Building a Thriving Coachella Valley

How Residents Experience
Work, Wealth, Learning & Belonging

April 2026



UCR Center for Community Solutions

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Executive Summary

The Inland Empire Community Foundation's Building Coachella Valley Fund commissioned a report to better understand **how residents experience well-being, meaningful work and wealth, lifelong learning, and belonging**, as well as how these conditions shape opportunity across the region. Using the Vital Conditions for Health and Well-Being framework as a guiding lens, this exploratory analysis focuses on the underlying conditions that support individuals and communities in thriving. Findings draw on an **original survey of Coachella Valley residents, complemented by a survey of Inland Empire residents and publicly available regional data** to provide both resident voice and structural context.

Overall Well-Being | **Forty percent of residents are thriving, while 60% are struggling or suffering** — levels **comparable to the Inland Empire, but below national benchmarks**, suggesting a majority of residents have precarious or poor well-being—underscoring the need to strengthen conditions that support upward movement toward thriving.

Meaningful Work & Wealth | **Employment rates are lower than in the Inland Empire** (52% vs. 63%), yet **among those employed, 67% report job stability, 59% report opportunities for advancement, and 35% would remain in their role over a higher-paying alternative**. At the same time, **60% of job seekers report unemployment lasting six months or longer**, and regional data show lower earnings and household incomes. These patterns suggest that while work is often meaningful and stable, access to employment—and the ability to translate it into long-term financial security—remains uneven.

Lifelong Learning | **Learning is widespread and valued, though not uniformly accessible**. Seventy-four percent of residents report access to educational resources (lower than the Inland Empire's reported access), while learning most often occurs through online platforms (56%) and social media (39%). Reported **benefits include skill development, increased confidence, and personal growth, though barriers such as cost, time, and perceived opportunity persist**. Together, these findings suggest that while residents are actively engaging in learning, access to formal education and digital resources may shape longer-term outcomes and mobility.

Belonging & Civic Muscle | While **32% of residents report a strong sense of belonging, 68% experience so-called "non-belonging"** (ambiguous belonging or exclusion). Belonging **increases with age, income, and education**, and is shaped by factors such as language access and pathways to civic participation. These patterns suggest that while many residents feel connected, opportunities remain to strengthen inclusion and expand meaningful participation in community life.

Thinking Forward | Across these findings, a consistent pattern emerges: **well-being in the Coachella Valley is shaped not by any single condition, but by how the vital conditions—focusing here on meaningful work, learning, and belonging—-intersect in residents' daily lives**. Many individuals are already engaged in these domains—working, learning, and participating in their communities—yet access to these opportunities and the quality of these experiences vary across groups. As stakeholders consider next steps, these findings highlight the value of focusing on where engagement already exists, and exploring how efforts across workforce, education, and community connection can be more intentionally connected to support sustained movement toward well-being.

INTRODUCTION

The Inland Empire Community Foundation's Building Coachella Valley Fund commissioned a report by the UCR Center for Community Solutions to **provide an exploratory understanding of how residents in the Coachella Valley experience learning, meaningful work, wealth, and belonging throughout their lives**, as well as how these experiences relate to overall well-being and life satisfaction. Using the Vital Conditions for Health and Well-Being as an overarching framework, this **study draws on findings from an original survey of 209 Coachella Valley residents**, administered in February 2026 and includes **comparisons to an original survey of Inland Empire (I.E.) residents** conducted by the UCR Center for Community Solutions in June - July 2025. We also draw on publicly available **data** to provide additional context and highlight complementary ways of measuring meaningful work and wealth, lifelong learning, and belonging from the **U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey**.

This report presents **key findings from the Coachella Valley survey, including demographic context and analyses of well-being, Meaningful Work & Wealth, Lifelong Learning, and Belonging & Civic Muscle with select comparisons to the I.E. and California**. More detailed information on data sources, survey methodology, and additional analyses from the American Community Survey data are provided in the Appendix.

ABOUT THE VITAL CONDITIONS FOR HEALTH & WELL-BEING

The **Vital Conditions for Health and Well-Being** framework offers a shared language for understanding the wide range of social, economic, and environmental conditions that shape well-being. Rather than focusing only on outcomes, it draws attention to the **underlying conditions that make it possible for individuals and communities to thrive**. In doing so, it creates a **common entry point for diverse stakeholders**—community members, nonprofits, and public agencies alike—**to see themselves in the work and understand how their efforts contribute to broader well-being**. It also supports a more holistic perspective, recognizing that well-being is shaped by a set of interconnected conditions that span everything from meeting basic needs to fostering meaningful participation in community life.

The Seven Vital Conditions include:

- **Belonging & Civic Muscle**: The foundational vital condition, Belonging & Civic Muscle is a sense of connection, trust, and inclusion within one's community, along with the ability to participate in and influence decisions that shape community life. This includes feeling seen and valued, as well as having opportunities to engage, contribute, and advocate for change.

- **Meaningful Work & Wealth**: Opportunities to engage in stable employment that offers fair wages, benefits, and a sense of purpose, along with the ability to build financial security over time. This includes not only earning income, but having pathways to save, invest, and create economic mobility for oneself and future generations.

- **Lifelong Learning**: Access to education and opportunities to build knowledge and skills at every stage

of life — whether through formal schooling, job training, or everyday learning experiences in community. Lifelong learning supports personal growth, adaptability, and the ability to navigate changing economic and social environments.

- **Basic Needs for Health & Safety**: Access to the essentials people need to live healthy, stable lives — such as nutritious food and environments free from harm. When these basic needs are met, individuals and families are better able to focus on long-term well-being and opportunity.

- **Humane Housing**: Stable, affordable, and quality housing that provides not just shelter, but a sense of dignity, safety, and belonging. Humane housing allows individuals and families to put down roots, build community, and maintain stability in other areas of life, including work, education, and health.

- **Reliable Transportation**: Safe, accessible, and affordable ways for people to get where they need to go — whether to work, school, healthcare, or community activities. Reliable transportation expands access to opportunity and helps individuals stay connected to essential services and social networks.

- **Thriving Natural World**: Access to clean air, safe water, and healthy natural environments that support both individual health and long-term sustainability. A thriving natural world contributes to physical well-being, quality of life, and the resilience of communities over time.

Given the focused scope of this effort, the **Building Coachella Valley Fund prioritized deeper exploration of Lifelong Learning and Meaningful Work & Wealth, with Belonging & Civic Muscle** incorporated as a foundational condition that underpins experiences across domains. The following section outlines the data sources and methodological approach used to examine these conditions, including both original survey data and publicly available measures that inform the analyses presented in this report.

DATA & METHODOLOGY

To examine how residents experience Lifelong Learning, Meaningful Work and Wealth, and Belonging & Civic Muscle, this report draws on three complementary data sources.

First, we conducted an original **survey of 209 adult residents of the Coachella Valley between February 3rd and February 24th, 2026**, using Dynata, a national survey research firm. Respondents were recruited from established panels and the survey was **administered online in English and Spanish**. While this approach enables timely and region-specific insights, it is not a probability-based sample and thus may underrepresent individuals with limited internet access or digital fluency. Additionally, we are mindful that the current survey research environment presents challenges in reaching some immigrant communities, which may also contribute to underrepresentation in the sample. In the next section, we **compare our sample's characteristics to the actual population characteristics (where available) as reported by the U.S. Census for the Coachella Valley Census County Division (CCD)** to provide insight into areas we may be over– or under-representing certain groups' experiences.

Second, we draw on an **original survey of I.E. residents conducted by the Center for Community Solutions (June – July 2025) as a point of comparison**; a detailed discussion of that survey's methodology is available on the Center's website.

Third, we incorporate data from the U.S. Census Bureau's **American Community Survey (ACS) (2020–2024) for the Coachella Valley Census County Division (CCD)**, with comparisons to the **I.E. (Riverside and San Bernardino Counties)** and the **State of California**, to provide broader population-level context.

Benchmarking the Coachella Valley Against the Inland Empire and California

Our analyses primarily focus on the results of the Coachella Valley Resident Survey, but are often benchmarked against the other data sources described above. To that end, when reviewing this report, please keep in mind that:

- When the sample characteristics of the Coachella Valley survey respondents are compared to the actual population estimates, we are using data from the American Community Survey for the Coachella Valley CCD;
- When findings from the Coachella Valley survey are compared to findings for the I.E., the comparison data is drawn from the 2025 Survey of I.E. Residents; and
- When the Coachella Valley CCD is compared to the I.E. and California, all data is drawn from the American Community Survey.

While our **analyses primarily focus on the results of the Coachella Valley Resident Survey**, together these three sources allow us to pair resident voice—allowing us to understand how people experience these conditions in their daily lives—-with publicly available data to situate those experiences within broader demographic and economic patterns. Additional detail on survey design, sample characteristics, and analytic approach is provided in the Appendix.

COACHELLA VALLEY SURVEY RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

The graphs in this section offer a **demographic snapshot of the 209 Coachella Valley residents** who participated in our survey, helping to ground the findings that follow in a clearer understanding of who is represented. These visualizations break down key characteristics — such as race and ethnicity, age, income, education, language spoken at home, and family structure. Where possible, we include **benchmark data from the American Community Survey for the Coachella Valley CCD** to allow for comparison of our sample with the broader regional population. This data helps frame the perspectives captured in this report and underscores the diversity of experiences across the Coachella Valley, while also highlighting areas where the sample may not fully reflect the broader population.

Demographic Characteristics

Across our sample, **45% of respondents identify as men, 54% as women, and 1% as non-binary or another gender identity**. The **median age in our survey sample is 42 years** (see: Figure 1), compared to 39.4 years in the Coachella Valley CCD. This difference is likely driven, at least in part, by our focus on adults; the CCD median

includes children, whereas our sample includes only individuals age 18 and older.

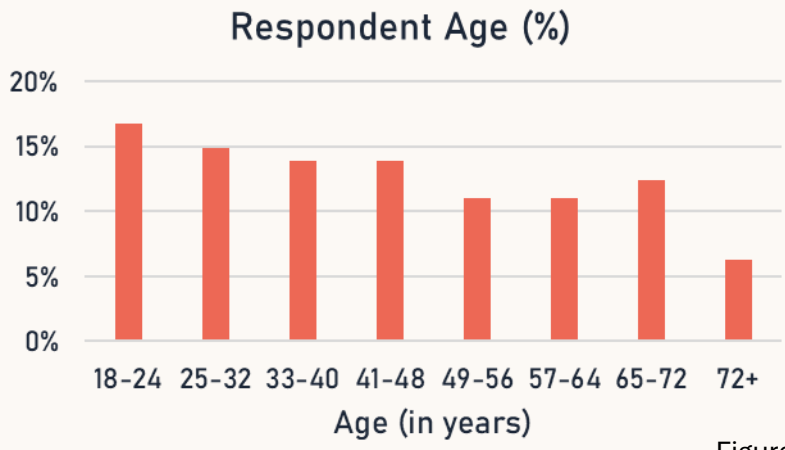


Figure 1.

Source: 2026, UCR Center of Community Solutions Survey of Coachella Valley Residents

Our sample reflects a racially and ethnically diverse population. Forty-one percent of respondents identify as White (Hispanic/Latino), 33% as White (not Hispanic/Latino), 11% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 5% each identifying as Asian and Black or African American, with smaller shares identifying as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander or multiracial. (See: Figure 2.)

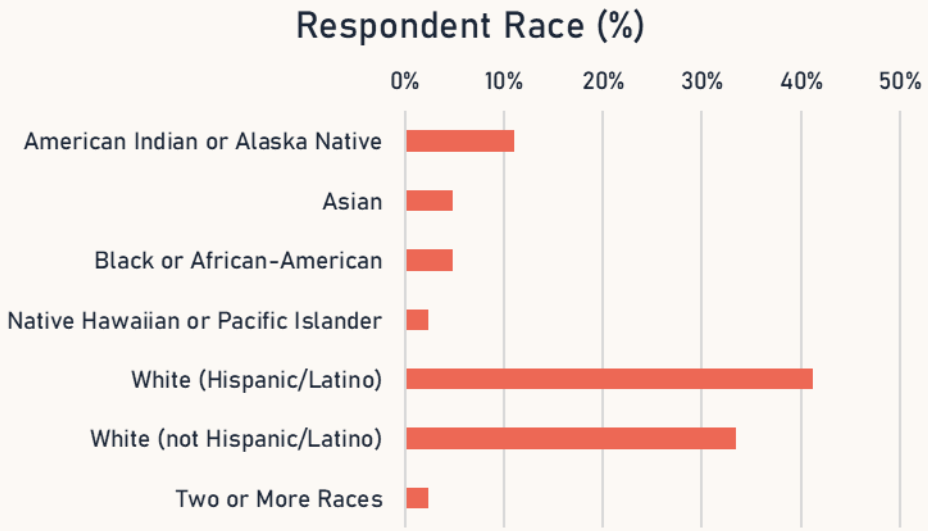


Figure 2.

Source: 2026, UCR Center of Community Solutions Survey of Coachella Valley Residents

Further, **59% of respondents identify their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino** and **6% percent of respondents identify as Middle Eastern or North African**, a category not captured in Census data. By comparison, the Coachella Valley CCD is 71% Hispanic, suggesting Hispanic/Latino residents may be somewhat underrepresented in our sample.

Just under half of survey respondents (48%) report speaking a language other than English at home, compared to 59.7% of households in the Coachella Valley CCD, again pointing to potential underrepresentation of non-English-speaking households in the survey.

Socioeconomic Characteristics

Educational attainment in the survey sample spans a wide range: 5% report less than a high school education, 30% hold a high school diploma or GED, and 32% report some college experience, while 19% hold a four-year degree and 14% a graduate or professional degree (see: Figure 3). **Our survey sample skews somewhat more educated, compared to the Coachella Valley CCD**, where 12.9% hold a bachelor's degree and 7.5% a graduate degree.

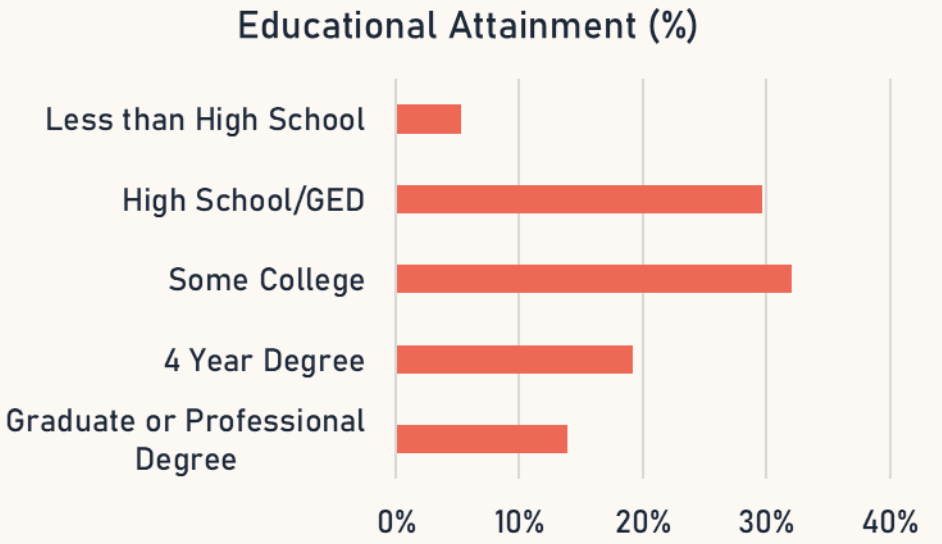


Figure 3.

Source: 2026, UCR Center of Community Solutions Survey of Coachella Valley Residents

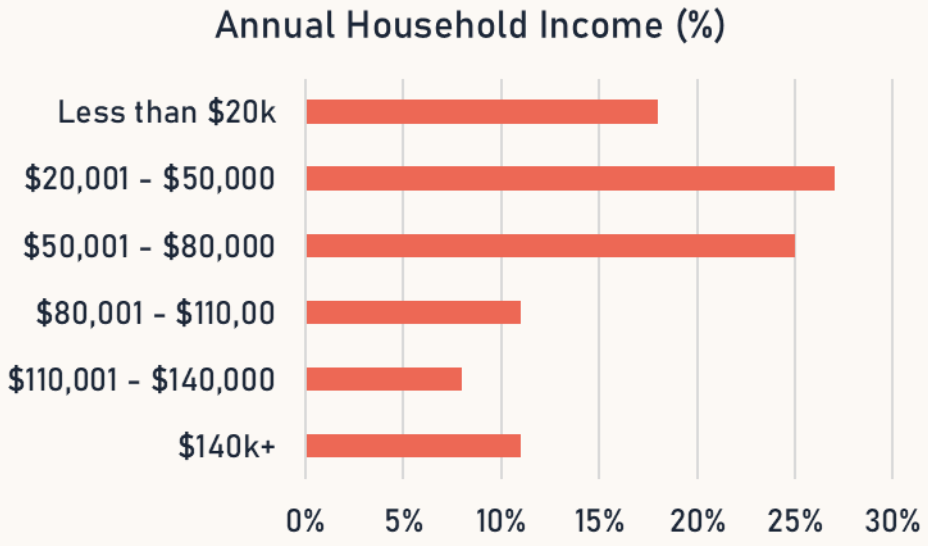


Figure 4.

Source: 2026, UCR Center of Community Solutions Survey of Coachella Valley Residents

Household income levels in the sample also vary considerably, with the largest shares falling between $20,001–$50,000 (27%) and $50,001–$80,000 (25%), and smaller proportions at both the lowest and highest ends of the distribution (see: Figure 4). The **median household income in our survey sample is $50,001 — $80,000, similar to $74,454 in the Coachella Valley CCD**.

Household & Family Structure

In terms of family structure, **33% of survey respondents report being married and 67% unmarried**, compared to a near even split in the Coachella Valley CCD (49.8% married, 50.2% unmarried). Additionally, **24% of respondents identify as caregivers to a child under 18**, offering further context on household composition.

Taken together, these comparisons suggest that while **the sample captures a broad cross-section of Coachella Valley residents and is generally representative, it skews slightly older and more educated, with some underrepresentation of Hispanic/Latino and non-English-speaking households**. These patterns should be kept in mind when interpreting the findings that follow.

WELL-BEING IN THE COACHELLA VALLEY

We begin by examining overall well-being in the Coachella Valley to provide a foundation for understanding how residents experience the conditions explored throughout this report.

The **Cantril Ladder,** developed by Hadley Cantril in the 1960s, is a widely used tool for assessing subjective well-being and life satisfaction across populations. It has become a cornerstone of global research on quality of life, adopted in large-scale studies like the Gallup World Poll and the OECD's Better Life Initiative. The ladder framework **asks individuals to reflect on their lives as a whole—placing themselves on a ladder from 0 (worst possible life) to 10 (best possible life)—to capture not only present satisfaction but also anticipated future well-being in 5 years**. This dual rating allows us to assess optimism and hope alongside current life quality, offering insight into perceived opportunities for advancement, psychological resilience, and systemic inequities. The framework has proven to be **highly predictive of various life outcomes in prior research, including health status, employment, civic engagement, and mortality, among other outcomes**.

Gallup's Cantril Ladder research has led to the development of a three-tier classification system of well-being—thriving, struggling, and suffering—based on how individuals score their current and future life evaluations.

- **Thriving**: Those classified as thriving rate their current life at 7 or higher and their expected life in five years at 8 or higher. Thriving individuals tend to report **greater emotional stability, stronger social support, and better health outcomes**.

- **Struggling**: Those who are neither thriving nor suffering are categorized as struggling. Research indicates that those who are struggling experience **higher levels of daily stress, job insecurity, and fluctuating access to basic resources**.

- **Suffering**: Suffering individuals fall at or below a 4 in their current and future life rating. Those who are

suffering face the **greatest hardship—often marked by social isolation, chronic illness, or exposure to systemic barriers—and are at significantly higher risk for depression, suicide, and disengagement from institutions**.

In the Coachella Valley, **40% of individuals are classified as thriving, 54% as struggling, and 7% as suffering.** These figures are relatively comparable to the Inland Empire, but show less **thriving and more suffering than the United States (53% and 4%, respectively)** (see: Figure 5). At the international level, the Coachella Valley outperforms global populations, with nearly 11 percentage points higher reported levels of thriving and less than half the global proportion of their population suffering.

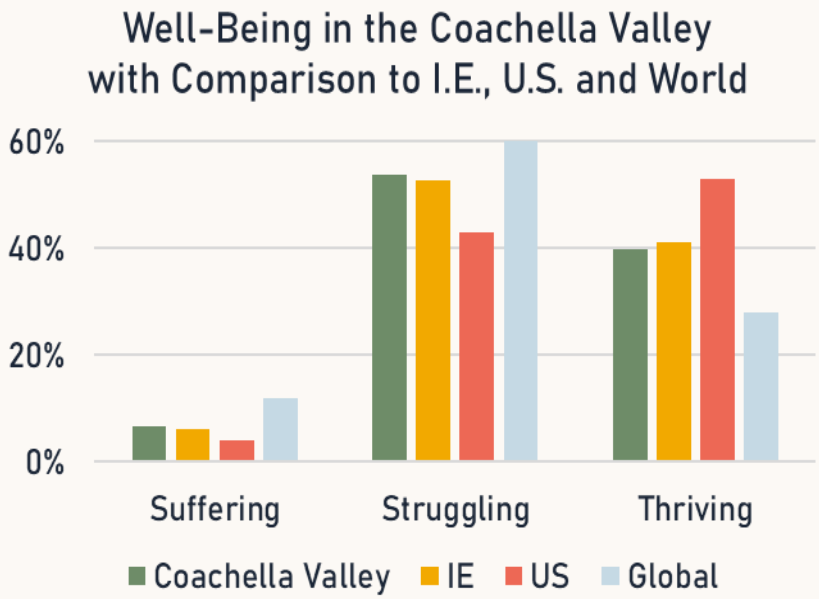


Figure 5.

Source: 2026, UCR Center of Community Solutions Survey of Coachella Valley Residents; 2025, UCR Center for Community Solutions Survey of IE Residents; 2024, Gallup Life Evaluation Index

Taken together, these findings suggest that while **40% of residents in the Coachella Valley are thriving** and navigating their daily lives with some degree of stability, **60% remain in a state of "struggling" or "suffering", highlighting opportunities to strengthen the conditions that support long-term, broad-based well-being**. In particular, the size of the "struggling" population points to a group that may benefit most from efforts to strengthen key Vital Conditions—such as access to meaningful work, lifelong learning, and community connection—that support greater stability and expand access to essential resources over time.

The sections that follow explore how key vital conditions—Meaningful Work and Wealth, Lifelong Learning, and Belonging & Civic Muscle—may help explain these patterns and where targeted investments may have the greatest impact.

MEANINGFUL WORK & WEALTH IN THE COACHELLA VALLEY

We next turn to meaningful work and wealth — key drivers of well-being that shape both day-to-day stability and

longer-term opportunity.

Employment in the Coachella Valley

Before exploring the Coachella Valley's work and wealth experiences, we examine the variation in employment status as compared to the Inland Empire. The **Coachella Valley has lower employment rates than the Inland Empire (52% vs. 63%)** and **higher proportions of individuals unemployed and looking for work (20% vs. 13%)**, as well as **unemployed and not looking for work (28% vs. 24%)**, which may be partially explained by the Coachella Valley's larger share of retirees.

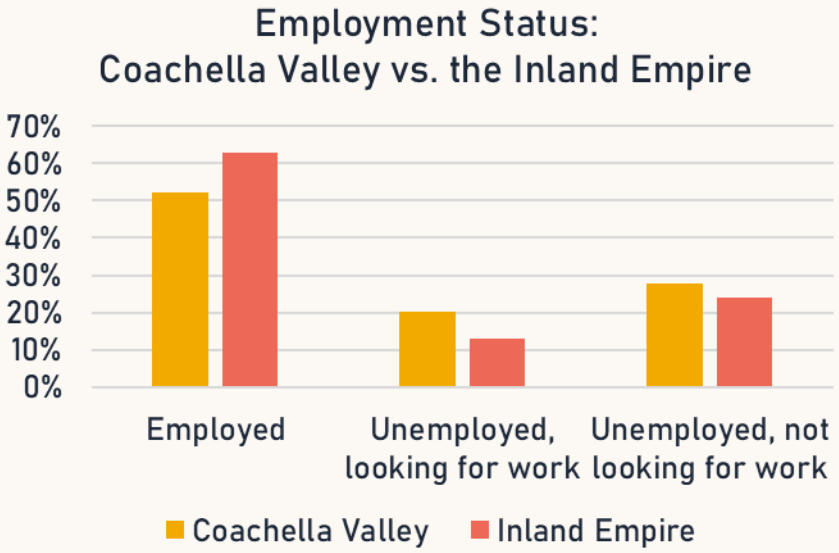


Figure 6.

Source: 2026, UCR Center of Community Solutions Survey of Coachella Valley Residents; 2025, UCR Center for Community Solutions Survey of IE Residents

Employment Experiences in the Coachella Valley

While employment rates in the Coachella Valley sit slightly below those of the Inland Empire, **residents in the Coachella Valley report significantly higher levels of career growth and job stability**. The majority (59%) of Coachella Valley residents report having opportunities to increase their incomes or advance in their careers, as compared to only 48% of individuals in the Inland Empire. Similarly, 67% of individuals in the Coachella Valley report feeling secure that their employment will remain stable over the next year, as compared to only 49% of people in the Inland Empire.

This contrast—between lower employment rates and stronger perceptions of job quality among those who are employed—**suggests that while access to work may be uneven, those who are working may be concentrated in roles that offer greater stability or perceived opportunity than those who work in the I.E. more generally**.

Residents of the Coachella Valley also experience high levels of workplace belonging and meaning: 65% of Coachella Valley residents report being proud to work for their organization, and 64% feel they can openly talk about their values when making decisions at work. Notably, 35% of individuals in the Coachella Valley would turn down another job that offered "quite a bit more" pay in order to stay with their current employer, suggesting that a **meaningful share of residents are motivated to remain in their roles for reasons beyond financial gain, in-**

cluding alignment with workplace culture, values, and sense of purpose.

This pattern highlights an important distinction between workplace culture and financial considerations: while many residents feel connected to their workplaces, a meaningful share are also willing to prioritize that connection even when presented with higher-paying opportunities, underscoring the role of purpose, values, and organizational fit in employment decisions.

Unemployment Experiences in the Coachella Valley

Sixty-percent of Coachella Valley residents who are unemployed report being without work for more than six months (60%)—roughly the length of time that California unemployment benefits last—while 14% have been employed for less than a month. Of those who are unemployed, **just under a quarter indicated they were experiencing unemployment for the first time in their career** (24%) and 43% report being unemployed often or very frequently across their work history. Together, this suggests that unemployment in the Coachella Valley may be persistent for affected residents and the pattern of recurring job instability for many may point to deeper structural or workforce challenges, rather than short-term job loss alone.

Coachella Valley residents who reported being unemployed, but not looking for work most often cited that their physical or mental health would need to improve before going to work (40%), that they **would need reliable transportation** to get to work (19%) or **specific job-relevant training/education** (14%) **before they could restart their job search**. At the same time 34% of these respondents indicated that they would not consider looking for work under any circumstance, at least partially reflecting the Coachella Valley's greater share of retirees who are permanently detached from the labor market.

These barriers reflect both individual and structural challenges to workforce participation, including health constraints and transportation access — factors that are closely tied to broader conditions shaping economic opportunity in the region.

Meaningful Work, Wealth, and Well-Being in the Coachella Valley

These differences in employment experiences have clear implications for overall well-being in the Coachella Valley. **Employed individuals reported the highest levels of thriving in the Coachella Valley** (48%), as compared to those who were unemployed and looking for work (26%) and those unemployed and not looking for work (34%). (see: Figure 7.) Respondents who were unemployed and looking for work also displayed the highest levels of struggling (62%) and suffering (12%), as compared with those who are unemployed, but not searching for work (55% struggling; 10% suffering). Again, these slightly higher levels of well-being for those who are unemployed and not looking for work, relative to those who are looking, may partially be an artifact of the region's high share of retirees who are permanently detached from the labor market of their choosing.

Seen in context, these findings underscore the central role of employment in shaping well-being. Beyond providing income, employment offers a pathway to financial stability, access to benefits, and opportunities for advancement, while also fostering routine, purpose, and connection to others. In this way, **meaningful work functions not only as an economic resource, but as a key mechanism through which individuals experience stability, opportunity, and belonging in their daily lives**. At the same time, these individual experiences are shaped by broader economic conditions that influence access to employment, earnings potential, and the ability to build and sustain wealth over time.

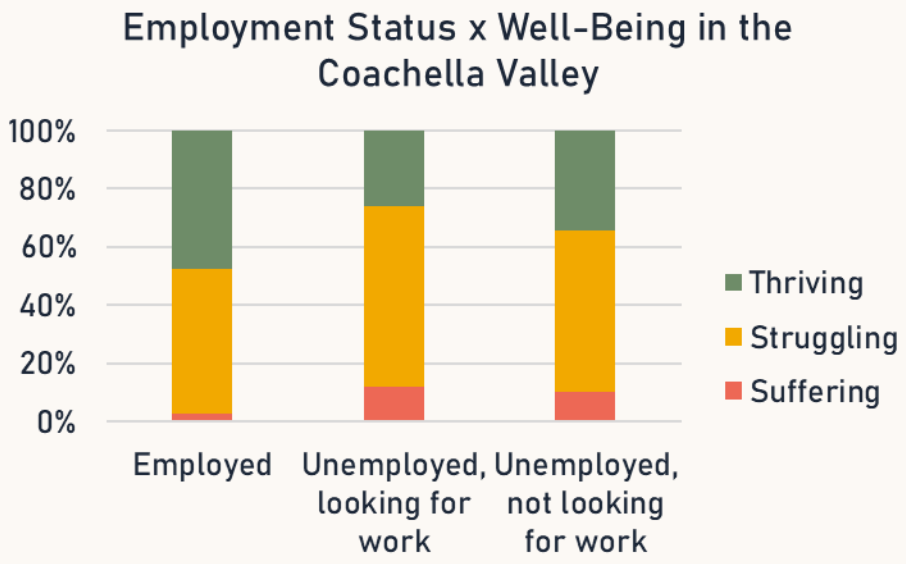


Figure 7.

Source: 2026, UCR Center of Community Solutions Survey of Coachella Valley Residents

Contextualizing Work and Wealth: Insights from Publicly Available Data

While the survey captures how residents experience work and financial stability in their day-to-day lives, publicly available data from the American Community Survey provide additional context on the structural conditions shaping those experiences. Compared to residents of the Inland Empire and the state of California, individuals living in the Coachella Valley consistently display lower values across key economic indicators. **Median worker earnings in the Coachella Valley are $36,740 — $6,405 less than the Inland Empire and $12,292 less than California** — and the region similarly reports lower median household and family incomes.

At the same time, other indicators point to more complex patterns of financial stability and wealth-building. The **Coachella Valley has a relatively high homeownership rate (68%)**—-exceeding both the Inland Empire and California—-and homeownership is often pointed to as a significant vehicle for wealth building. However, the median value of owner-occupied homes remains lower than in either region. Residents are also somewhat **more likely to rely on income sources such as Social Security** (37%, relative to 31% in the Inland Empire and 28% in California) and **public assistance - including Supplemental Security Income** (7% compared to 6% in the I.E. and California), **public cash assistance** (6% compared to 5% in the IE and 4% in California) and **SNAP benefits** (19% of Coachella Valley households in the past 12 months compared to 14% in the I.E. and 12% in California).

A more nuanced picture of financial stability emerges from these data. While some households benefit from more stable or asset-based forms of wealth, others face ongoing constraints related to income, benefits, and access to employment. This contrast highlights how differences in income, benefits, and asset ownership may compound over time, shaping not only current financial stability but longer-term opportunities for mobility. Additional detail on these and other indicators related to wealth are provided in the Appendix.

We next turn to lifelong learning — an essential driver of well-being that shapes individuals' ability to build skills, adapt to changing economic conditions, and pursue opportunities over the course of their lives.

Access to Learning in the Coachella Valley

Coachella Valley residents **less often report having access to educational resources in their local community than those in the I.E.** (74% and 80%, respectively). Coachella Valley residents are also slightly less likely to report that they value their education (79%) than residents of the Inland Empire (82%).

These patterns point to a subtle but meaningful gap between access and engagement: while most residents report both access to and value for education, lower rates relative to the Inland Empire suggest that learning opportunities may be unevenly distributed or experienced across the region.

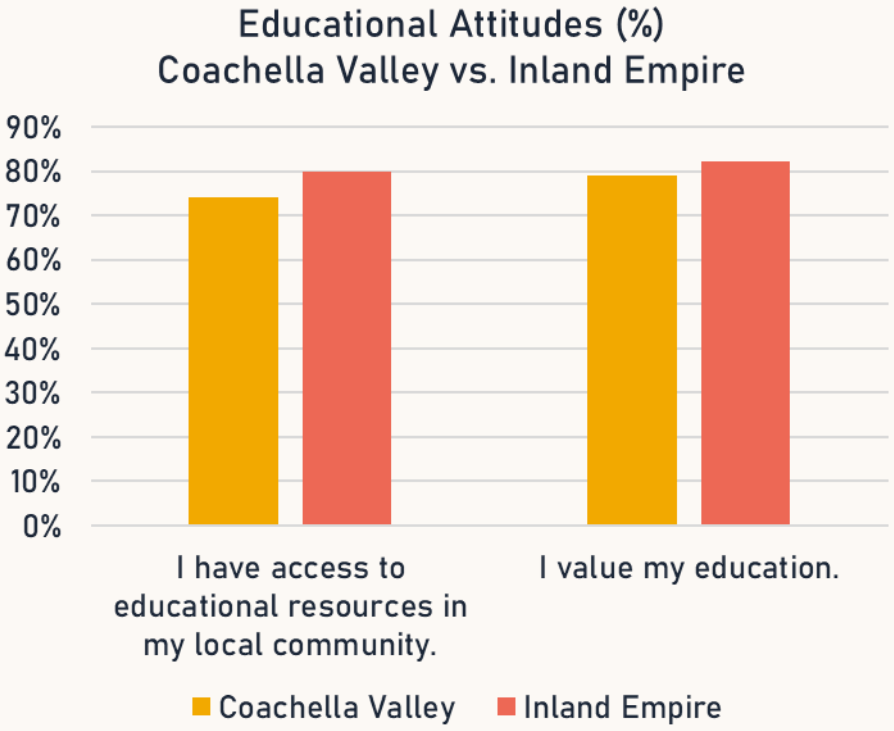


Figure 8.

Source: 2026, UCR Center of Community Solutions Survey of Coachella Valley Residents; 2025 UCR Center of Community Solutions Survey of I.E. Residents

Learning Experiences and Benefits

Of individuals who reported engaging in learning in the past 12 months, most indicated that they were learning using online resources (56%); social media (39%); a family member, friend or colleague (27%); or printed materials (26%).

The Vital Conditions Framework underscores that engaging in learning across the life course yields benefits far

beyond just the acquisition of new information and knowledge. To better understand these benefits in the Coachella Valley, residents were asked to reflect on any changes they experienced as a result of participating in a learning opportunity in the past 12 months. The most commonly cited benefit was learning a new skill or about a topic that brings them joy (39%), followed by an improvement in self-confidence (33%), and an improvement in the skills required for their job (26%). Only 5% of individuals reported experiencing no benefits or changes as a result of their learning (see: Figure 9).

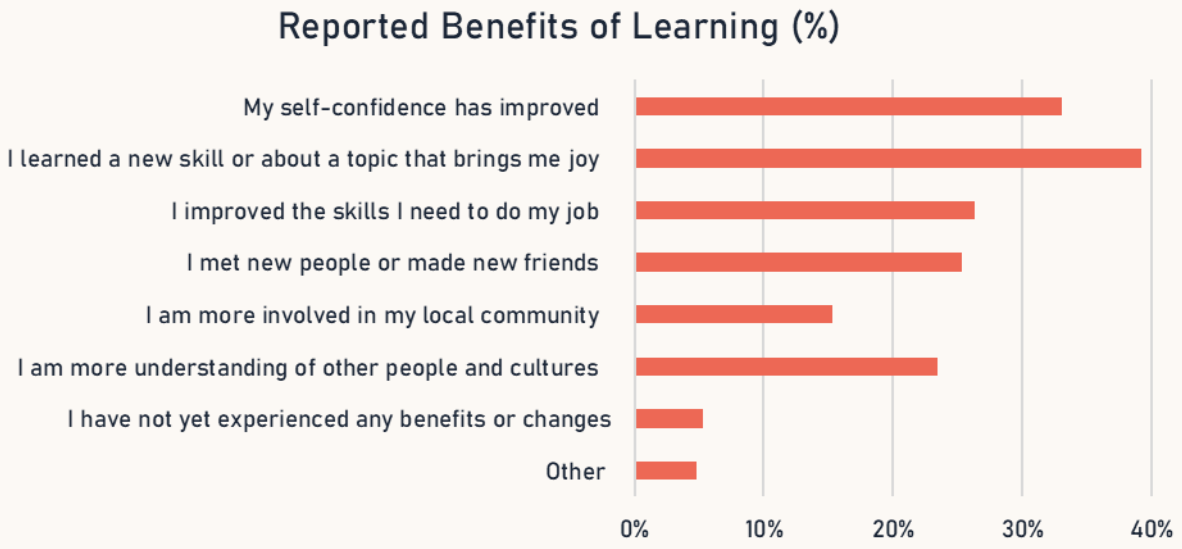


Figure 9.

Source: 2026, UCR Center of Community Solutions Survey of Coachella Valley Residents

These responses point to learning as an active and meaningful part of daily life in the Coachella Valley — one that extends well beyond skill-building to include personal growth, confidence, and enjoyment. Whether occurring through formal education or informal, self-directed experiences, learning appears to play a multifaceted role in how residents develop, adapt, and find fulfillment and belonging in their communities.

Barriers to Learning

Of the Coachella Valley residents that did not participate in learning within the past 12 months, only 44% reported that nothing prevented them from learning, they just did not want to learn anything new. **Sixty-six percent of those who did not participate in learning in the past 12 months indicated there was a specific barrier that prevented them from doing so.** Nearly a third reported they could not afford learning opportunities (31%), while 21% did not have the time and 18% felt they were too old to pursue learning. These responses point to a mix of structural and perceptual barriers to participation in learning, including cost and time constraints alongside attitudes about relevance or accessibility at different stages of life.

Lifelong Learning and Well-Being in the Coachella Valley

In the Coachella Valley, access to educational resources and the personal value placed on education exhibit variation across well-being levels. Nearly half of those who report having access to educational resources or valuing their education are struggling (50% and 51%, respectively), slightly exceeding the rates reported by those who are thriving (43% and 42%, respectively).

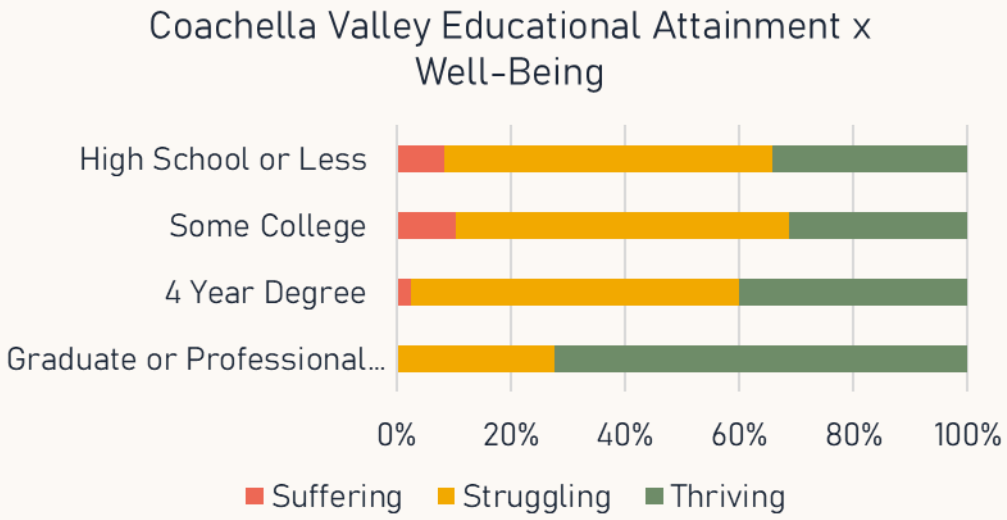


Figure 10.

Source: 2026, UCR Center of Community Solutions Survey of Coachella Valley Residents

Educational attainment shows a similar, but more clearly defined, relationship with well-being. **Individuals with lower levels of formal education are far more likely to be suffering and struggling**. As attainment increases, the share of individuals who are thriving rises—reaching nearly 75% among those with a graduate or professional degree—while the share struggling and suffering declines. Rates of suffering remain relatively low across groups, but are lowest among those with the highest levels of education. These patterns suggest that while both informal and formal learning contribute to well-being, higher educational attainment is associated with greater stability and a higher likelihood of thriving.

These patterns point to an important distinction between participation in learning and the longer-term outcomes associated with educational attainment. While many residents are actively engaging in learning and report meaningful benefits, the stronger gradient observed across formal education levels underscores that not all learning opportunities translate equally into stability and well-being over time. This raises important considerations around how learning experiences are structured, supported, and connected to broader pathways — particularly for those who are currently struggling. Ensuring that **opportunities for skill-building, personal development, and education are not only accessible, but also aligned with pathways to economic stability and mobility, may be a key area for further exploration.** In this way, the findings invite a closer look at how different forms of learning—formal and informal—can be better connected to support more sustained movement toward thriving.

Contextualizing Lifelong Learning: Insights from Publicly Available Data

While survey responses highlight how residents experience learning in their daily lives, broader patterns of access and attainment provide additional context. **In the Coachella Valley, 23.9% of the population aged three years and older is enrolled in school, compared to 27% in the Inland Empire and 25.2% in California,** indicating lower levels of participation in formal early childhood education overall.

At the same time, **access to technology—an increasingly important gateway to learning—remains slightly more limited in the region**. The Coachella Valley has the lowest percentage of households with broadband inter-

net access (92.2%) and access to a computer (95.6%), compared to the Inland Empire and California (approximately 97% and 94%, respectively). This is particularly **notable given that the most commonly reported learning methods in the survey were online resources and social media**, underscoring the importance of reliable digital access in supporting lifelong learning.

What emerges is a distinction between engagement and access: while residents are actively learning—often through informal and digital means—structural factors such as access to formal education and technology may influence the depth and reach of these opportunities. Additional detail on these indicators is provided in the Appendix.

A NOTE ON BELONGING & CIVIC MUSCLE IN THE COACHELLA VALLEY

Finally, we next turn to belonging and civic muscle - foundational conditions that shape how individuals experience connection, inclusion, and their ability to participate in community life.

Belonging in the Coachella Valley

We use the Belonging Barometer, a validated measure based on individuals' level of agreement with a set of statements capturing connection, inclusion, and authenticity, and influence within their local community to assess Coachella Valley residents' feelings of belonging in their local community. Responses to these statements are combined into a composite measure that classifies individuals as experiencing belonging, ambiguity, or exclusion. A full discussion of this measure, including the construction of the categories, is included in the Appendix.

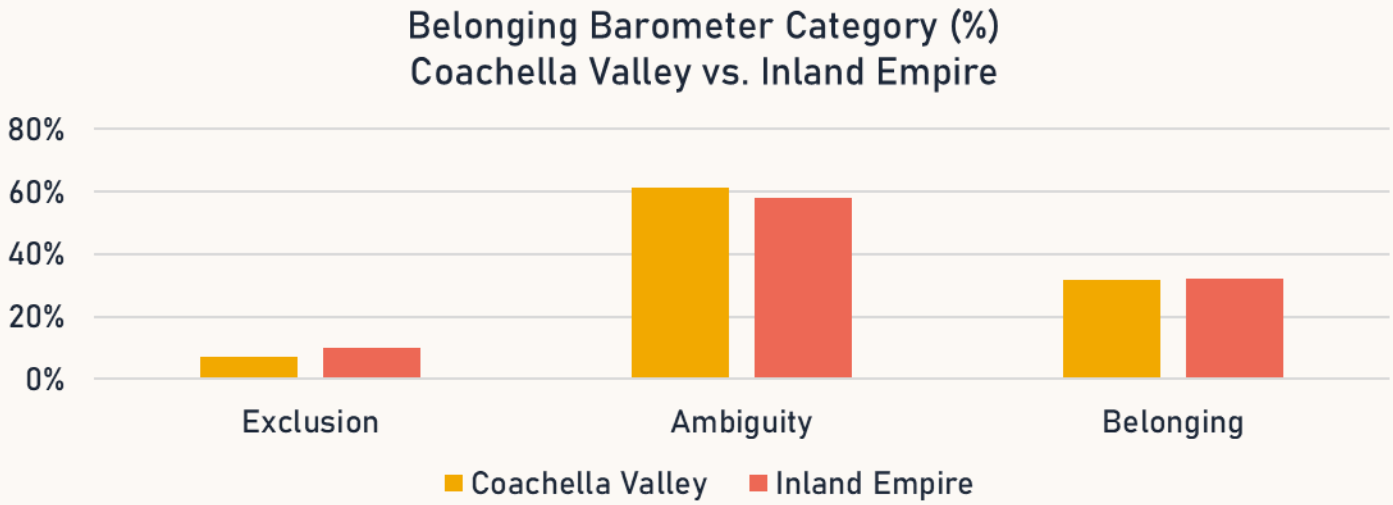


Figure 11.

Source: 2026, UCR Center of Community Solutions Survey of Coachella Valley Residents;
2025 UCR Center of Community Solutions Survey of I.E. Residents

The majority of respondents reported a sense of ambiguity about their belonging in the local community (61%), while **nearly one-third felt a clear sense of belonging** (32%) and only about 7% reported experiencing exclusion. In total, **68% of Coachella Valley residents are characterized as experiencing what prior research deems "non-belonging"** (exclusion or ambiguity). In comparison, Inland Empire residents experience higher rates of exclusion (10%), as well as equivalent rates of belonging (32%) and non-belonging (68%).

These findings suggest that while outright exclusion is relatively limited, a large share of residents experience uncertainty in their connection to the community, pointing to opportunities to strengthen inclusion and engagement.

Belonging Across Demographic Groups

Experiences of belonging in the Coachella Valley vary across key demographic groups. **Younger adults generally report higher levels of exclusion**, with individuals ages 33 – 40 reporting the highest levels of exclusion and the lowest scores of belonging, while **older adults—especially those 57–64—report the lowest sense of exclusion and the highest sense of belonging**. This pattern suggests that belonging may strengthen over time, as individuals build social networks, familiarity, and stability within their communities.

Belonging in the Coachella Valley also generally increases with educational attainment, with the majority of respondents who hold graduate or professional degrees reporting a sense of belonging (52%), and those with less than a high school education reporting the highest levels of exclusion (18%). Similarly, reported **belonging appears to increase as income increases**, reaching its highest level for individuals with income between $110,000 and $140,000 (50%), while those in middle-income ranges report comparatively higher levels of exclusion.

These patterns point to a layered experience of belonging in the Coachella Valley, where connection and inclusion appear to deepen alongside greater stability, resources, and time within the community — raising important considerations about how belonging is cultivated and for whom it is most accessible.

Belonging and Well-Being in the Coachella Valley

Existing research demonstrates a consistent connection between belonging and well-being, highlighting the importance of social connectedness on overall life outcomes. The results from this survey align with this body of work, with **rates of thriving increasing as belonging and connectedness to the local community increases**, culminating in 53% of respondents reporting belonging in their local community also thriving. At the other end of belonging, 1 in 5 individuals reporting exclusion in their local community report suffering.

Taken together, these findings underscore that belonging extends beyond a social condition, emerging as a central dimension of well-being that is closely associated with how supported, connected, and equipped individuals

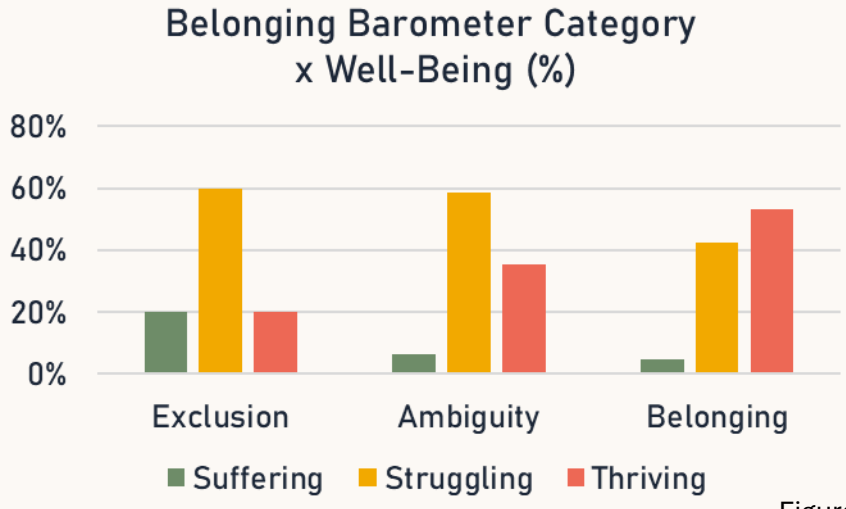


Figure 12.

Source: 2026, UCR Center of Community Solutions Survey of Coachella Valley Residents

feel to navigate challenges in their daily lives.

Contextualizing Belonging & Civic Muscle

While survey responses highlight how residents experience belonging in their daily lives, broader population patterns provide additional context for understanding these experiences, as well as factors that may pose barriers or support cultivating widespread belonging in the region. The **Coachella Valley has a higher share of foreign-born non-citizens** (17%) than both the Inland Empire and California, alongside **higher rates of limited English proficiency** (24% of residents do not speak English "well"). At the same time, the region demonstrates relatively **high residential stability**, with 93% of residents living in the same home over the past year, but a smaller **share of the population is of voting age** compared to the Inland Empire and California.

These patterns suggest that while many **residents maintain stable ties to place, factors such as language access and pathways to civic participation may influence how belonging is experienced and who is able to fully engage in community decision-making**. This raises important considerations for how opportunities for participation and connection are made visible, accessible, and inclusive across the region. Additional detail on these indicators is provided in the Appendix.

BUILDING A THRIVING COACHELLA VALLEY

The findings in this report point to a consistent pattern: well-being in the Coachella Valley is shaped not by any single factor, but reflected at the intersection of the vital conditions for well-being, including meaningful work, opportunities for learning, and a sense of belonging within the community. Across each of these conditions, **many residents report positive experiences—feeling connected to their workplaces, engaging in learning in ways that build confidence and skills, and maintaining ties to their communities**. At the same time, these **experiences are often uneven, with a majority of residents falling into a well-being state of "struggling"**, and with differences emerging across access to employment, education, and social connection.

These patterns reflect what prior research has long demonstrated: **meaningful work extends beyond employment alone, providing income, stability, and social connection that can support overall health and well-being** (Link & Phelan, 1995; Phelan et al., 2010; Van Der Noordt et al., 2014). Similarly, **access to learning—whether formal or informal—builds knowledge, confidence, and adaptability, serving as a protective resource across the life course** (Link & Phelan, 1995; Phelan et al., 2010). Belonging, in turn, reflects the extent to which individuals feel supported, included, and able to participate in community life. Together, these conditions shape how residents experience opportunity, stability, and well-being in their daily lives.

The results also suggest that **particular attention may be warranted for residents who are currently "struggling".** Across both meaningful work and lifelong learning, this group often reports access to key resources—such as employment, educational opportunities, or a desire to engage—but has not yet translated those experiences into thriving. This pattern points to a space where changes in access, quality, or alignment may have meaningful implications for overall well-being.

More broadly, the findings are not intended to prescribe a single course of action, but rather to inform ongoing conversations across the Coachella Valley about how to strengthen the conditions that support well-being. For

community-based organizations, funders, and public agencies, this may involve considering how efforts related to workforce development, education, and community connection can reinforce one another. It may also involve centering the lived experiences of residents — recognizing that well-being is shaped not only by access to resources, but by how those resources are experienced in practice.

Ultimately, this report provides a snapshot of how residents in the Coachella Valley are navigating work, learning, and belonging today, while also highlighting the potential for these conditions—when strengthened and aligned—to support more residents in moving toward thriving over time.

APPENDIX A
Description of Survey Data & Methodology

To better understand how Coachella Valley residents experience Lifelong Learning and Meaningful Work & Wealth, we conducted a regionwide survey of 209 adults living in the Coachella Valley between February 3 and February 24, 2026. Respondents were recruited through Dynata, a national survey research firm that draws from established panels and offers modest incentives for participation. While not a probability-based sample, the resulting group broadly reflects the Coachella Valley's population across key demographic characteristics (see breakdown below). To be eligible, individuals had to be age 18 or older, reside in a Coachella Valley zip code, and be able to complete the survey in English or Spanish. Recognizing the importance of language access in a region as diverse as the Coachella Valley, we designed the survey to be available in both English and Spanish. Given these criteria, we refer to our sample as "Coachella Valley residents" throughout this report.

The survey featured a mix of established and original measures, including the Belonging Barometer (assessing emotional connection, value, and inclusion) and the Cantril Ladder (a global standard for measuring life satisfaction). We also included items drawn from national studies such as the American Time Use Survey and General Social Survey, alongside questions from the Comprehensive Meaningful Work Scale and new questions tailored to local life experiences across the Vital Conditions framework. This blend of validated and region-specific items enables both comparative analysis and deeper insight into the lived realities of Coachella Valley residents.

As with any survey-based research, certain limitations are worth noting. Online panel surveys may inadvertently exclude individuals with limited internet access or digital fluency, and response patterns may be influenced by self-selection bias. In addition, while a sample of 209 residents is sufficient to identify broad patterns and generate important preliminary insights, it remains relatively small for subgroup analyses (e.g. examining differences by education, income, age, or other demographic characteristics). As a result, findings involving smaller groups should be interpreted with caution, as estimates may be more sensitive to sampling variability and should be understood as directional rather than definitive. Despite these limitations, we believe the findings offer valuable insight into meaningful work and wealth, lifelong learning, well -being, and belonging in the Coachella Valley that can help catalyze conversations around regional strategy.

APPENDIX B
Description of Survey Measures - Belonging, Meaningful Work & Wealth, and Lifelong Learning

Measuring Belonging

The Belonging Barometer measures individuals' sense of belonging through their level of agreement with 10 statements that gauge their connection, acceptance, authenticity, influence, and exclusion across a variety of life settings (e.g. in the workplace, local community, nation). We administered the full suite of statements to assess belonging in the local community—defined as the people who live in the respondent's region— allowing for an understanding of the state of belonging among Coachella Valley residents.

The Belonging Barometer statements administered to our sample include:

- I feel emotionally connected to my local community.
- My local community welcomes and includes me in activities.
- I feel unable to be my whole and authentic self with my local community. (reverse scaled)
- My local community values me and my contributions.
- My relationships with others in my local community are as satisfying as I want them to be.
- I feel like an "insider" who understands how my local community works.
- I feel like I am treated as "less than" others in my local community. (reverse scaled)
- I feel unable to influence collective decisions within my local community.* (reverse scaled)
- When interacting with people in my local community, I feel like I truly belong.*
- I am comfortable expressing my opinions in my local community.*

Respondents rate their agreement with each statement on a 1–5 scale and are grouped by their average score into exclusion (<2.34), ambiguous (2.34–4.66), or belonging (>4.66). The researchers who developed the barometer consider those in the exclusion or ambiguous groups to experience "non-belonging."

Measuring Meaningful Work & Wealth

To capture an understanding of how people in the Coachella Valley experience meaningful work and wealth, a set of ten questions were developed, including both original questions and items adapted from existing surveys. The questions were adapted from the American Time Use Survey, General Social Survey, and the Comprehensive Meaningful Work Scale. In all, these are designed to capture not just people's employment and financial experiences but whether their work gives them a sense of purpose and if they feel truly secure in their financial future.

Respondents were provided with a screener question to determine employment status, then were presented with a corresponding set of questions. Those who were employed were asked to rate their agreement with the following statements on a scale of 1 to 5 to gauge an understanding of their current and prospective employment experiences:

1. I have opportunities to increase my income or grow in my career.
2. I feel my employment will remain stable over the next year.
3. I am proud to be working for my firm or organization.
4. I would turn down another job that offered quite a bit more pay in order to stay with this organization.
5. I can openly talk about my values when we are making decisions at work.

Individuals who were unemployed, but looking for a job, were asked to identify how they were undergoing their job search, how long and how often they had been searching for a job:

1. Have you done any of the following to find work during the last 4 weeks? (select all that apply)
    - Contacted an employer directly to ask for work
    - Contacted friends or relatives to help me find work
    - Looked at job postings online (Indeed, LinkedIn, etc.)
    - Sent resumes / filled out applications
    - Contacted an employment center or agency
    - Attended job training / courses
    - Checked the union or professional registers
    - Nothing. I did not look for work in the past 4 weeks.
2. How long have you been unemployed and looking for work?
    - Less than a month
    - 1-6 months
    - 6 months-1 year
    - Over 1 year
3. Thinking about all of the times since you got your first job, how many times have you been unemployed and looking for work?
    - Very frequently
    - Often
    - Sometimes
    - Rarely
    - This is my first time being unemployed and looking for work

And finally, people unemployed and not looking for work were asked to identify what would warrant a change in their employment status:

1. Which, if any, of the following would need to change for you to begin looking for work? (select all that apply)
    - My health would need to improve (physical or mental)
    - I would need affordable childcare
    - I would need caregiving support for an adult in my life
    - I would need to be able to work without losing my government benefits (disability, food, housing, etc.)
    - I would need reliable transportation to get to work
    - I would need training or education to qualify for jobs
    - I'm in school and need to graduate from my program first
    - I would need to meet the legal and/or licensing requirements to work
    - Other
    - I would not consider looking for work under any circumstance.

Lifelong Learning

To understand of how people in the Coachella Valley experience learning over the course of their life, a set of 5 questions were developed to assess accessibility, barriers, and attitudes towards learning. These questions include a combination of questions adapted from the General Social Survey as well as new questions designed for this survey.

After being prompted to assess the accessibility of educational resources in their community and indicate whether they value their education, residents were asked to specify how they have participated in learning in the past year, if at all. If respondents indicated participating in learning experiences within the past year, they were then asked to report any benefits they received from learning. If respondents indicated not participating in learning experiences within the past year, they were asked to report any barriers that prevented them from doing so.

APPENDIX C:
Insights on Belonging & Civic Muscle, Meaningful Work & Wealth, and Lifelong Learning from the American Community Survey

While the survey captures how residents experience work, learning, and belonging in their day-to-day lives, publicly available data provide important additional context on the broader conditions shaping those experiences. Specifically, data from the American Community Survey (ACS) offer population-level indicators that help situate survey findings within longer-term structural patterns related to economic opportunity, educational access, and well-being across the Coachella Valley.

These data complement the survey in several important ways. First, they provide a broader, more representative view of the region, helping to contextualize findings from a smaller sample of residents. Second, they capture structural factors—such as income distributions, labor force participation, educational attainment, and access to resources—that may not be fully observable through self-reported experiences alone. **In** particular, analyses of median indicators—such as earnings, household and family income, and housing values—offer insight into typical economic conditions in the region. Medians are used rather than averages because they are less influenced by extremely high or low values, providing a more accurate reflection of what a "typical" resident or household experiences. Together, these measures provide a more complete picture of how residents experience the Vital Conditions, highlighting both lived experiences and the underlying conditions that shape them.

The sections that follow present additional indicators related to Meaningful Work & Wealth, Lifelong Learning, and Well-Being, with comparisons to the Inland Empire and the state of California where relevant.

Belonging and Civic Muscle

Place of birth and citizenship status matter for belonging, especially as it determines the extent to which one experiences acceptance in their community, and also leads to certain barriers, or the absence thereof, that can limit comfort in one's surroundings. As such, an analysis of citizenship status, residential stability, English proficiency, and the share of the population eligible to participate in civic life (including voting eligibility by gender) is included below.

In the Coachella Valley, 70% of residents are native-born U.S. citizens, 13% are naturalized citizens, and 17% are foreign-born non-citizens; these figures are in comparison to those for California (native-born: 73%; naturalized: 15%; non-citizen: 12%) and the Inland Empire (native-born: 78%; naturalized: 12%; non-citizen: 10%), respectively. In summary, Coachella Valley has the lowest share of native US citizens and the highest number of non-citizens across all regions. (See: Figure A-1.)

The Coachella Valley is also relatively resident-stable, with 93% of its population living in the same house for the past year, which is higher than the stability rate in California (90%) and the Inland Empire (91%), indicating lower rates of residential turnover that may support more consistent social networks and community cohesion. (See: Figure A-2.)

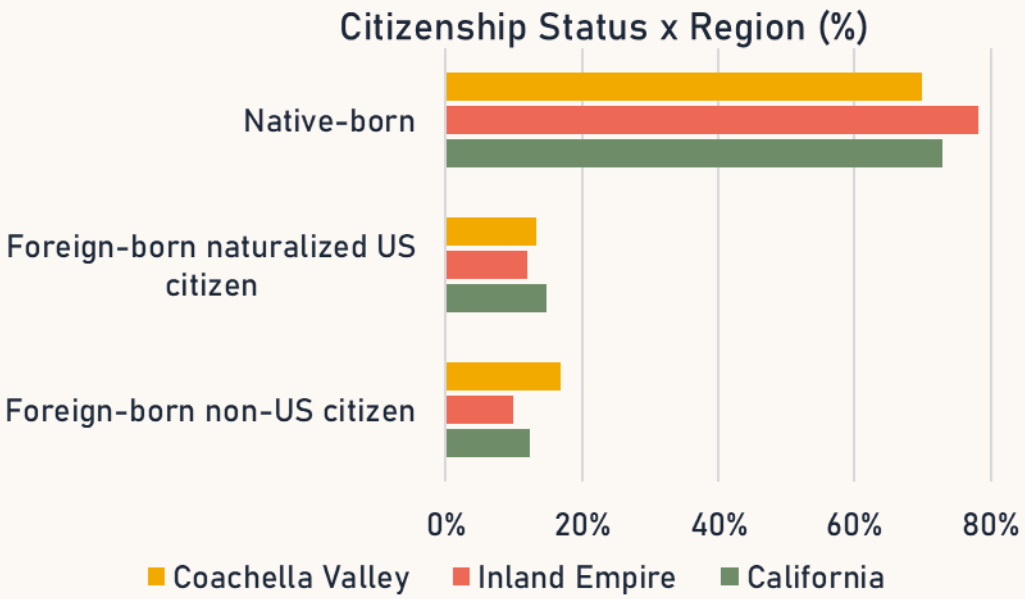


Figure A-1.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020 - 2024 5-Year Estimates

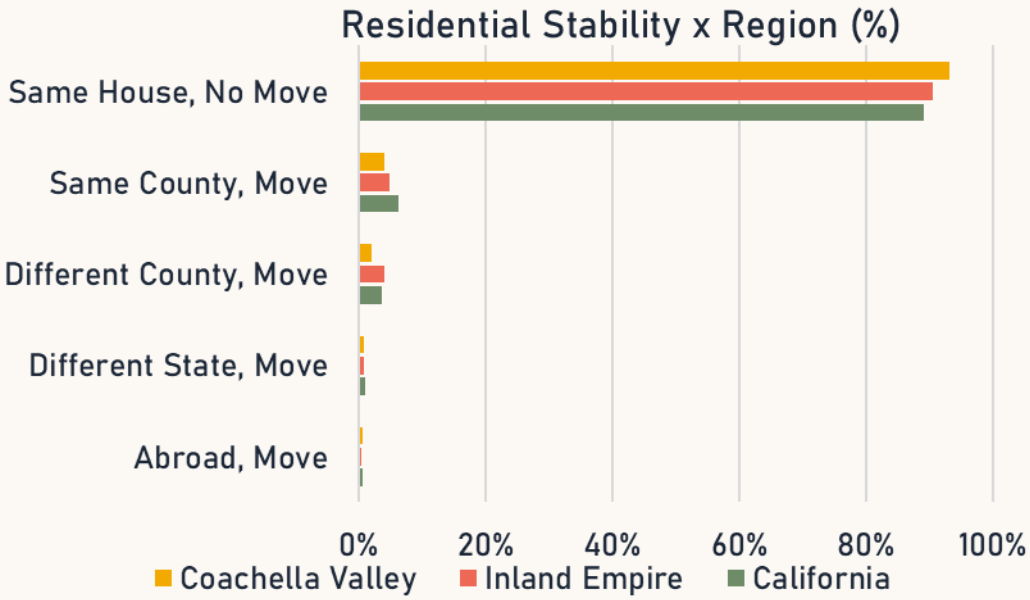


Figure A-2.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020 - 2024 5-Year Estimates

Limited English proficiency may signal barriers to belonging, such as labor-market and social isolation, and difficulty accessing services or participating in civic life. The Coachella Valley experiences somewhat lower levels of English fluency: 24% of Coachella Valley residents do not speak English proficiently, which is higher than the proficiency levels of California (18%) and the Inland Empire (15%). (See: Figure A-3.)

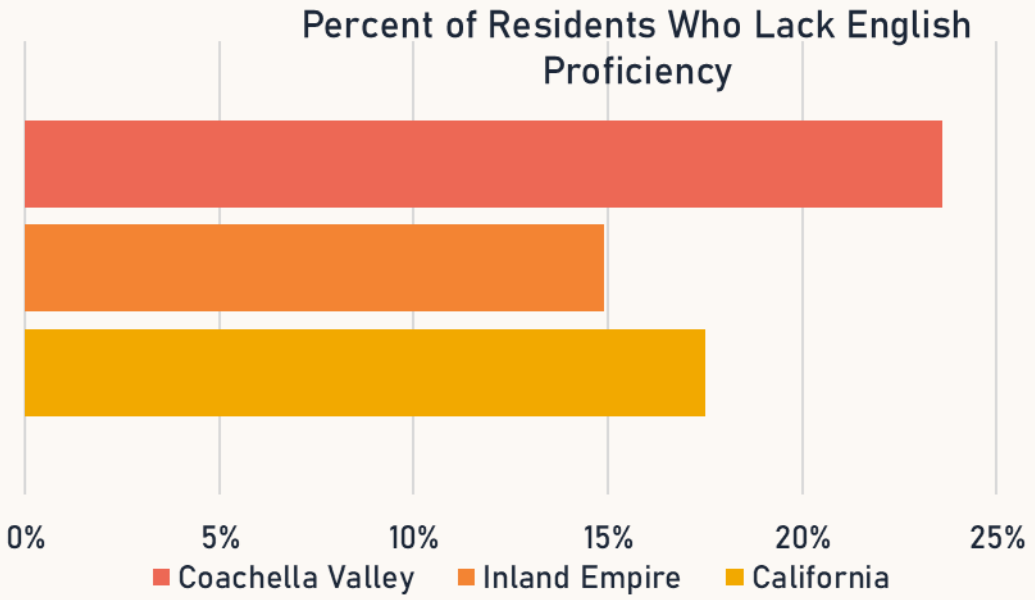


Figure A-3.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020 - 2024 5-Year Estimates

Coachella Valley also has the lowest voting-age population rate among these regions, a metric that reflects the share of residents who are positioned to participate in civic life and influence local decision-making. As shown in Figure A-4 below, 79% of citizens in the Coachella Valley are old enough to vote, compared to 85% in California and 88% in the Inland Empire. A smaller voting-age population may limit the overall capacity for civic engagement and representation, shaping how community priorities are articulated and acted upon over time.

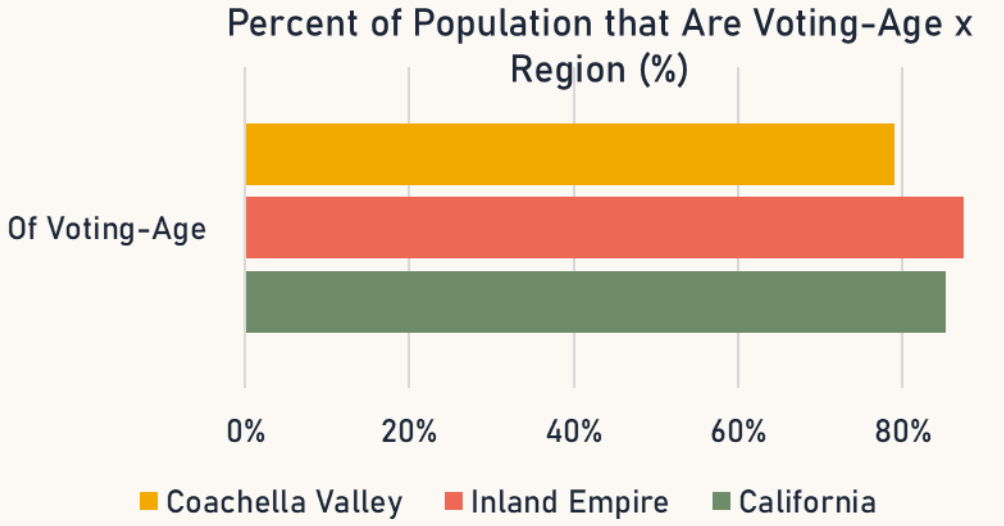


Figure A-4.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020 - 2024 5-Year Estimates

Meaningful Work & Wealth

Evaluating median wealth indicators, such as median worker earnings, household income, family income, and value of owner-occupied housing units, provides insight into how Coachella Valley residents, as well as future generations may fare. These measures also highlight how conditions typically associated with Meaningful Work & Wealth intersect with other domains—such as housing stability and basic needs for health and safety—underscoring the ways in which financial resources shape access to essential goods, services, and overall well-being.

Compared to residents of the Inland Empire and the state of California, individuals living in the Coachella Valley consistently display the lowest values across all median wealth indicators. Figure A-5, below indicates that in addition to median worker earnings of $36,740, $6,405 less than the Inland Empire and $12,292 less than California, Coachella Valley residents also report the lowest median household and family income. Furthermore, the median value of owner-occupied units in the Coachella Valley is the lowest among the three regions, with the median value of an owner-occupied unit in Coachella at $449,700, as compared to $553,116 and $734,700 in the Inland Empire and California, respectively.

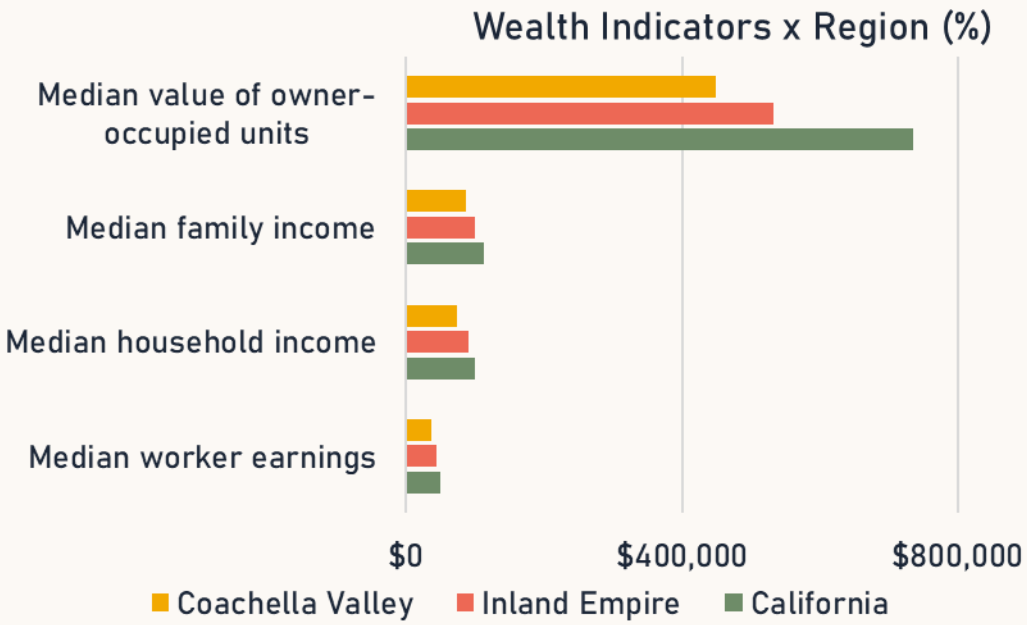


Figure A-5.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020 - 2024 5-Year Estimates

Employment status displays similar trends: 60% of the Coachella Valley's population age 16+ are in the labor force, which is lower than the rates for the Inland Empire and California (61% and 63%, respectively). Simultaneously, the Coachella Valley has the highest labor non-participation rate at 40%, compared to the Inland Empire and California (38% and 36%, respectively). The labor non-participation rate measures the working-age population that is neither employed nor actively seeking work, including students, retirees, and people with disabilities. In contrast, the unemployment rate captures people in the labor force who are unemployed but are actively seeking work. With regards to the unemployment rate, Coachella Valley residents experience unemployment at a

slightly higher rate than those in the Inland Empire and California, with an unemployment rate of 6.9% (as compared to 6.8% and 6.6% for the Inland Empire and California, respectively). (See: Figure A-6).

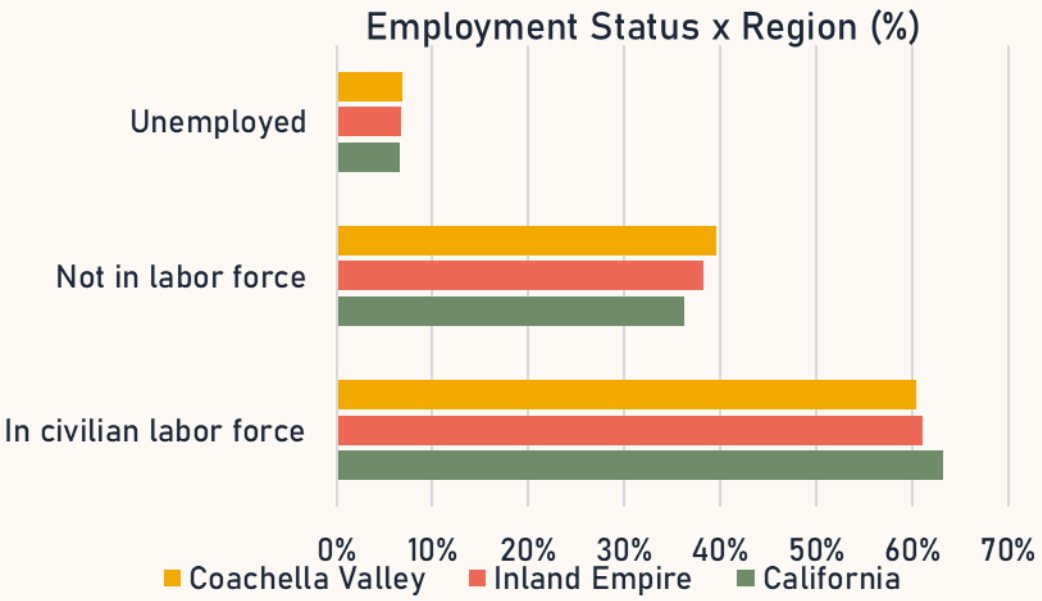


Figure A-6.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020 - 2024 5-Year Estimates

Retirement and Social Security benefits can reflect an individual's history of formal employment and provide key insights into their wealth accumulation, and thus are valuable metrics to explore meaningful work and wealth. The Coachella Valley has the highest percentage of households with retirement (23%) and Social Security income (37%) as compared to the Inland Empire (retirement: 23%; Social Security: 31%) and California (retirement: 22%; Social Security: 28%). (See: Figure A-7.)

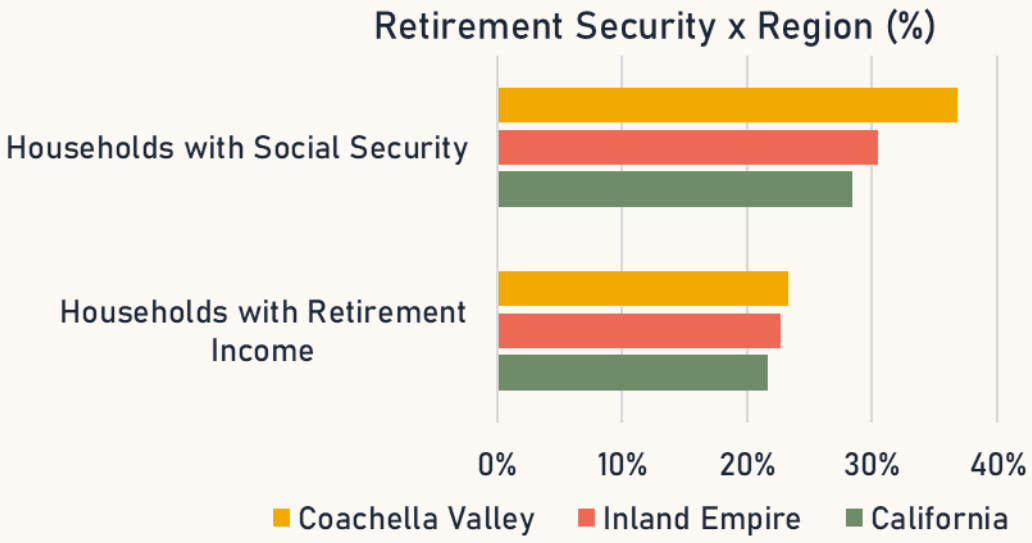


Figure A-7.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020 - 2024 5-Year Estimates

The Coachella Valley similarly has the highest percentage of households receiving safety nets such as Supplemental Security Income (7%) and public cash assistance (6%) relative to the Inland Empire (Supplemental Security Income: 6%; public cash assistance: 5%) and California (Supplemental Security Income: 6%; public cash assistance: 4%). (See: Figure A-8.)

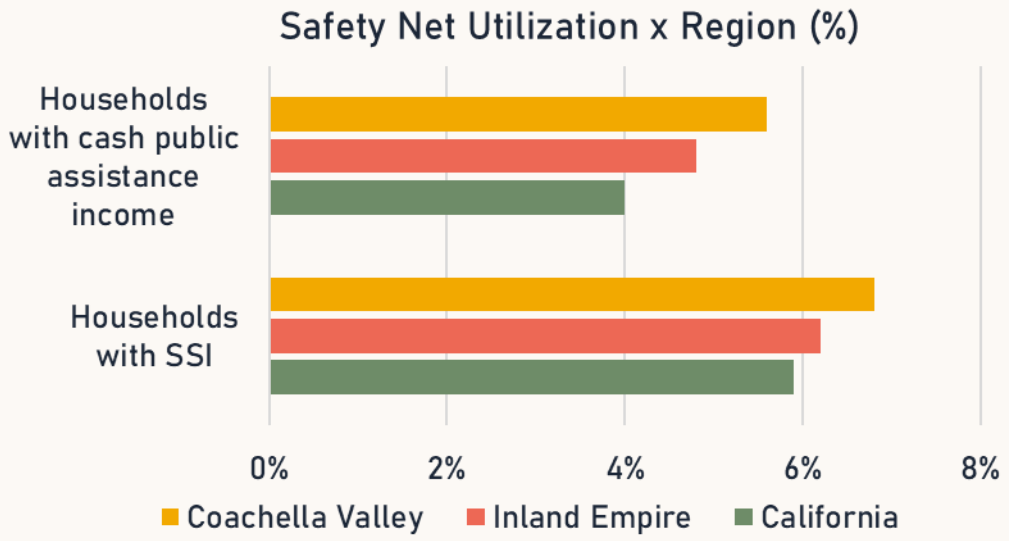


Figure A-8.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020 - 2024 5-Year Estimates

Just as income data can provide an understanding of how Coachella Valley residents experience meaningful work, other work-related benefits such as health insurance coverage can provide similarly useful insights about the determinants of well-being. The Coachella Valley has the lowest percentage of employed people with health insurance coverage (87%), relative to the Inland Empire (90%) and California (92%). (See: Figure A-9.)

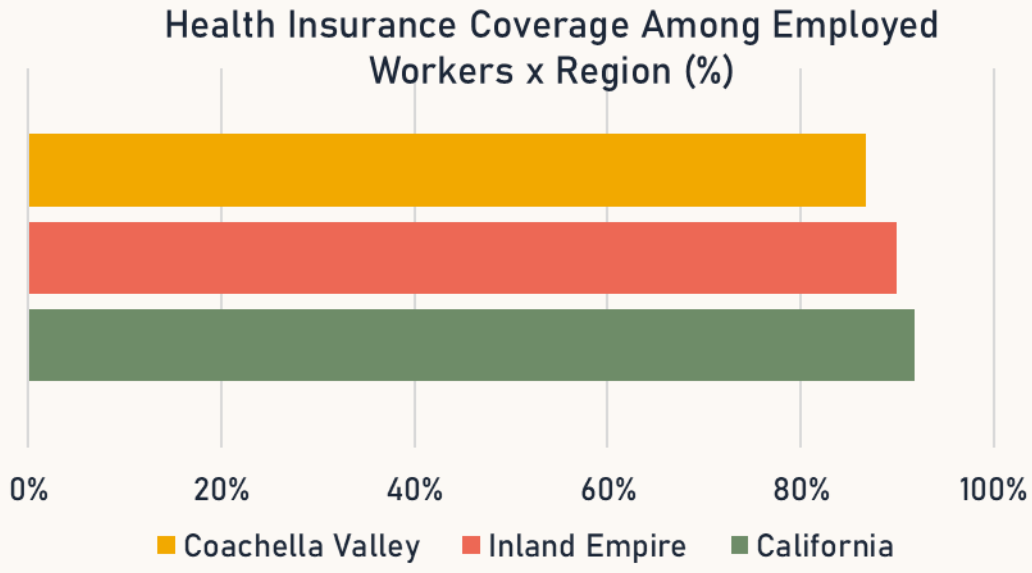


Figure A-9.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020 - 2024 5-Year Estimates

Aside from rents, another useful indicator of wealth is homeownership. Having a higher homeownership rate signals more capacity to have wealth in the form of home equity or from rents, which relatively transient income may not provide. With regard to this metric, the Coachella Valley has the highest homeownership rate (68%), compared to the Inland Empire (66%) and California (56%). (See: Figure A-10.)

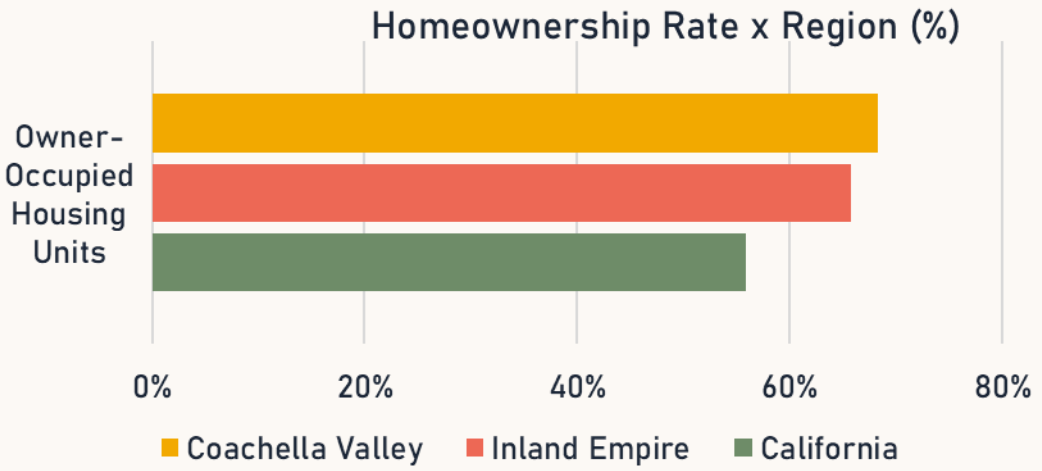


Figure A-10.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020 - 2024 5-Year Estimates

Lifelong Learning

As shown in Figure A-11, 23.9% of the Coachella Valley's population aged 3 and older is enrolled in school, which is lower than the enrollment rates in the Inland Empire (27%) and California (25.2%). This trend is maintained among the population enrolled in college or graduate school (22.6%), which is lower than that of the Inland Empire (27%) and California (30%). However, the Coachella Valley has the highest share of the population enrolled in high school (26%), compared to the Inland Empire (23%) and California (22%).

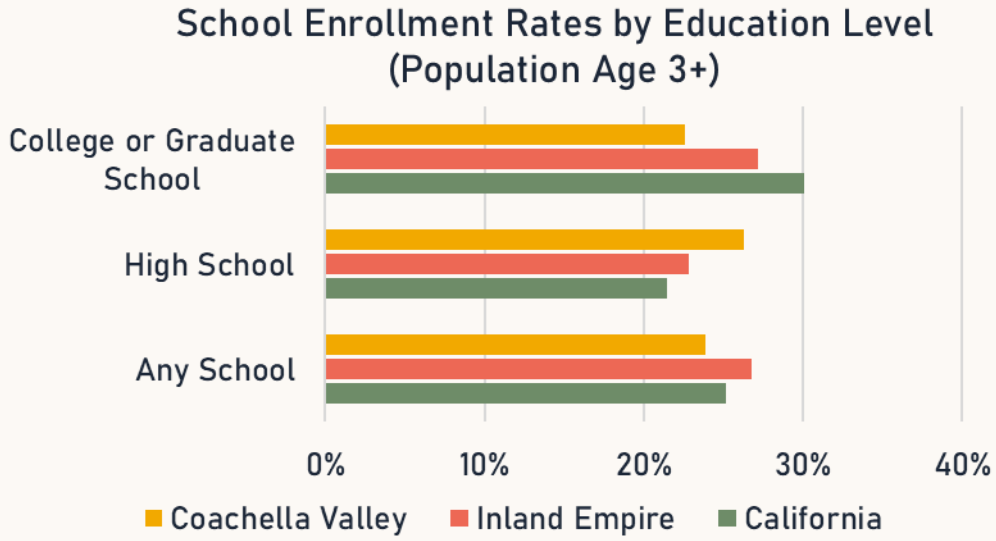


Figure A-11.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020 - 2024 5-Year Estimates

Perhaps the most commonly used measure of Lifelong Learning is educational attainment, which is the highest level of schooling a person has achieved. Higher attainment is associated with better well-being and suggests greater breadth of formal knowledge across the lifespan. The Coachella Valley has the smallest share of residents, 25 and older, with a bachelor's degree or higher (21%), as compared to the Inland Empire (25%) and California (37%). (See: Figure A-12.)

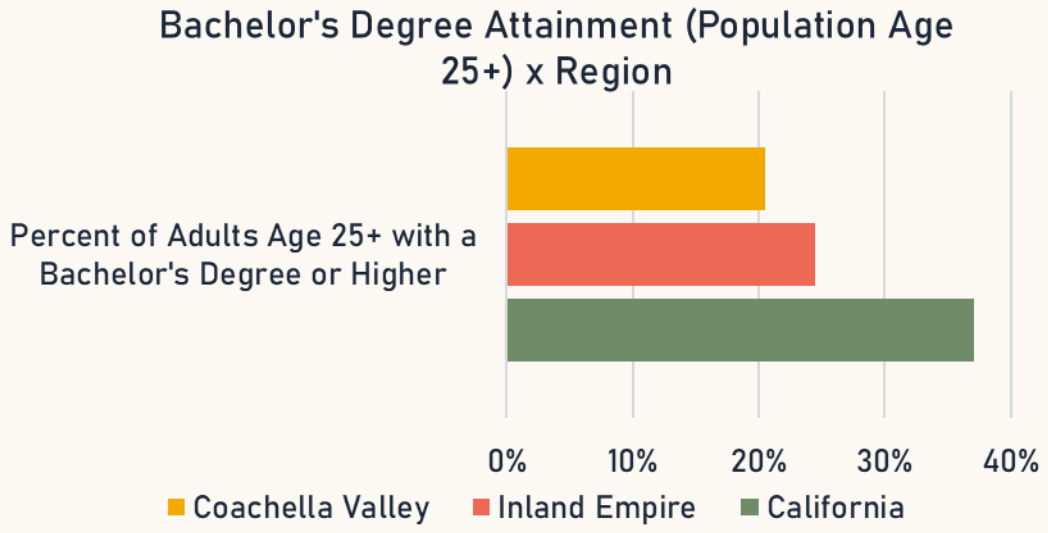


Figure A-12.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020 - 2024 5-Year Estimates

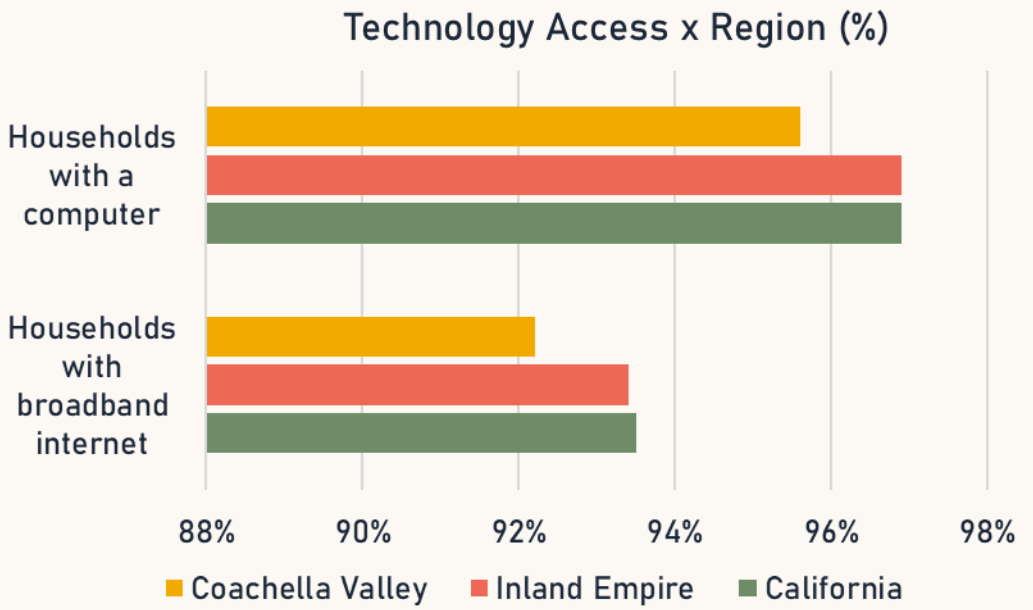


Figure A-13.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 2020 - 2024 5-Year Estimates

Regarding technology access, Coachella Valley similarly underperforms slightly relative to the Inland Empire and California. Coachella Valley has the lowest percentage of households with broadband internet access (92.2%) and a computer (95.6%), compared to the Inland Empire and California, which were roughly the same on both

indicators (approximately 97% and 94%, respectively). Computers and broadband internet support access to information, create awareness of educational and economic opportunities to improve status and well-being, help in skill-building, education, and digital literacy, which all ultimately enable lifelong learning and a greater capacity of knowledge. (See: Figure A-13.)

Across these indicators, a consistent pattern emerges: the Coachella Valley often reflects more constrained economic and educational conditions relative to the Inland Empire and California, alongside pockets of relative stability in areas such as homeownership and residential tenure. Median earnings and income levels remain lower, labor force participation is slightly reduced, and educational attainment and access to technology lag behind broader regional benchmarks. At the same time, higher rates of homeownership, reliance on retirement and public assistance income, and lower rent burden suggest that financial stability is experienced in varied and sometimes offsetting ways across households.

These findings reinforce the value of pairing survey data with population-level indicators. While the survey captures how residents experience work, learning, and well-being in their daily lives, these broader measures help illuminate the structural conditions that shape those experiences over time. Taken together, they point to a region where access to opportunity, stability, and resources is unevenly distributed — highlighting areas for continued attention as stakeholders consider how different conditions interact to support (or constrain) well-being across the Coachella Valley.