment for EDGE as we introduced a new mission, vision, and theory of change that together chart a bold, strategic course for the future of our work.



Despite California's challenging fiscal landscape, EDGE remained steadfast in our advocacy to protect vital workforce and education investments. Through collaboration with legislators, the Administration, and our broad network of partners, we ensured that Californians most affected by economic barriers continued to have pathways to education, training, and family-sustaining employment. These victories reaffirm that advocacy works and that cross-sector collaboration remains one of our greatest strengths.

This year also marked growth and renewal. Our updated mission and vision reflect the evolving landscape of California's workforce and the ongoing need to connect equity, education, and opportunity. We launched a clear theory of change to guide how EDGE builds partnerships, advances policy, and strengthens systems, ensuring our efforts lead to real outcomes for workers, learners, and employers.

I'm deeply grateful to our Board of Directors, staff, and partners for their continued leadership and dedication. Together, we've demonstrated that progress is possible even in challenging times when we stay grounded in equity and collaboration.

Thank you for being part of the EDGE community and for standing with us as we continue to build a stronger, fairer, and more prosperous California for all.

Here is to moving forward, together!

Best regards,

Zima Creason

Zima Creason
Executive Director
California EDGE Coalition

Mission and Vision

In June 2025, EDGE announced its new mission and vision to guide statewide policy and advocacy efforts, marking a significant step in the organization's continued evolution and strategic direction. These updated statements reflect EDGE's commitment to advancing economic mobility and prosperity for all Californians through education and workforce policy change.

Mission

To advocate for education and workforce investments, as well as systems change, through nonpartisan policy engagement, expanding access to high-quality jobs, economic mobility, and family-sustaining prosperity for all Californians.

Vision

We envision a more socially just and economically thriving California where equitable access to education and skills training meets the demands of the labor market, preparing all Californians to achieve lasting economic security, and with collaboration across business, labor, social justice, post-secondary education, and workforce systems – creating the conditions for inclusive prosperity.



"These new statements reaffirm who we are, what we believe, and where we're going," said Zima Creason, Executive Director of the California EDGE Coalition. "They reflect the voices of our Board and staff team, and signal a bold commitment to centering opportunity and collaboration in our work."

"This is a powerful moment for EDGE," said Linda Collins, Board President of the California EDGE Coalition and Founder & Executive Director of the Career Ladders Project. "Our new mission and vision underscore our shared commitment to education, upward mobility, and cross-sector collaboration – values that are urgently needed to build a more inclusive economy in California."

EDGE's Theory of Change

Advancing Economic Mobility and Inclusive Prosperity in California

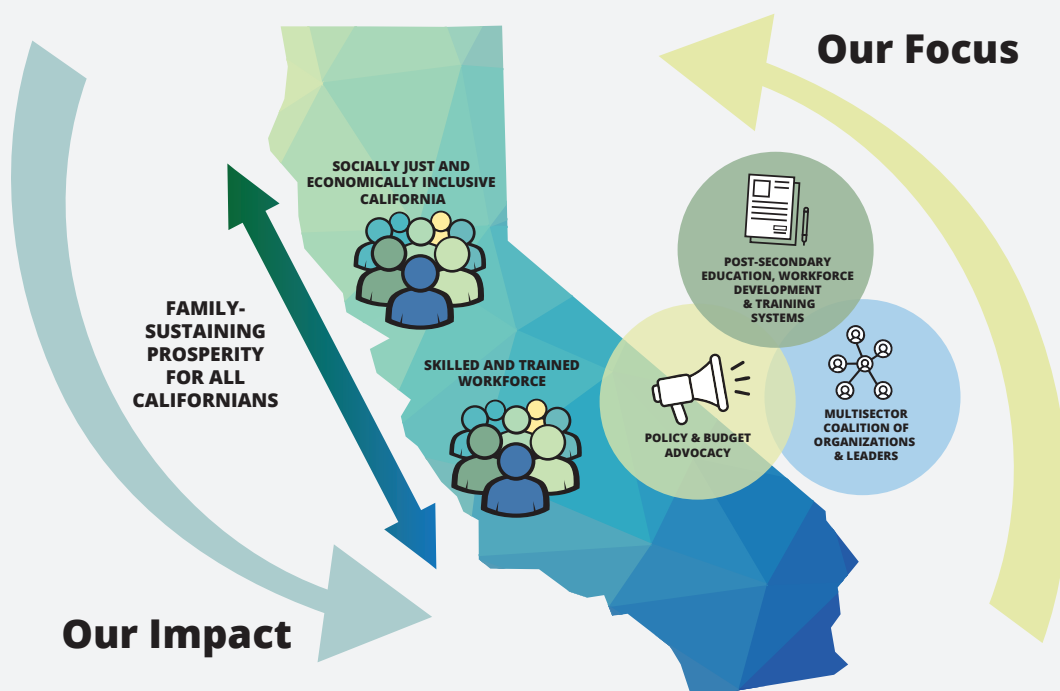
In September 2025, EDGE proudly announced the release of our Theory of Change – a roadmap that illustrates how our mission and vision translate into real impact for Californians. It visually demonstrates how EDGE's three areas of focus come together to dismantle barriers, strengthen systems, and expand opportunities:

- 1 Building and Sustaining a Diverse Coalition:** We unite business, labor, education, workforce, social justice, and community leaders to find common ground and elevate shared priorities.
- 2 Policy and Budget Advocacy:** We turn community needs and data into actionable recommendations that shape state policy and investments.
- 3 Strengthening Postsecondary Education and Training Systems:** We work to align education and workforce systems so learners complete programs that lead to good jobs.

Together, these strategies ensure that workers, especially those historically excluded, can achieve economic mobility and secure family-sustaining wages, while employers access the skilled, trained workforce they need.

The result is clear:

A stronger, more equitable California where shared prosperity is possible for all.



Communications and Advocacy



Impact

California's 2025 policy landscape was marked by significant fiscal challenges and key legislative decisions that shaped investments in education, workforce development, and support for underserved communities. Several new laws addressed the benefits cliff, expanded access to financial aid, and strengthened work-based learning opportunities to better serve adult learners, youth, and workers, while also supporting employers and the state's economy. The 2025–26 state budget, totaling \$321.1 billion, reflected difficult choices amid reduced federal support but still preserved critical programs for Californians

facing barriers to stability and employment. During this period of fiscal restraint, strong advocacy efforts made a difference, ensuring that the voices of impacted communities were heard while decisions were made by the Governor and Legislature. However, the work is far from over. Many Californians continue to need greater support to complete training, secure good jobs, and provide for their families. EDGE remains committed to working with the Administration, Legislature, and partners to advance strategies that expand economic mobility for Californians who continue to face barriers to employment.

Meet our Board



LINDA COLLINS

EDGE Board President
Executive Director, Career Ladders
Project



PEGGY WHEELER

EDGE Board Vice President/Secretary
EDGE Vice President/Secretary &
Vice President of Rural Health and
Governance, California Hospital
Association



REBECCA HANSON

EDGE Board Treasurer
Executive Director, SEIU-UHW Joint
Employer Education Fund and the
Shirley Ware Education Center



BIANCA BLOMQUIST

California Policy Director/Northern
California, Outreach Director National
Future of Work, California Small
Business Majority



ABBIE LANGSTON

Director Equitable Economy,
Policy Link



RITA MEDINA

Deputy Director, Latino Coalition for a
Healthy California



ADAM PECK

Executive Director, California
Workforce Association



JEREMY SMITH

Chief of Staff and Director of
Workforce Development, State Building
and Construction Trades Council



LARRY GALIZIO

Ex-Officio Member & President/
CEO, Community College League of
California

Meet our Staff



ZIMA CREASON

Executive Director



ANNA ALVARADO

Chief of Policy and Government
Affairs



ROXANNE STELLMACHER

Chief of Operations and Programs



JASON HENDERSON

Policy Analyst



LEOLA ROBERTS

Administrative Assistant



KRISTY WEBER

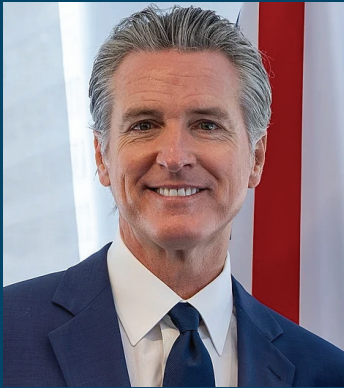
Program and Support Analyst



Top 8 from the Capitol

Below are the top 8 legislative and budget victories that EDGE supported and advocated for throughout the 2025 legislative session. Full highlights of EDGE's accomplishments can be found [here](#).

- 1 Chaptered AB 42 (Bryan) Simplifying CalWORKs/CalFresh.** This bill ensures all student grants, loans, fellowships, and scholarships are excluded from income calculations for CalWORKs and CalFresh recipients, addressing the benefits cliff issue and helping underserved Californians access the full support needed to complete education and training programs.
- 2 Chaptered AB 323 (Fong) Strong Workforce Program Fund Authorization.** This bill authorizes Strong Workforce Program (SWP) funds to support students and employers in offering paid work-based learning opportunities that enhance employability and job placement. By expanding the allowable uses of SWP funds, connections between education and employment are strengthened, supporting the development of long-term employment and robust career pathways for students.
- 3 Chaptered SB 638 (Padilla) & AB 1098 (Fong) California Education Interagency Council.** These bills, in conjunction, establish the California Education Interagency Council (Council) within the Government Operations Agency (GovOps) to align education and workforce systems, support adult skill development, and address the changing nature of work and the economy. The Council will serve in an advisory capacity, providing policy guidance and recommendations on career technical education, college and career pathway programs, and workforce development initiatives. Together, this bill package seeks to break down silos across education and workforce systems by creating a single coordinating body to improve efficiency, equity, and accountability statewide.



"Every Californian deserves the opportunity to build real-life skills and pursue a fulfilling career — including those that don't require college degrees. California is working to ensure that every person has what they need to get a well-paying, long-lasting job so we can build an economy for the future that supports all families."

Governor Gavin Newsom

Top 8 From the Capitol continued

4 Master Plan for Career Education.

Governor Newsom's release of [California's Master Plan for Career Education](#) established a cross-sector strategy to strengthen education-to-employment pathways. The plan outlines six key actions to modernize and align systems, emphasizing experiential learning, streamlined programs, coordinated funding, and stronger regional partnerships linking training with high-demand industries. EDGE participated in workgroup sessions that informed the development of this report, which also includes several of [EDGE's recommendations](#) to expand access to education and skills training leading to quality jobs and greater economic opportunity for Californians. Several goals of the Master Plan were advanced in this year's legislative session, including progress on expanding credit for prior learning strategies and new investments to create the California Education Interagency Council:

i. Credit for Prior Learning Expansion.

The budget approved \$15 million one-time and \$5 million ongoing Proposition 98 General Fund for the Credit for Prior Learning Initiative. This critical effort allows Californians to translate real-world experience into college credit. This investment advances the primary objectives outlined in the Master Plan for Career Education, expanding access and accelerating pathways to degree and credential attainment.

ii. California Education Interagency Council.

The budget included a \$1.5 million investment to establish the California Education Interagency Council, aimed at strengthening planning and coordination across higher education and workforce development, a key goal of the Master Plan for Career Education. This effort complements SB 638 (Padilla) and AB 1098 (Fong), companion bills approved this year to further advance alignment across education and workforce systems.

Top 8 From the Capitol continued

5 Regional Initiative for Social Enterprise (CalRISE) Program. The budget maintained a one-time \$17 million General Fund investment for CalRISE, which supports employment social enterprises that provide jobs, training, and wraparound services for individuals facing barriers such as homelessness, justice involvement, or mental health challenges. This funding also strengthens connections between these enterprises and the 13 California Jobs First Regional Collaboratives, aligning job creation and workforce training with each region's priority industries.

6 Rising Scholars Expansion. The budget provided \$10 million in ongoing Proposition 98 General Funds to expand the Rising Scholars Network, a statewide initiative within the community college system that supports students who are currently or formerly justice-involved by expanding access to higher education opportunities.

7 Emergency Financial Assistance Grants. The budget included an increase of \$20 million, one-time Proposition 98 to provide flexible emergency financial aid assistance to California Dream Act Application (CADAA) filers, supporting immigrant students.

8 Cradle-to-Career Data System. The budget provided a \$3 million ongoing increase from Proposition 98 to support both the California College Guidance Initiative (CCGI) and the C2C Data System. CCGI helps students plan and prepare for college by providing tools and resources for academic planning, college applications, and financial aid.



"We have a responsibility to ensure every Californian can access quality training and education that lead to good, family-sustaining jobs. That means investing in apprenticeships and skills programs that open real opportunities for workers - especially opportunities for youth, dislocated workers, and immigrants. To create lasting economic mobility, we must bring education, labor, and industry together to build pathways that put people first. I'm proud to work alongside partners like the California EDGE Coalition who are helping to expand opportunity and strengthen our workforce across the state."

State Senator Lola Smallwood-Cuevas

Lending our Expertise

Connecting Work and Postsecondary Learning

EDGE at the Capitol: Executive Director Zima Creason served as the lead witness before the Assembly Higher Education Committee in support of creating the California Education Interagency Council, a key goal of the Governor's Master Plan for Career Education. She emphasized the importance of the Council's role in streamlining regulations, aligning investments, and removing bureaucratic barriers, while ensuring that opportunity youth, adult learners, people of color, and immigrant communities are recognized and supported in their pursuit of economic security.

CSAC FAFSA/CADAA Implementation

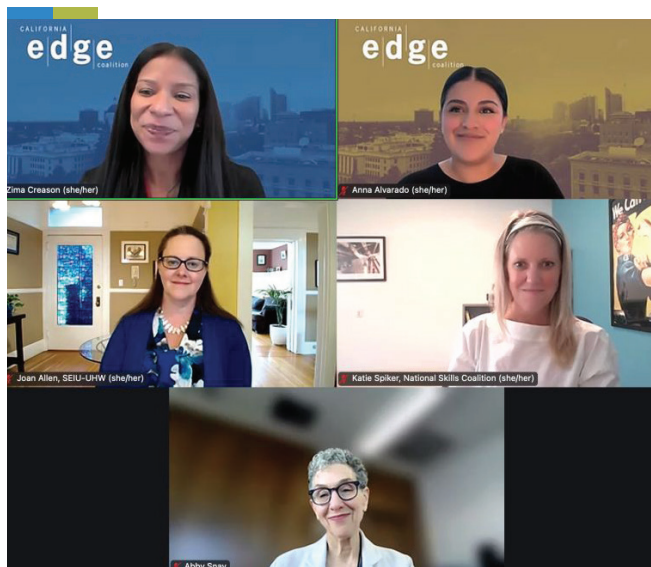
Workgroup: EDGE Executive Director Zima Creason was invited to serve on the California Student Aid Commission's 2026–27 Statewide FAFSA/CADAA Implementation Workgroup. The workgroup coordinates statewide communications, builds data-informed partnerships, and collaborates on strategies to increase financial-aid application completion across California. Zima's participation ensures EDGE's equity and workforce lens informs efforts to expand affordable postsecondary pathways for all learners.



Lending Our Expertise continued

ReWork the Bay: EDGE Executive Director, Zima Creason, serves on ReWork the Bay's Equity at Work Council. ReWork brings together values-aligned leaders across economic justice, education and training, business, and philanthropy to achieve an equitable Bay Area future where everyone has access to quality jobs that enable full lives with security, dignity, and agency.

SkillSPAN: EDGE plays a key role in advancing workforce development efforts as the lead organization for SkillSPAN in California. As part of the National Skills Coalition's nationwide initiative, EDGE collaborates with a diverse network of partners to advocate for policies and programs that strengthen skills development, promote economic mobility, and ensure that California's workforce is prepared for the demands of a rapidly changing economy.



EDGE Network Table Talk: EDGE hosted an engaging Table Talk in partnership with the National Skills Coalition, focused on recent federal workforce policy developments and their implications for California. Attendees heard directly from state and federal policy experts who shared key insights on new legislation, evolving funding priorities, and emerging federal agendas shaping the future of workforce programs, planning, and partnerships across the state.

California Higher Ed Equity Coalition

(CHEEC): EDGE is a member of the CA Higher Ed Equity Coalition group where we partner with other organizations to ensure California provides equitable access to education and economic mobility. Our shared vision is that every Californian, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or income has the skills and education they need to be upwardly mobile, participate in the workforce, and contribute to civic life.

Lending Our Expertise continued

California Alliance of Dual Enrollment

Partnerships (CADEP): EDGE was elected to serve as an organizational representative on the CADEP Board of Directors. CADEP is a unified coalition committed to the advancement of equity, student success, and quality in dual enrollment programs in California.

California Opportunity Youth Network (COYN):

EDGE joined the COYN network and serves on the steering committee. COYN works to transform systems, policies, investments, and narratives to ensure all youth and young adults in California have the opportunity to flourish in adulthood.

Californians for College Affordability Coalition:

EDGE is a member of the College Affordability Coalition. The coalition works to strengthen need-based financial aid so all students can afford to attend and complete college, keeping California's workforce competitive. The coalition brings together student associations, civil rights groups, business and workforce partners, and higher education advocates, united by two core principles: prioritize students with the greatest need and ensure colleges serve students effectively.

Data 4 The People Coalition: EDGE is a member of the Data 4 The People Coalition, a diverse group of partners advocating to ensure the Cradle-to-Career Data System centers equity and meets the needs of students, workers, and families. The coalition works to ensure the system includes data that highlights gaps and disparities in education and workforce outcomes while giving Californians the tools to make informed education and career decisions.

Economic Mobility 4 All Coalition: EDGE is a member of the Economic Mobility for All (EM4A) Coalition, which advocates for policies that ensure all Californians, regardless of background, immigration status, or language proficiency, have the opportunity to thrive in their chosen careers.



Thank You



National Skills Coalition (NSC)

partners with EDGE to lead the California SkillSPAN affiliate network, a statewide coalition of organizations advancing workforce development policies that remove systemic barriers and promote an inclusive economy for all Californians.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

provides support to EDGE with advocacy related to the Cradle-to-Career statewide longitudinal data system, financial aid reform, and dual enrollment implementation.

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation

supports EDGE's expanded efforts to include opportunity youth and uplift their unique barriers in our workforce development, education, and training advocacy.

ReWork the Bay

supports EDGE's participation in ReWork the Bay's Equity at Work Council. ReWork brings together values-aligned leaders across economic justice, education and training, business, and philanthropy to achieve an equitable Bay Area future where everyone has access to quality jobs that enable full lives with security, dignity, and agency.

The James Irvine Foundation

supports EDGE's goal of advancing economic mobility and shared prosperity for all Californians through statewide advocacy and policy-maker education focused on workforce development and training.

The Tipping Point Community

partners with EDGE to advance equitable access to education and workforce opportunities across California. Together, we work to expand earn-and-learn programs, strengthen support services for underserved learners, increase access to flexible financial aid, and leverage workforce data to inform smarter policy and investment decisions that promote economic mobility for all Californians.

The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation

supports EDGE in strengthening organizational capacity to better serve Angelenos and engage them in state advocacy efforts. This partnership enhances EDGE's ability to connect with LA communities and amplify local voices.



The EDGE Network

The [EDGE Network](#) is a growing community of advocates and organizations working together to advance equity and economic opportunity across California. As part of the EDGE Network, members help shape the future of education, workforce development, and training by participating in collaborative advocacy that breaks down systemic barriers and builds a more inclusive economy. Membership is free and open to all who share our mission. By joining, you'll receive updates on policy initiatives, invitations to events and actions, and opportunities to engage directly in efforts that create accessible pathways to good jobs for all Californians. Together, we're driving lasting systems change, one connection at a time. [Sign up here.](#)

