UCR Center for Community Solutions

THRIVING in the COACHELLA VALLEY

A First Look at Data on the Vital Conditions for Well-Being

Coachella Valley Residents Are Struggling, but Look to the Future with Optimism

The **Cantril Ladder** is a widely used measure of well-being that asks people to rate their lives today and where they expect to be in five years on a scale from 0–10. Based on these responses, individuals are grouped into three categories: **thriving** (high life satisfaction and optimism about the future), **struggling** (getting by but facing uncertainty), or **suffering** (low life satisfaction and limited expectations for improvement).

While a majority of Coachella Valley residents are struggling, the region stands out for its optimism: **67% of residents expect their lives to improve in the next five years**—a higher share than in the Inland Empire (IE) overall (61%)—which suggests many residents see real potential for greater opportunity, even if current conditions make thriving difficult for some today.

About the Study

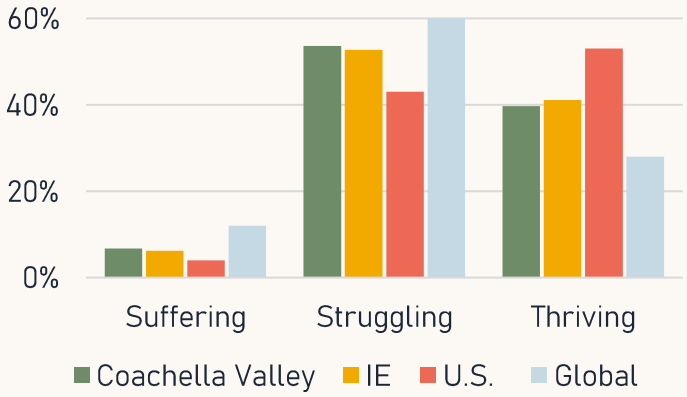
The Building Coachella Valley Fund commissioned the UCR Center for Community Solutions to develop a snapshot of well-being in the Coachella Valley using the Vital Conditions framework. **Coachella Valley statistics are derived from an original online survey of 209 adult residents (February 2026),** developed for this study, while **Inland Empire (I.E.) comparisons draw from a separate regional survey of 2,381 residents (June–July 2025).** A report with detailed methodology and full study findings—including the analysis of secondary data—will be available at communitysolutions.ucr.edu by May 2026.

39% of Coachella Valley residents are **THRIVING**

54% of Coachella Valley residents are **STRUGGLING**

7% of Coachella Valley residents are **SUFFERING**

How does Well-Being the Coachella Valley Compare to the Inland Empire (IE), U.S. & World?



The **Coachella Valley's well-being profile closely mirrors the Inland Empire's**, suggesting many of the same opportunities and pressures shaping life across the broader region may also be present locally. **Thriving in the Coachella Valley falls below the U.S.** but above the global average, while struggling and suffering are more common than in the U.S. but less common worldwide. For perspective, **if the Coachella Valley was its own country, its present-day well-being would rank 49th globally** —compared with 24th for the United States.

What does it take to thrive?

The **Vital Conditions framework** recognizes that thriving communities depend on strength across a set of interconnected conditions that shape opportunity, well-being, and quality of life. Here, we focus on three of the seven conditions in the Coachella Valley:

- **Meaningful Work & Wealth**, access to stable jobs and economic mobility;
- **Lifelong Learning**, opportunities to build knowledge and skills across the life course; and
- **Belonging & Civic Muscle**, the foundation for all other conditions, reflecting whether residents feel connected to their community and able to shape its future.

Belonging in the Coachella Valley

Prior research finds that people who feel they belong in their community experience stronger well-being, while communities with higher belonging overall are more resilient, safer, and healthier. In the Coachella Valley, **31% of residents report a strong sense of belonging** in their local community, while 69% fall into what prior research calls "non-belonging" – a pattern similar to the Inland Empire overall. **Among residents who feel they belong, 53% are thriving, compared with 43% struggling and just 4% suffering** – highlighting belonging's potential as a powerful lever for improving community well-being.

Lifelong Learning is Valued, Not Always Accessible in the Coachella Valley

79%	report they value their education (v. 82% in the I.E.)
74%	report learning opportunities are accessible in their community (v. 80% in the I.E.)
31%	cite high cost as a barrier to their learning in the past 12 months
21%	cite a lack of time as a barrier to their learning in the past 12 months.

Meaningful Work & Wealth

Work and well-being move together in the Coachella Valley: **63% of those who are thriving holding at least a part-time job**, compared with just 21% of those who are suffering – highlighting the powerful role access to stable, meaningful employment plays in supporting opportunity and thriving communities.



Employment less common in the Coachella Valley than in the I.E. (overall).

Only 58% of Coachella Valley residents report being employed, compared with 63% in the Inland Empire, while 42% report not working (including retirees). Among those who are employed, 64% work full time, and among those not working, 44% report actively looking for a job.



Workers in the Coachella Valley see more pathways to advancement / salary growth and forecast greater job stability over the next 12 months than those in the I.E. (overall).

More Coachella Valley workers report opportunities for advancement (59% vs. 48% in the I.E.) and expect job stability over the next year (67% vs. 49%).



Work offers more than just a paycheck for many Coachella Valley workers.

66% of residents are proud to work for their employer, and 51% would stay even if offered substantially higher pay elsewhere.



Those who aren't employed confront a range of barriers.

Poor physical and/or mental health (40%), insufficient transportation (19%), and a need for job-relevant training or education (14%) are the most common barriers to employment. Affordable childcare is the least commonly cited barrier to employment (2%).

This report was developed with significant contributions from UCR School of Public Policy MPP graduate student researchers Rachel Strausman (Randall Lewis Policy Researcher), Victoria Valenzuela, and Paula Omokhomion.