MONTHLY MARKET INTELLIGENCE

SoCal Aerospace & Defense Hiring Report

Southern California — LA/OC + San Diego • August 2026 Edition • Issue 3

Tracking who is hiring, what they pay, the contracts shaping demand, and where the SoCal aerospace and defense workforce is headed — compiled monthly for employers, job seekers, and the regional community.

Prepared by Intrepidus Talent Solutions — specialist aerospace & defense staffing for Southern California.

In this issue

Why this report

If you hire, recruit, or work in aerospace & defense across Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties, this report is built for you. Each month it answers the questions that matter most in this market, using public, verifiable data: Who is hiring right now, and for what roles? What does the market actually pay here? Which federal contracts will create the next wave of jobs? Is the local market expanding or contracting?

Hiring managers and HR teams use it to benchmark pay and see who they are competing with for talent. Recruiters use it to spot where demand is moving. Job seekers - including transitioning military - use it to find who is hiring and what it takes to qualify.

This is Issue No. 3 - and the first fully verified issue. All sixteen tracked employers were counted this cycle: fourteen pulled live from their official career systems on a single date (August 16, 2026), and RTX and Kratos counted manually on August 21, 2026. July was the first largely verified baseline; this issue delivers the clean like-for-like month-over-month read that Issue 2 promised.

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The Monthly Pulse[1]

Southern California's aerospace and defense market posted **2,453 verified on-site openings** in August, 104 more than July's 2,349 - but almost none of that is real growth. SpaceX's location tags re-expanded this month (Hawthorne, Irvine, and Long Beach now list separately), restoring coverage that July's single-tag consolidation had hidden, while Lockheed Martin's mid-cycle platform migration pushed its count the other way. Strip those two and the remaining fourteen employers are down 178 roles, or 9 percent.

That 9 percent needs one more caveat, and it is a large one. General Atomics alone accounts for 139 of the 178, and GA-ASI is the one comparison in this Index we cannot certify as like-for-like: July's 507 exceeds this month's entire on-site California pool, which points to hybrid-tagged roles having been counted in July and excluded now (see note ††). Set GA-ASI aside as well and the remaining thirteen employers are down just 39 roles, about 2.6 percent. **The honest read is a market that is flat to modestly softer - not one that is rolling over.**

Where it softened. Northrop eased 811 to 789 - its San Diego cluster gave up 42 roles while the LA/OC corridor added 20, led by Palmdale at 160 open roles, its largest single SoCal site this month. Amentum fell to five San Diego reqs, a genuine and verified pullback. RTX (121), Boeing (149), and L3Harris (133) each trimmed modestly. GA-ASI's 368 is the steepest reported decline but carries the comparability caveat above.

Where it firmed - and it is all San Diego. BAE ship repair (41, +12), Leidos (54, +11), HII Mission Technologies (27, +9), Shield AI (29, +4), and Parsons (30, +3) all added roles against verified July counts. Kratos is verified for the first time at 10 San Diego roles; because July carried a held estimate, treat that as a new datum rather than growth. The common thread is services, autonomy, C4ISR, and ship repair - not the primes.

The layoff signal stayed quiet. No tracked A&D employer carries an active California WARN notice in any of the three counties, and the region's active filings remain concentrated outside the industry. Against a heavy contract backdrop - a $278M San Diego NIWC Pacific engineering IDIQ, Rocket Lab and Viasat seats on a $981M space-test IDIQ, and steady B-21 and MQ-9 anchors - the market reads as consolidating, not contracting.

This month at a glance

Indicator	Reading	Note
Open A&D roles in the Index (16-employer sample)	2,453	16 of 16 verified - first fully verified issue
LA/OC vs San Diego split	1,607 / 846	66% LA/OC corridor, 34% San Diego cluster
Largest single employer	Northrop Grumman	789 combined (529 LA/OC + 260 SD)
Second largest	SpaceX	623, effectively all LA/OC (tag re-expansion) †
Top-6 share of tracked roles	~89%	Northrop, SpaceX, GA-ASI, Boeing, L3Harris, RTX
GA-ASI counted total	368 ▼	Down from 507, but not certified like-for-like (††); still the No. 1 SD employer
Major new award (this period)	NIWC ~$278M (Aug 12)	29-awardee San Diego engineering IDIQ; plus $981M SSC space-test IDIQ
Aerospace engineer avg wage - LA/OC	$145,190	~1.98x local all-occupation average (BLS OEWS, unchanged)
Active A&D WARN notices - SoCal	None this period	No tracked A&D employer on an active notice
Hiring outlook (tracked sample)	Flat to softer ◆	Headline up on tag changes; underlying -2.6% to -9% depending on GA-ASI

SoCal Openings Index[2]

> *The Openings Index is this report's primary monthly metric - a same-date count of open aerospace & defense roles across a fixed list of 16 SoCal employers, taken from official company sources.*

Scope note: the Index is a fixed 16-employer sample built for month-to-month comparability - not a census of every A&D opening in the region. This issue verifies all 16 employers (RTX and Kratos manually). July verified 15 of 16, so the July-to-August deltas below are the first clean like-for-like read of the series. All share and concentration figures describe the tracked sample.

This month's count

2,453 open A&D roles across the 16 tracked employers (14 counted August 16, 2026; RTX and Kratos August 21, 2026) - 1,607 in the LA/OC corridor and 846 in San Diego. Every count is on-site only: remote and hybrid roles are excluded, and each job is assigned to a single cluster by its primary location. The table below shows August against July's verified baseline.

By employer

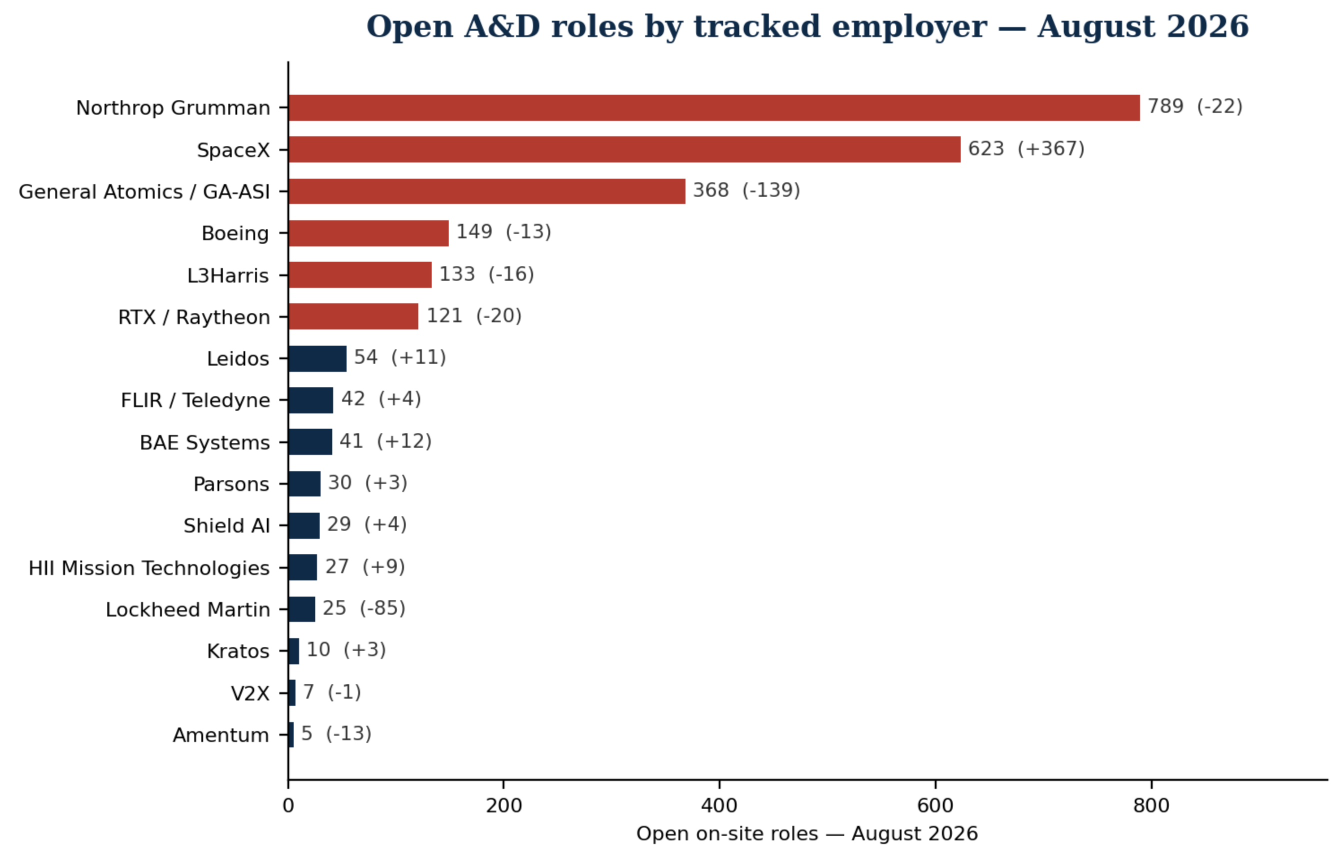

Figure 1: Openings by tracked employer, August 2026, sorted by total. Red = top six; navy = the rest. Change vs July shown in parentheses.

Employer	Aug	Jul	Chg	LA/OC	SD	Primary SoCal sites
Northrop Grumman	**789**	811	▼ -22	529	260	Redondo Beach, El Segundo, Palmdale, San Diego
SpaceX †	**623**	256	▲ +367	623	0	Hawthorne, Irvine, Long Beach
General Atomics / GA-ASI ††	**368**	507	▼ -139	18	350	Poway, San Diego, Palmdale
Boeing	**149**	162	▼ -13	149	0	El Segundo, Seal Beach, Long Beach
L3Harris §	**133**	149	▼ -16	94	39	Canoga Park, Yorba Linda, Anaheim, Carlsbad
RTX / Raytheon ¶	**121**	141	▼ -20	106	15	El Segundo, Fullerton, San Diego
Leidos	**54**	43	▲ +11	7	47	San Diego, Vista
FLIR / Teledyne ‡	**42**	38	▲ +4	28	14	El Segundo, Torrance, San Diego
BAE Systems	**41**	29	▲ +12	0	41	San Diego (ship repair)
Parsons	**30**	27	▲ +3	25	5	Pasadena, San Diego
Shield AI	**29**	25	▲ +4	0	29	San Diego (HQ)

Employer	Aug	Jul	Chg	LA/OC	SD	Primary SoCal sites
HII Mission Technologies	**27**	18	▲ +9	0	27	San Diego, Coronado
Lockheed Martin **	**25**	110	▼ -85	24	1	Palmdale (Skunk Works)
Kratos ¶	**10**	7	▲ +3	0	10	San Diego
V2X	**7**	8	▼ -1	4	3	Los Angeles, San Diego
Amentum	**5**	18	▼ -13	0	5	San Diego
TOTAL	**2,453**	**2,349**	**▲ +104**	**1,607**	**846**	**66% LA/OC - 34% San Diego**

† SpaceX's location tags re-expanded in August: Hawthorne 601, Irvine 20, Long Beach 2. July's 256 sat under a single consolidated "Hawthorne" tag, so the +367 is a coverage restoration plus real Starship/Starlink hiring - not a like-for-like swing.

‡ FLIR / Teledyne counted across Teledyne's full SoCal careers portal (El Segundo, Torrance, San Diego facilities), on-site roles only; 14 temporary-duty (TDY) postings excluded, matching July's treatment (17 excluded).

§ L3Harris is a floor: 72 postings tagged only "Multiple Locations" were excluded as unverifiable. L3Harris also completed its move from Workday to a Phenom careers site this cycle.

** Lockheed Martin migrated to a new Eightfold recruiting platform mid-cycle; its legacy careers site now shows an under-construction page. The 25 reqs live on the new board (Palmdale 24, San Diego 1) are a floor until the migration is confirmed complete - read the -85 as a platform artifact, not layoffs (no WARN filing exists).

†† General Atomics / GA-ASI is NOT certified like-for-like against July. August applied the careers site's on-site workstyle filter (584 California results: 402 on-site, 180 hybrid, 2 remote) and counted 368 SoCal on-site roles. July's 507 - 505 of them San Diego - exceeds August's entire California on-site pool net of excluded areas, indicating hybrid roles were counted in July. Read the -139 as largely a methodology correction; September will be the first clean GA-ASI comparison.

¶ RTX and Kratos counted manually by Intrepidus on August 21, 2026 (CAPTCHA-gated and embedded portals). Goleta, Edwards, and Lompoc stripped per Index rules. Kratos is verified for the first time (July carried a held estimate).

What the numbers say

Concentration eased a notch but remains prime-driven. Northrop Grumman (789) and SpaceX (623) together hold 58 percent of every tracked opening. Add GA-ASI, Boeing, L3Harris, and RTX and the top six cover roughly 89 percent of the Index. The LA/OC corridor now reads 66 percent of the sample - inflated by SpaceX's tag restoration - while San Diego's 846 open roles remain anchored by GA-ASI (350), Leidos (47), BAE ship repair (41), and the unmanned/C4ISR tier.

Sort the movers into three buckets. Platform and tagging noise: SpaceX (+367), Lockheed (-85), and GA-ASI (-139) - none is a clean July comparison. Verified declines: Northrop's San Diego trim (-42), RTX (-20), L3Harris (-16), Amentum (-13), Boeing (-13). Verified growth: BAE (+12), Leidos (+11), HII (+9), Shield AI (+4), Parsons (+3) - every one of them San Diego, in services, autonomy, and ship repair. Kratos's 10 is a first verification, not a gain. Only the second and third buckets should be read as market signal.

By role family

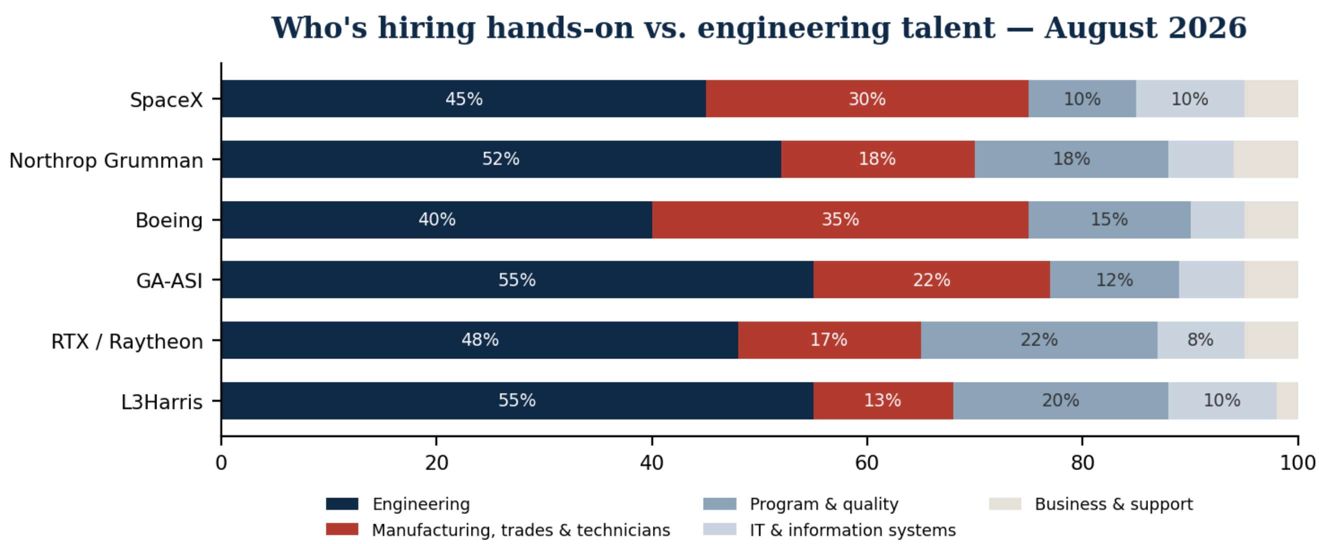

Figure 2: Approximate role-family mix for the six largest employers, carried from July's posting-title analysis; SpaceX and Boeing publish category-level data, all others are Intrepidus estimates. Next full refresh: September issue.

Engineering remains the dominant category at every tracked prime - roughly 40-55% of openings - skewing toward propulsion, structures, and space systems in LA/OC and toward RF/EW engineering for the C4ISR programs in San Diego. **Manufacturing, trades & technicians** stay heaviest at SpaceX Hawthorne and Boeing Long Beach/Seal Beach. Likely hardest to fill this month: cleared RF/EW engineers across the San Diego cluster, where BAE, Leidos, HII, and Shield AI are all adding roles into the same clearance-constrained pool.

What the Market Pays[4]

> *Salary benchmarks are among the data most requested by both job seekers and hiring managers.*

Refreshed this issue. Issues 1 through 3 published BLS Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics from the May 2023 release. That series has since been superseded twice, and this edition moves the benchmarks to the current **May 2025** release (published July 9, 2026) for the LA-Long Beach-Anaheim and San Diego-Chula Vista-Carlsbad metros, with national figures added for comparison. Readers comparing against earlier issues will see every figure move; that is the two-year catch-up, not a one-year swing. The next OEWS release is expected in spring 2027.

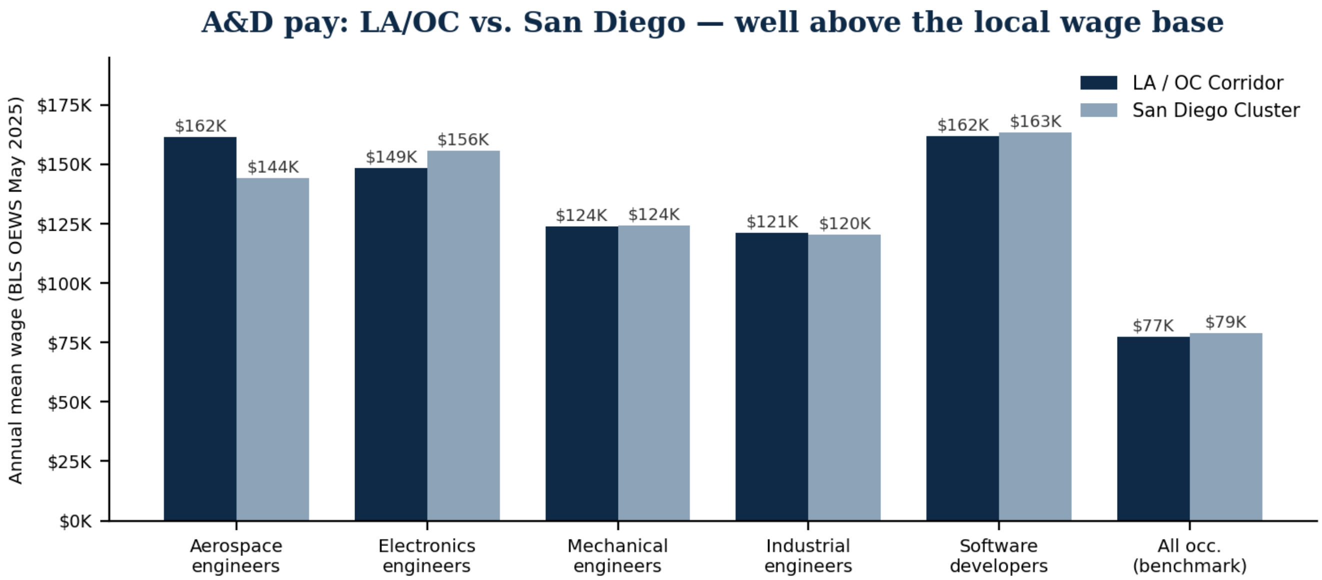

Figure 3: Average annual wage by occupation, LA/OC vs. San Diego (BLS OEWS, May 2025).

Occupation	LA / OC	vs. LA avg	San Diego	vs. SD avg	National
Aerospace engineers	$161,520	2.09x	$144,280	1.83x	$142,060
Electronics engineers	$148,620	1.92x	$155,740	1.97x	$137,280
Mechanical engineers	$123,940	1.60x	$124,420	1.57x	$113,610
Industrial engineers	$121,280	1.57x	$120,260	1.52x	$109,900
Software developers	$161,900	2.10x	$163,300	2.07x	$148,100
Aerospace eng. & ops techs	$102,770	1.33x	$92,670	1.17x	$91,310
All occupations (benchmark)	$77,270	—	$79,060	—	$69,770

The LA headline: aerospace engineers in the LA/OC corridor now average **$161,520** - 2.09 times the local all-occupation mean of $77,270, and 14 percent above the national aerospace-engineer average of $142,060. The corridor is the country's premium market for the occupation, anchored by commercial-space pay in Hawthorne and El Segundo. **San Diego's twist holds:** electronics engineers there ($155,740) still out-earn San Diego aerospace engineers ($144,280) - and out-earn their LA/OC counterparts too. That is the cleared EW and C4ISR premium, where Northrop, L3Harris, BAE, and Leidos compete for a supply constrained by clearance requirements rather than by degree pipelines.

Premium pay and a premium base. Unlike some A&D regions, Southern California pays above the national average on every occupation tracked here - by 4 percent for aerospace technicians in San Diego and by as much as 14 percent for LA/OC aerospace engineers. The multiple against the local wage base is narrower than in lower-cost aerospace regions precisely because Southern California's overall wage base is itself high ($77,270 in LA/OC and $79,060 in San Diego, against $69,770 nationally). One honest boundary, repeated on purpose: these are wages, not a cost-of-living measure, and this report does not yet publish one.

What moved since the May 2023 benchmarks. LA/OC aerospace engineers rose 11 percent ($145,190 to $161,520) and San Diego aerospace engineers 16 percent ($124,460 to $144,280) across the two-year gap, against local all-occupation bases that rose about 5 and 4 percent. A&D pay in both clusters outran the broader local labor market over that window.

Contracts & the Demand Signal[3]

> *Federal contract awards are a directional signal of future hiring - work awarded today is staffed over the following quarters. Tracking anchor programs performed in Southern California, from public federal records, is one of this report's differentiators.*

Every figure below is filtered to a **Southern California place of performance**. Important caveat: a local place of performance establishes relevance, but does not by itself prove incremental local hiring - existing staff, subcontractors, or non-labor spending may absorb part of the work. Values are cumulative program or contract-ceiling figures unless noted.

The scale of the federal book

Across the three counties, **123,307 active federal prime-award records** carried a Los Angeles, Orange, or San Diego place of performance with FY2026 activity as of an August 24, 2026 pull of USASpending.gov, together accounting for **$26.9B in obligations** - $18.1B of it Department of War. Los Angeles County holds the largest share by record count (86,809 records, $13.1B), San Diego the largest defense concentration relative to its size ($11.5B total, $8.6B DoW), and Orange County the smallest book ($2.3B). Together the three counties represent roughly 57 percent of all California federal contract obligations this fiscal year.

Why no year-over-year figure appears here. Department of War procurement data reaches FPDS-NG and USASpending on a 90-day delay, so the most recent three months of FY2026 are materially under-reported. Any county-level growth rate computed today would be an artifact of that lag rather than a market signal. The quarterly contract census in the September flagship will carry a lag-matched comparison.

The anchor programs (largest active contracts with SoCal work)

Awardee	Obligations on record	County / site
The Aerospace Corporation	$8,671M	Los Angeles - El Segundo (FFRDC)
General Dynamics NASSCO	$5,900M / $3,364M / $1,896M	San Diego - shipbuilding & repair
Northrop Grumman Systems	$3,466M	Los Angeles
Aerojet Rocketdyne (NASA)	$3,373M	Los Angeles
SpaceX (NASA)	$3,206M	Los Angeles - Hawthorne
The Boeing Company	$3,131M	Los Angeles
Caltech / JPL (NASA)	$2,968M	Los Angeles - La Canada Flintridge
General Atomics Aeronautical	$1,896M	San Diego - Poway
Raytheon	$1,795M	Los Angeles
L3Harris Interstate Electronics	$480M	Orange - Anaheim

Largest FY2026-active prime-award records by cumulative obligations to date, USASpending.gov, pulled August 24, 2026. Each line is a single prime-award record - large programs span multiple records, so a program's full value can exceed any one line. These figures show where federal money is anchored, not single-year local spend.

Freshly awarded - the forward signal

• **San Diego engineering IDIQ - $278M (Aug 12, 2026).** NIWC Pacific awarded 29 companies positions on a $278M base ($400M with the two-year option) multiple-award IDIQ for operational exercise design, systems engineering, and technical support using DevSecOps methodologies. Work is performed in San Diego, with a five-year ordering period running to August 2031. Awardees include San Diego names Epsilon C5I, Highbury Defense Group, Solute, and Sentar alongside Leidos, Parsons, GDIT, SAIC, and Booz Allen - a direct multi-year San Diego engineering headcount signal.

• **Space test & range capability - $981M ceiling (late Jul 2026).** Space Systems Command's 15-awardee IDIQ for space test and range capability development names Rocket Lab (Long Beach) and Viasat (Carlsbad) among its awardees. Work is to be performed at various locations rather than a stated SoCal site, so read this as a SoCal-headquartered-awardee signal rather than a confirmed local place of performance.

• **Sustainment keeps landing locally.** Northrop San Diego took a $17.7M RQ-4B Global Hawk modification (work in San Diego and El Segundo); Raytheon Fullerton won a $25M sole-source IDIQ for AN/USC-28(V) terminal depot repair through 2031; Walashek (National City) adds $12.2M of LCAC service-life work at Camp Pendleton; and RTX's $1.30B F135 spares action carries El Cajon and San Diego work shares.

Why it matters for hiring: the NIWC and SSC vehicles run straight through the San Diego mid-tier that firmed this month, and the sustainment awards anchor Fullerton and National City shops. Award-to-posting lag says these surface as reqs over the next two to three quarters.

Out for bid - the earliest signal

Solicitations are the earliest visible demand signal, ahead of awards and well ahead of postings. Five live actions with a confirmed Southern California place of performance close or decide inside the next two quarters:

Action	Agency / place of performance	Status
SWRMC HM&E fleet technical assistance follow-on (N5523626R0007)	NAVSEA / SWRMC - San Diego 92136	Proposals due Sept 11, 2026
MEO Missile Warning / Missile Tracking Epoch 3 & 4 (RFI)	Space Systems Command - El Segundo 90245	RFI responses due Oct 31, 2026; RFP to follow
Kronos Family of Systems CSO, AOI 4 mission support	SSC Battle Management C3 - El Segundo	Responses due Aug 28, 2026
Zero Trust Architecture vendor framework (RFI)	SSC Integration & Operations - El Segundo	Responses due Sept 11, 2026
USS Cincinnati (LCS 20) and USS Canberra (LCS 30) FY27 DSRAs	NAVSEA - West Coast; both ships San Diego-homeported	Award anticipated on or before Nov 2026

Read the ship-repair line carefully. The LCS and LPD availabilities are solicited coast-wide on the West Coast under a single solicitation. San Diego yards are the natural performers given homeport and SWRMC involvement, but the solicitations do not restrict place of performance to San Diego - so we log them as probable, not committed, local work.

Behind those, NIWC Pacific's own published forecast puts three more San Diego engineering vehicles into the next two quarters: a Tactical Data Link capabilities-based ISEA ($50-100M, award forecast December 2026), C2 Systems Modernization software engineering services ($10-25M, December 2026), and Application Arsenal enterprise engineering ($25-50M, January 2027). Four larger NIWC actions - including a $250-500M engineering services vehicle and a $300-500M centerwide cyber and engineering MAC - had forecast award dates that have now passed without a confirmable announcement; we mark their status unknown rather than pending.

Orange County has no visible forward pipeline, and that is structural rather than a gap in our search. Orange County A&D federal work - Boeing Huntington Beach, L3Harris Interstate Electronics in Anaheim, Anduril in Costa Mesa - is performed at contractor facilities under existing vehicles and modifications, so it does not surface as new place-of-performance-tagged solicitations.

Risk Signals - WARN Watch

As of the August pull, no tracked A&D company carries an active California WARN notice in LA, Orange, or San Diego counties (EDD data current to August 14). Active filings across the three counties sit outside the industry - parking services, food processing, media, healthcare, and enterprise software (LAZ Parking, Bumble Bee Foods, NBCUniversal, Sharp HealthCare, ServiceNow). The Raytheon (El Segundo) and Boeing (Palmdale) filings recorded in Issue 1 have both aged off the 60-day window with no replacements.

> *Net signal: zero disclosed A&D workers in active WARN notices against 2,453 open roles. The active-window A&D layoff signal is nil for a second straight month.*

The cleared talent released by Raytheon and Boeing earlier in 2026 has largely been reabsorbed by the primes. With no fresh A&D filings anywhere in the three counties, smaller suppliers should not count on a pool of displaced cleared candidates this quarter - competing on speed and offer quality against the San Diego mid-tier is the realistic path.

This Month in Southern California[5]

> *A fast-moving roundup of the developments that move the local labor market - refreshed every issue so the report always has news, not just numbers.*

The month's defining story: San Diego builds interceptors

The single largest local capacity commitment of the window landed in San Diego. On August 3 Northrop Grumman entered two multi-year framework agreements worth more than $3B with the Department of War and Lockheed Martin to accelerate missile-interceptor production. The $1B THAAD tranche is headlined by the company as **quadrupling THAAD component production**, with the body of the release committing to significantly increase monthly deliveries over seven years. Northrop cites a 50-year legacy of high-rate production at its San Diego plant; local reporting places that work at Miramar and marks the site's 50th year in 2026. The separate $2B PAC-3 MSE tranche is performed outside California and is excluded from our read. No headcount was disclosed, and we will not infer one - but rate increases of that size are not achieved without touch labor.

The other San Diego capital item, with a date correction: General Atomics won a $20M California Competes tax credit to build a Blanket Component Test Facility at its Magnet Technologies Center in Poway. The company announced the award on **June 22, 2026** - before this issue's window - and it reached local broadcast coverage on August 3 and August 21, which is why it reads as August news. We log it as June activity surfacing locally. One caution on that coverage: the widely quoted 40,000-jobs figure is a statewide fusion-industry projection over a decade, not a General Atomics hiring commitment.

Awards that land on a specific SoCal floor

• **BAE Systems San Diego - $149.8M USS Boxer availability (announced Aug 10-11).** Maintenance, modernization and repair of LHD 4 during an FY27 selected restricted availability, up to $180.0M with options, completing October 2028, work performed in San Diego. This is the clearest contract-to-posting line in the issue: BAE's tracked San Diego openings rose 12 this month, and waterfront availabilities of this size pull shipfitters, welders, electricians, pipefitters, and planners.

• **GA-ASI Poway - $47.4M MQ-9A sustainment modification (announced Aug 10-11).** Continued engineering and logistics support for the Marine Corps MAGTF-EMALE system, with **42 percent of the work performed in Poway** through August 2027 - steady engineering headcount at the county's largest A&D employer even as its posting count normalizes.

• **Rocket Lab - Viasat PTS-G satellite bus (Aug 17).** Rocket Lab will build a Lightning-GEO bus hosting Viasat's dual-band anti-jam payload for Space Systems Command's PTS-G program. The joint release carries a Long Beach dateline but does not state a work location; Rocket Lab's Spacecraft Production Complex is in Long Beach, so we treat the LA County work as probable rather than confirmed. Value not disclosed.

• **Impulse Space - $28M SSC extension, Redondo Beach (Aug 12).** Two Mira orbital transfer vehicles for the VICTUS SALO responsive-space missions, with assembly, payload integration and environmental testing in Redondo Beach.

• **ThinKom Solutions - Army counter-drone OTA with a $49M ceiling (Aug 19).** A mobile high-power microwave C-UAS prototype (Alecto), with initial funding covering one of four prototypes and field testing planned for 2027. This is a ceiling, not an obligation. ThinKom is headquartered in Hawthorne, but the release states no place of performance - we log the LA County work as probable, not confirmed.

Program watch

• **B-21 volume is rising at Palmdale.** Northrop's July 21 second-quarter results reported sales up 5 percent to $10.9B on a record backlog near $105B, with higher volume driven partly by B-21 and other restricted programs following the Q1 2026 agreement with the Air Force to expand production capacity. B-21 final assembly is at Air Force Plant 42 in Palmdale, and our Index shows Northrop's Palmdale site at 160 open roles - its largest single SoCal concentration this month. Northrop disclosed no Palmdale-specific headcount.

• **Shield AI's X-BAT cleared its propulsion gate.** On July 20 the San Diego company and GE Aerospace completed integration and engine light-off of the AVEN thrust-vectoring nozzle on an F110 - the gate to vertical flight, with flight testing said to begin later this year. The testing itself was performed at GE's Peebles, Ohio site, not in San Diego; the local read is schedule confidence for the San Diego engineering base, which added four tracked roles.

• **Collaborative Combat Aircraft keeps flying from outside our boundary.** The Air Force announced the first live AIM-120 firing from Anduril's YFQ-44A on July 15, with the shot reported to have occurred on or about July 10 over the Mojave - just ahead of this issue's window, and republished in trade press in mid-August, a common source of date confusion. Anduril is Costa Mesa-headquartered, so the program matters to Orange County engineering, but the test was executed at Edwards in Kern County - outside the counted area, and the company has not stated where the aircraft is built.

Hiring & expansion notes

• **MISTRAS expanded its Los Angeles A&D laboratory** on July 23, adding welding, grinding and rework services, two CNC machines and vertical turning centers handling parts up to three tons, automated ultrasonic testing and CMM dimensional inspection - framed explicitly as capacity for aerospace and defense production backlogs. Skilled-trades and NDT technician demand, though no job count was announced.

• **The LA County build-out that predates this window still governs 2027 hiring.** Anduril's $1B Long Beach and Lakewood campus (announced January 2026; roughly 5,500 direct jobs, ready mid-2027), Voyager's Long Beach facility, True Anomaly's plan to double headcount, and Divergent's Long Beach operation are all in build-out. None is new this month, and we flag them as context rather than news - but they are the reason LA/OC posting demand should be expected to firm through next year independent of this month's readings.

• **A practical note for job seekers:** two tracked employers changed job boards this cycle. Lockheed Martin retired lockheedmartinjobs.com for lockheedmartin.eightfold.ai, and L3Harris completed a move to careers.l3harris.com on the Phenom platform. Old links, saved searches and alerts are dead on both - rebuild them, and check back over the coming weeks as requisitions reload.

Monthly Spotlight[6]

THIS MONTH: The San Diego Mid-Tier Surge - Where the Hiring Actually Is

> *Each issue features one rotating deep-dive on a topic that shapes local A&D hiring. This month: the clearest unambiguous signal in the data - a services, autonomy and ship-repair tier adding roles in San Diego while the primes flatten.*

Strip out the three employers whose counts moved for platform or tagging reasons, and this month's Index tells one clean story: **every single verified gain in Southern California happened in San Diego, and none of it happened at a prime.** BAE Systems added 12 roles, Leidos 11, HII Mission Technologies 9, Shield AI 4, and Parsons 3. Kratos, verified for the first time, sits at 10. Meanwhile Northrop's San Diego cluster gave up 42 roles, RTX trimmed 20, L3Harris 16, and Amentum fell to five reqs.

That is not a rounding artifact. It is a 39-role verified swing toward the mid-tier inside a market where the two largest employers hold 58 percent of all tracked openings - and it lines up almost perfectly with where federal money landed this month.

The contract lines are unusually legible this month

Ordinarily the link from award to posting is a directional inference. This month it is close to a straight line. BAE Systems San Diego took a $149.8M USS Boxer availability announced August 10-11, running to October 2028 - and BAE posted the largest verified gain in the Index. NIWC Pacific's $278M engineering IDIQ, awarded August 12 across 29 companies with work performed in San Diego, seats Leidos, Parsons, SAIC, GDIT and Booz Allen alongside San Diego names Epsilon C5I, Highbury Defense Group, Solute and Sentar - and Leidos and Parsons both added roles. NIWC's earlier $350M Seabed-to-Space ISR vehicle carries HII Mission Technologies, Leidos and Parsons among sixteen awardees; HII added nine. GA-ASI's $47.4M MQ-9A modification puts 42 percent of its work in Poway.

The pattern is consistent: San Diego's federal work arrives as **multi-year services and sustainment vehicles competed among many mid-sized firms**, not as single large production awards to one prime. That structure spreads hiring across a dozen employers rather than concentrating it, and it is why the county's posting base holds up even when GA-ASI and Northrop are trimming.

What it means for pay - and for who wins the candidate

The wage data explains the friction. San Diego electronics engineers average $155,740 against $144,280 for San Diego aerospace engineers - the only occupation pair in this report where electronics out-earns aerospace, and it is the cleared EW and C4ISR premium showing up in the official statistics. Every employer named above is competing for substantially the same candidate: a cleared or clearable engineer or technician who can work on-site in San Diego County. There were no A&D WARN filings anywhere in the three counties this period, so there is no pool of displaced cleared talent entering the market to relieve it.

For the mid-tier, that is the whole competitive problem in one sentence: **you are bidding against Northrop and GA-ASI for the same clearances, without their brand or their pay bands.** The offsetting advantages are real but perishable - speed of offer, program variety, and the fact that a services or autonomy firm can often put an engineer on mission work in weeks rather than months.

What to do about it

• **Job seekers (cleared engineers and technicians):** the San Diego mid-tier is where the verified hiring is right now, and the primes' trimming makes those employers relatively more attractive than the headline Index would suggest. If you hold an active clearance and RF, EW, C4ISR, autonomy or shipboard-systems experience, you are the constrained input in this market. Ask about program length - a role funded under a five-year IDIQ vehicle carries different stability than one on a single availability.

• **Job seekers (trades):** the Boxer availability runs to October 2028, and San Diego ship repair has been the steadiest verified grower in this Index for two consecutive months. Shipfitting, welding, marine electrical and pipefitting are the entry points.

• **Hiring managers at mid-tier firms:** your competition for cleared candidates is now eleven other companies on the same contract vehicles, not just the primes. Speed is the lever you actually control - the firms winning these candidates are moving from first contact to offer inside two weeks. If your clearance-sponsorship path is slower than that, publish it anyway; candidates weigh a known timeline over an unknown one.

• **Hiring managers at primes:** a trimming posting count is not the same as a shrinking workforce, but it does mean your recruiting pipeline is quieter at exactly the moment the mid-tier is staffing up on multi-year vehicles. The cleared candidates leaving your pipeline this quarter are largely not leaving the region.

National Context: U.S. vs. Southern California[7]

> *Southern California is a large slice of a very large national industry. Setting the local market against the national backdrop shows what makes the region distinctive: it pays above national scale for A&D occupations, it sits directly in the path of federal missile and space spending, and it is adding capacity.*

U.S. aerospace and defense supported approximately **2.1 million jobs** and generated **$988.6B in sales** in 2025, contributing $500B in economic value - 1.6 percent of U.S. GDP - and paying $266B in labor income at an average wage above $127,000, roughly 40 percent higher than the national average across all industries (AIA 2026 Facts & Figures, 2025 data). End-use companies accounted for 930,000 of those jobs and the supply chain for about 1.1 million. Direct manufacturing employment splits almost evenly between commercial aerospace (51 percent) and defense and national security (49 percent).

On the federal demand side, Congress enacted **$839.2B in FY2026 Department of War appropriations** (P.L. 119-75, signed February 3, 2026), including $167.5B for procurement and $145.9B for research and development. The emphasis lands where Southern California is strong: enacted funding for selected missile and munitions programs came in $1.3B above the request, missile defense $0.8B above, and selected space systems $0.8B above. Golden Dome is funded separately - $24.4B through the FY2025 reconciliation law, available through 2029, including $7.2B for space-based sensors.

One honest counterweight: the autonomy line is smaller than the trade-press narrative suggests. Collaborative Combat Aircraft received **$0.17B** in enacted FY2026 appropriations, against a $0.18B base request. Separately, a June 24, 2026 supplemental sought $86.1B in total, of which $67.1B was for Department of War military and intelligence activities across all accounts; Congress had not acted on it as of this issue. That $67.1B is a department-wide request with no published Collaborative Combat Aircraft line - not an autonomy figure - and it is not money until appropriated.

FY2026 also began badly for contractors: a 42-day shutdown from October 1 to November 12, 2025, then a continuing resolution to January 30 and a second short lapse. Under the CR the department could not start new R&D programs or raise procurement rates - a documentable explanation for softness in defense-prime hiring in late 2025 and early 2026, and useful context for reading this year's posting levels.

The national trend line

Figure 4: BLS Current Employment Statistics series CES3133640001 - all employees, aerospace product and parts manufacturing, seasonally adjusted. June 2026 preliminary; May 2026 revised to 588.1K. Extracted August 24, 2026.

The national industry keeps climbing. U.S. aerospace product and parts manufacturing employment reached a preliminary **591,600 in June 2026** - up 24,800 jobs, or 4.4 percent, over twelve months, and rising in every month of 2026 so far. That is the highest monthly reading since November 1993, a roughly 32-year high. Two caveats worth stating: BLS had not published a July 2026 value for this series as of our pull date, and the 2026 preliminary benchmark revision publishes August 28, 2026, which may move the level.

The benchmark snapshot

Metric	National (U.S.)	Southern California	Takeaway
Aerospace mfg. employment trend	+4.4% year over year - 32-year high	Index -2.6% to -9% month over month*	Local postings easing against a rising national industry
Aerospace engineer pay (avg)	$142,060	$161,520 LA/OC - $144,280 SD	LA/OC pays 14% above national - the country's premium market
Electronics engineer pay (avg)	$137,280	$148,620 LA/OC - $155,740 SD	San Diego's cleared EW/C4ISR premium exceeds LA/OC
Aerospace technician pay (avg)	$91,310	$102,770 LA/OC - $92,670 SD	Above national in both clusters
Avg A&D wage / local wage base	$127,000+ industry avg	$77,270 LA/OC and $79,060 SD all-occupation mean	A&D pay runs roughly 2x the local base
Federal demand backdrop	~$839.2B FY26 DoW appropriations	$26.9B FY26 obligations across the three counties	Missile, space and naval priorities landing locally

*Different measures - national is payroll employment year over year; local is tracked job postings month over month, excluding the SpaceX and Lockheed platform artifacts. Directional comparison only.

Bottom line: Southern California pays above national scale for every A&D occupation tracked here, against a local wage base that is itself well above the national average. Its missile, space and naval work sits squarely in current federal budget priorities, and more than a billion dollars of new LA County capacity is under construction for 2027 occupancy. The month-over-month posting softness is real but modest, and it is happening against a national industry at its highest employment in three decades.

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Appendix & Methodology

How this report stays fresh

Most foundational data - employment, wages, total industry size - changes slowly. To stay current without manufacturing false movement, the report is built in two layers on a hybrid schedule:

• **Fresh layer** - the Openings Index, contract awards and the solicitation pipeline, the news roundup, and the rotating Spotlight. These change every issue and lead the report.

• **Backbone layer** - occupational wages, national benchmarks, and the federal contract census. These anchor credibility and are refreshed when official data is released, not forced monthly. This issue moved the wage backbone from BLS OEWS May 2023 to May 2025 and added the USASpending contract census for the first time.

A light monthly pulse runs every month; a deeper quarterly flagship lands in September, December, March, and June. **Next month is a flagship issue**: it will carry the quarterly contract-census refresh with a lag-matched year-over-year comparison, the quarterly company-list review, a re-baselined GA-ASI count, and the first clean read on whether Lockheed Martin's and L3Harris's migrated job boards have finished repopulating.

Methodology & sources

Openings Index - a defined-sample metric: open roles counted from a fixed list of 16 named Southern California A&D employers, compiled from each company's official careers site or applicant tracking system, filtered to Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego county locations, on a fixed date (August 16, 2026; RTX and Kratos counted manually August 21). No aggregators are used as primary sources. The same list is used every month so the trend is comparable; it is reviewed quarterly. The Index is not a census of all A&D openings in the region - employers not on the list, third-party staffing listings, and federal civil-service and military postings are excluded by design. Share and concentration figures describe the tracked sample.

What we exclude - remote, hybrid, and temporary-duty (TDY) postings; roles outside the three counties, including Goleta and Santa Barbara County, Edwards AFB and Kern County, China Lake, Ridgecrest, Lompoc, Vandenberg, Ventura, Riverside, San Bernardino, and all Northern and Central California. Each job is assigned to one cluster by its primary (first-listed) location so the two cluster columns sum to the total; postings are deduplicated by job ID.

The GA-ASI comparability break (August 2026) - August applied the careers site's on-site workstyle filter at source (584 California results: 402 on-site, 180 hybrid, 2 remote) and counted 368 SoCal on-site roles, of which 397 of 402 on-site listings were captured across nine result pages. July's reported 507 - 505 of it San Diego - exceeds August's entire California on-site pool net of excluded areas, which indicates hybrid-tagged roles were counted in July. GA-ASI is therefore reported but excluded from any like-for-like claim, and will be re-baselined in September.

Platform migrations - Lockheed Martin moved from lockheedmartinjobs.com to lockheedmartin.eightfold.ai mid-cycle, and L3Harris completed a move from Workday to a Phenom site at careers.l3harris.com. Both counts are floors pending repopulation. L3Harris additionally excludes 72 postings tagged only "Multiple Locations" as unverifiable. SpaceX's location tags re-expanded from a single consolidated Hawthorne tag to separate Hawthorne, Irvine and Long Beach tags, so its July-to-August change is not like-for-like.

Wages - BLS Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics, May 2025 release (published July 9, 2026), Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim (MSA 31080) and San Diego-Chula Vista-Carlsbad (MSA 41740) metros and national, annual mean wages on a like-for-like basis, retrieved from the BLS public API. The LA-Long Beach-Anaheim MSA comprises Los Angeles and Orange counties, matching this report's LA/OC cluster exactly. Prior issues used the May 2023 release; the next OEWS update is expected in spring 2027.

Contracts - USASpending.gov prime awards filtered to Los Angeles (06037), Orange (06059), and San Diego (06073) county place of performance, FY2026 time period, award types A/B/C/D, prime awards only, pulled August 24, 2026. Award headlines from Department of War daily contract announcements, Space Systems Command releases, GovConWire, and company announcements, July 20 - August 21, 2026. Solicitation pipeline from SAM.gov and NIWC Pacific's published contracts forecast (May 7, 2026). Department of War procurement data reaches FPDS-NG on a 90-day delay, so FY2026 obligations are under-reported for the most recent three months and no year-over-year growth rate is published this issue.

Layoff / WARN watch - California EDD WARN filings via CaliforniaWarn.com, data current to August 14, 2026. Note that state WARN publication runs behind filing, so an absence of filings in the most recent weeks is an absence of visible data rather than proof of no filings.

National context - AIA 2026 Facts & Figures (2025 data, published June 25, 2026); BLS Current Employment Statistics series CES3133640001; FY2026 Department of War appropriations per P.L. 119-75 and CRS R48891; program-level funding per CRS R48860.

Evidence standard - role counts, wages, WARN filings, and federal award values are reported as observed data from public sources. Connections between awards, solicitations, and hiring are treated as directional indicators unless individual postings can be tied to a specific program. Where a figure is our own count or an estimate, it is labeled as such. Job postings churn daily, so Index counts are snapshots that may not be reproducible after the pull date.

Section notes & sources (footnotes)

1 The Monthly Pulse. Third issue; first issue with all sixteen employers verified. Figures are drawn from public sources (company career sites, USASpending.gov, BLS, California WARN filings, and government and company announcements); where a number is our own count - chiefly the Openings Index - it is labeled. Change arithmetic: all sixteen employers 2,349 to 2,453 (+104, +4.4%); excluding SpaceX and Lockheed Martin from both months 1,983 to 1,805 (-178, -9.0%); additionally excluding GA-ASI 1,476 to 1,437 (-39, -2.6%).

2 Openings Index - scope & method. See Methodology above for the full definition, the exclusion list, the GA-ASI comparability break, and the platform-migration treatments. Per-employer counts, methods and confidence ratings appear in the count sheet below.

3 Contracts & the Demand Signal. Census and anchor table: USASpending.gov, pulled August 24, 2026 (filters in Methodology). Award headlines: NIWC Pacific operational exercise design and systems engineering IDIQ, Department of War announcement August 13, 2026 and GovConWire August 14, 2026 (29 awardees, $278M base, $400M ceiling, five-year ordering period to August 12, 2031, work performed in San Diego); BAE Systems San Diego USS Boxer availability, announced August 10-11, 2026 ($149,752,069; up to $180,005,703 with options; completion October 2028); GA-ASI MQ-9A MAGTF-EMALE modification P00009, announced August 10-11, 2026 ($47,361,658; 42% Poway); Northrop Grumman RQ-4B digital receiver ECP modification P00018 ($17,747,040; San Diego and El Segundo); Raytheon Fullerton AN/USC-28(V) depot repair IDIQ ($25M, to 2031); Walashek LCAC E-SLEP ($12,188,754, Camp Pendleton); RTX F135 spares UCA modification P00024 ($1,295,745,898; El Cajon 1.1%, San Diego 0.9%); Space Systems Command space test and range capability development multiple-award, awarded July 29, 2026 ($981M ceiling, fifteen awardees including Rocket Lab and Viasat, work performed at various locations). Solicitations from SAM.gov notices as cited and NIWC Pacific's contracts forecast presented to NDIA San Diego, May 7, 2026. The connection from award to local job postings is a reasonable interpretation, not something this issue measures directly.

4 What the Market Pays. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, OEWS May 2025, Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim and San Diego-Chula Vista-Carlsbad metropolitan areas and national, annual mean wages, retrieved via the BLS public API August 24, 2026. Occupation codes: 17-2011 aerospace engineers, 17-2072 electronics engineers except computer, 17-2141 mechanical engineers, 17-2112 industrial engineers, 15-1252 software developers, 17-3021 aerospace engineering and operations technologists and technicians, 00-0000 all occupations. San Diego employment for aerospace engineering and operations technicians was not released. Comparisons to prior issues reference the May 2023 release used in Issues 1 through 3.

5 This Month in Southern California. Northrop Grumman missile-interceptor framework agreements, company announcement August 3, 2026, with San Diego detail reported August 11, 2026 (the $2B PAC-3 MSE tranche is performed outside California and is excluded). General Atomics California

Competes Tax Credit, company announcement June 22, 2026 with local broadcast coverage August 3 and August 21, 2026 - logged as pre-window activity surfacing locally (the 40,000-job figure is a statewide fusion-industry projection over a decade, not a company commitment; outlets differ on the associated economic figure). MISTRAS Group Los Angeles laboratory expansion, July 23, 2026. Viasat selection of Rocket Lab for the PTS-G bus, announced August 17, 2026; the joint release carries a Long Beach dateline but states no work location, so LA County performance is inferred from Rocket Lab's Long Beach Spacecraft Production Complex (Viasat's underlying PTS-G prime award was May 22, 2026, outside this window). Impulse Space SSC extension, awarded August 12, 2026. ThinKom Solutions Army OTA, announced August 19, 2026 ($49M ceiling, initial funding for one of four prototypes; place of performance not stated in the release). Northrop Grumman second-quarter 2026 results, July 21, 2026 (the B-21 capacity-expansion agreement itself was announced February 2026, outside this window). Shield AI and GE Aerospace X-BAT engine light-off, July 20, 2026 (testing performed at Peebles, Ohio, on GE's F110-GE-129E). YFQ-44A live-fire test announced by the Air Force July 15, 2026, with the shot reported on or about July 10 (executed at Edwards AFB, outside the counted area; republished in trade press August 13). Anduril Long Beach and Lakewood campus announced January 26, 2026 and included as context only.

6 Monthly Spotlight. All employer movements are from this issue's Openings Index pull. Verified gains and declines exclude SpaceX, Lockheed Martin and GA-ASI for the reasons given in the Index section. Contract references are as cited in footnote 3, plus the NIWC Pacific Seabed-to-Space ISR multiple-award ($350M ceiling, sixteen awardees, May 2026). Wage figures per footnote 4. Statements about offer speed and candidate behavior reflect Intrepidus recruiting experience rather than measured time-to-fill data, and are labeled as such.

7 National Context. Aerospace Industries Association, 2026 Facts & Figures (2025 data; published June 25, 2026); figures taken from AIA's published pages rather than the full PDF. AIA does not publish a figure explicitly labeled direct employment - the 930,000 figure is end-use company jobs. BLS Current Employment Statistics series CES3133640001 (all employees, aerospace product and parts manufacturing, seasonally adjusted), thirteen-month series extracted August 24, 2026; June 2026 preliminary, May 2026 revised to 588,100; the 32-year-high characterization refers to the highest monthly value since November 1993 (591,800) and was verified against the full series back to 1990. No July 2026 value had been published for this series as of the pull date. FY2026 Department of War appropriations per P.L. 119-75 (Division A of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026, signed February 3, 2026) and CRS R48891; selected-program funding per CRS R48860; Golden Dome funding per P.L. 119-21 section 20003 and CRS IN12576 ($24.4B available through September 30, 2029, including $7.2B for space-based sensors; the statute itself does not use the name Golden Dome). The June 24, 2026 supplemental request totalled $86.1B, of which $67.1B was for Department of War activities department-wide (CRS IN12700), with no published Collaborative Combat Aircraft line. Northrop Grumman's second-quarter backlog is $104.7B as reported, which the company rounds to $105B. The FY2026 $839.2B is the grand total including scorekeeping adjustments; the discretionary DoD Appropriations Act line is $838.6B. CRS counts the FY2026 lapse in appropriations as 42 days; some analysts count 43 on an inclusive basis.

August count sheet

Employer	Aug	Jul	Method (August)	Confidence
Northrop Grumman	789	811	Eightfold official API, LA r=75 + SD r=60 merged, deduped by job ID	High
SpaceX	623	256	Official careers site, full job list parsed, deduped by requisition	High (tags re-expanded)
General Atomics / GA-ASI	368	507	BrassRing official site, Onsite workstyle facet applied at source	High on level; not comparable
Boeing	149	162	Official Phenom site, click-through pagination, all pages	High
L3Harris	133	149	Official Phenom site (migrated), click-through; Multiple Locations excluded	Floor
RTX / Raytheon	121	141	Manual count by Intrepidus (CAPTCHA-gated site)	High (manual)
Leidos	54	43	Workday cxs API, detail fetch for multi-location postings	High
FLIR / Teledyne	42	38	Workday cxs API, consolidated Teledyne tenant; TDY excluded	High
BAE Systems	41	29	Official Phenom site, ddo payload read, all pages	High
Parsons	30	27	Workday cxs API; per-posting detail fetch required (list omits location)	High
Shield AI	29	25	Lever API, onsite workplaceType only	High
HII Mission Technologies	27	18	SuccessFactors official site, all result pages	High
Lockheed Martin	25	110	New Eightfold platform (migrated mid-cycle)	Measured; floor
Kratos	10	7	Manual count by Intrepidus (embedded portal resists automation)	High (manual)

Employer	Aug	Jul	Method (August)	Confidence
V2X	7	8	iCIMS-backed official site, California location filter, all pages	High
Amentum	5	18	Workday cxs API	High

Full pull notes are retained for every issue and available on request. "Floor" indicates the count is known to be incomplete for a stated reason.

The tracked company universe (16)

Primes: Northrop Grumman, SpaceX, General Atomics / GA-ASI, Boeing, Lockheed Martin, RTX / Raytheon, L3Harris. **Suppliers and specialists:** Teledyne (including FLIR), BAE Systems, Shield AI, Kratos. **Services, engineering and base contractors:** Leidos, Parsons, HII Mission Technologies, Amentum, V2X.

Under quarterly review, with decisions due in the September flagship: **candidate additions** include Anduril (Costa Mesa and the Long Beach campus opening 2027), Rocket Lab (Long Beach), Viasat (Carlsbad), Impulse Space (Redondo Beach), and The Aerospace Corporation (El Segundo) - the largest single federal award record in the three counties and not currently tracked. **Re-baselining:** GA-ASI and Lockheed Martin. No removals are proposed; all sixteen current members posted verified Southern California openings this month.