MONTHLY MARKET INTELLIGENCE

SoCal Aerospace & Defense Hiring Report

Southern California — LA/OC + San Diego • September 2026 Edition • Issue 4

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. 4, a quarterly flagship. All sixteen tracked employers were counted: twelve pulled live from their official career systems on September 16, 2026, General Atomics and V2X on September 18, 2026, and RTX and Kratos counted manually on September 18, 2026. The flagship also carries the quarterly federal contract census with the series' first year-over-year comparison, a re-baselined General Atomics count, a full audit of all sixteen pull techniques, and - new this issue - an **expanded sample** adding three large Southern California employers the Index has never tracked.

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The Monthly Pulse[1]

Southern California's aerospace and defense market posted **2,721 verified on-site openings** in September, 268 more than August's 2,453 and the highest reading in the series to date. Two of the sixteen moved for reasons unrelated to hiring - Lockheed Martin's job board finished repopulating after its platform migration, and Amentum's count moved to full-board enumeration - and stripping both still leaves the other fourteen up 125 roles, +5.2 percent.

General Atomics is the month's largest verified gain. Both months applied the careers site's on-site workstyle filter at source, so the comparison is like-for-like: GA-ASI went from 368 to **436**, up 68. Its entire California on-site pool grew from 402 listings to 470 over the same window, so this is capacity, not tagging. It also retires the July puzzle - July's reported 507 sits inside this month's 642-role California pool once hybrid roles are included, which is the confirmation that July's pull counted hybrid. Set GA-ASI aside along with Lockheed and Amentum and the remaining thirteen employers are still up 57 roles, +2.8 percent. **Every way we cut it, the tracked market expanded this month.**

Where it grew. GA-ASI added 68 and RTX added 46 - the largest verified gains in the Index and both concentrated in the counted area. Northrop rose from 789 to 822, with its San Diego cluster reversing sharply: San Diego gained 41 roles while the LA/OC corridor eased 8, the mirror image of August. Boeing added 17 and its El Segundo site alone now carries 131 of its 166 SoCal reqs, though we do not hold August site-level detail for Boeing and so cannot say where within the corridor the 17 landed. L3Harris added 22 and Shield AI 8. Leidos added 10, all San Diego.

Where it softened - the San Diego mid-tier. BAE Systems fell 13, Parsons 13, HII 6 and V2X 4. These are the same names that added roles in August, and the swings run both ways on small bases: BAE is twelve up then thirteen down on a base under fifty. Treat month-to-month movement in employers this size as noise until three months point the same way. Four of Parsons' thirteen are a counting-rule effect - Pasadena and San Diego roles excluded this month as hybrid.

SpaceX is down 46. At 577 it carries the same tag structure as August, so the change is like-for-like: Hawthorne fell from 601 to 558, Irvine held at 19, and the two Long Beach reqs closed out. One month is not a trend, but the comparison is a sound one.

The layoff signal stayed quiet for a third straight month. No tracked A&D employer carries an active California WARN notice in any of the three counties. Against a contract backdrop that includes a $115.7M BAE amphib availability, a $149.6M NASSCO destroyer modernization and a $603M Raytheon El Segundo radar ceiling, the market reads as expanding.

This month at a glance

Indicator	Reading	Note
Open A&D roles in the Index (16-employer sample)	2,721	All 16 employers counted this cycle
LA/OC vs San Diego split	1,716 / 1,005	63% LA/OC corridor, 37% San Diego cluster
Largest single employer	Northrop Grumman	822 combined (521 LA/OC + 301 SD)
Second largest	SpaceX	577, all LA/OC; -46 on identical tag structure †
Top-6 share of tracked roles	~85%	Northrop, SpaceX, GA-ASI, RTX, Boeing, L3Harris
GA-ASI counted total	436 ▲	Up 68 on a like-for-like on-site basis, same workstyle filter both months (††)
Major new award (this period)	BAE $115.7M (Sept 10)	LPD-30/31 availabilities, San Diego; options to $527.5M
Aerospace engineer avg wage - LA/OC	$161,520	2.09x local all-occupation average (BLS OEWS May 2025)
Expanded sample (19 employers)	3,152	Index plus Aerospace Corp (257), Castelion (144) and NASSCO (30); levels only, no baseline yet
Federal contract census (quarterly)	$29.4B FY26 obligations	133,617 prime records across the three counties; lag-matched YoY +18.9%
Active A&D WARN notices - SoCal	None this period	Third consecutive month with no tracked A&D employer on an active notice
Hiring outlook (tracked sample)	Expanding ▲	Headline +10.9%; underlying +2.8% to +5.2% excluding platform and method effects

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. Both August and September verify all 16 employers, so the month-over-month change is like-for-like. Every figure in this section, and every share and concentration figure in this issue, describes those sixteen. **Three employers are added this issue as a separate expanded sample** and are reported below the Index table, never inside it - they have no prior-month baseline, so including them would break the comparison this Index exists to provide.

This month's count

2,721 open A&D roles across the 16 tracked employers (12 counted September 16, 2026; General Atomics and V2X September 18, 2026; RTX and Kratos manually on September 18, 2026) - 1,716 in the LA/OC corridor and 1,005 in San Diego. Every count is on-site only: remote, hybrid and temporary-duty roles are excluded, and each job is assigned to a single cluster by its primary location. The table below shows September against August's verified baseline.

By employer

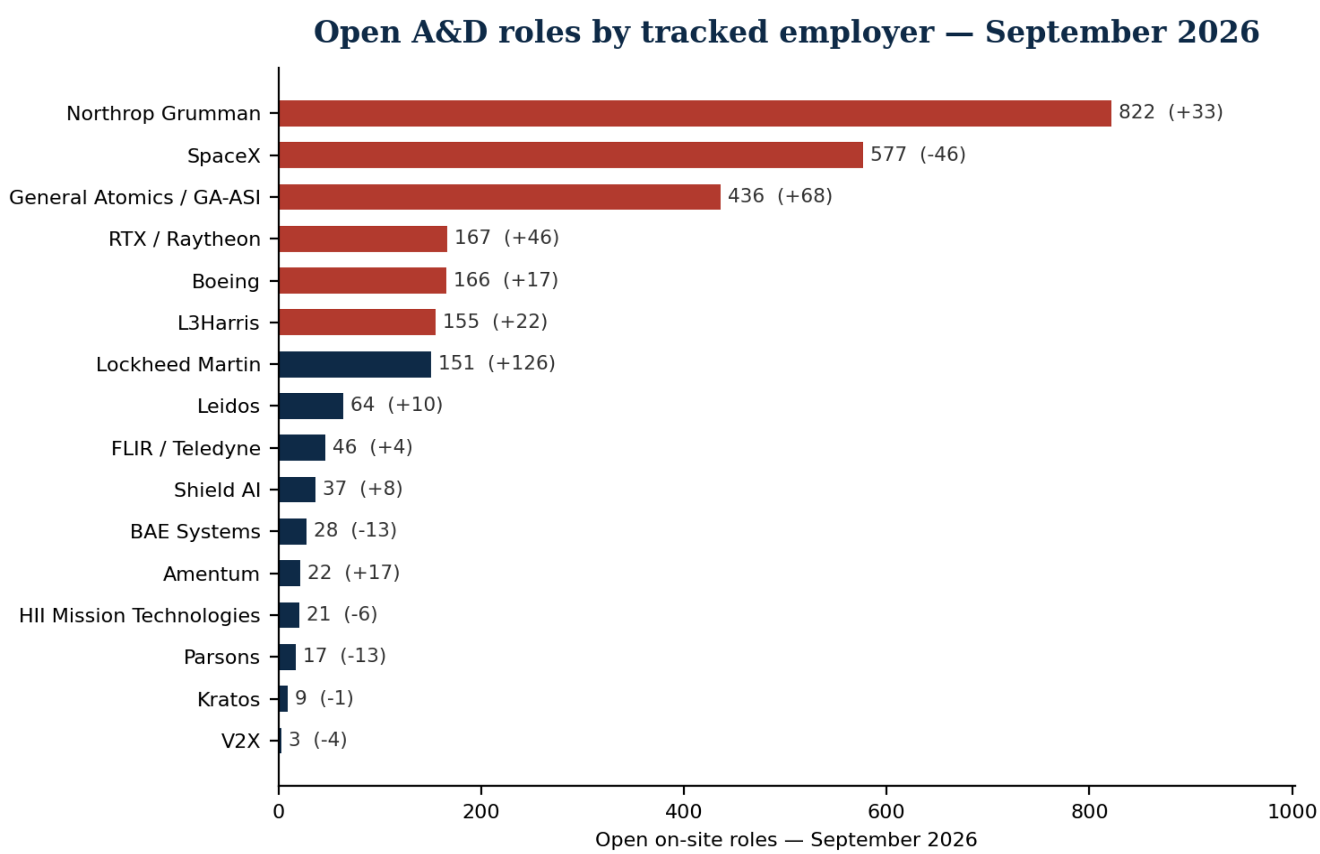

Figure 1: Openings by tracked employer, September 2026, sorted by total. Red = top six; navy = the rest. Change vs August shown in parentheses. Lockheed Martin's +126 and Amentum's +17 reflect publishing and method changes, not hiring.

Employer	Sep	Aug	Chg	LA/OC	SD	Primary SoCal sites
Northrop Grumman	**822**	789	▲ +33	521	301	Redondo Beach, Palmdale, Woodland Hills, San Diego

Employer	Sep	Aug	Chg	LA/OC	SD	Primary SoCal sites
SpaceX †	**577**	623	▼ -46	577	0	Hawthorne, Irvine
General Atomics / GA-ASI ††	**436**	368	▲ +68	19	417	Poway, San Diego, Palmdale
RTX / Raytheon ¶	**167**	121	▲ +46	138	29	El Segundo, Fullerton, San Diego
Boeing	**166**	149	▲ +17	166	0	El Segundo, Seal Beach, Long Beach
L3Harris §	**155**	133	▲ +22	95	60	Canoga Park, Carlsbad, San Diego, Anaheim
Lockheed Martin **	**151**	25	▲ +126	142	9	Palmdale (Skunk Works), San Diego
Leidos	**64**	54	▲ +10	6	58	San Diego, Vista
FLIR / Teledyne ‡	**46**	42	▲ +4	27	19	Torrance, El Segundo, San Diego
Shield AI	**37**	29	▲ +8	0	37	San Diego (HQ)
BAE Systems ~	**28**	41	▼ -13	0	28	San Diego (ship repair)
Amentum ##	**22**	5	▲ +17	7	15	San Diego, Lancaster
HII Mission Technologies @	**21**	27	▼ -6	0	21	San Diego, Coronado
Parsons ^	**17**	30	▼ -13	16	1	Los Angeles, Pasadena
Kratos ¶	**9**	10	▼ -1	0	9	San Diego
V2X	**3**	7	▼ -4	2	1	Coronado, Glendale
TOTAL	**2,721**	**2,453**	**▲ +268**	**1,716**	**1,005**	**63% LA/OC - 37% San Diego**

† SpaceX carried the same tag structure in August and September (Hawthorne, Irvine, and - in August only - Long Beach listed separately), so the month-over-month change is like-for-like. Hawthorne 558 (from 601), Irvine 19 (from 20), Long Beach 0 (from 2). Vandenberg, "Remote - XX" and "Flexible - Any SpaceX Site" rows are excluded.

‡ FLIR / Teledyne counted across Teledyne's full careers portal, on-site roles only; 20 temporary-duty (TDY) postings inside the two clusters excluded (Hawthorne 18, Poway 2), against 14 in August and 17 in July. Goleta and Camarillo are Teledyne's two largest California sites and both sit outside the counted area.

§ L3Harris remains a floor: postings tagged only "Multiple Locations" are excluded as unverifiable (62 inside the California search view this month, against 72 in August). The pull technique moved to full-board enumeration this cycle for robustness rather than coverage: run side by side on the same date, the California search view and a full 2,087-record board enumeration returned the identical 151 in-cluster postings, with none missed either way.

** Lockheed Martin's Eightfold migration is complete and the board has repopulated. The 151 reqs (Palmdale 139, El Segundo 3, San Diego 9) are a full count, not a floor. August's 25 was a mid-migration floor and July's 110 was measured on the retired legacy site, so neither is comparable - read the +126 as the platform coming back online, not hiring.

†† General Atomics / GA-ASI is now certified like-for-like. Both months applied the careers site's on-site workstyle filter at source: September returned 642 California results (470 on-site, 167 hybrid, 5 remote) against August's 584 (402 on-site, 180 hybrid, 2 remote), and 467 of the 470 on-site listings were captured across ten result pages. SoCal on-site roles rose from 368 to 436. July's reported 507 sits inside September's 642-role pool once hybrid is included, which confirms July's pull counted hybrid roles.

Amentum is counted from this issue by full-board enumeration of its 2,771-posting careers board; earlier issues used a location query, so prior-month figures are not comparable. September: San Diego 14, San Marcos 1, Lancaster 3, Los Angeles 1, Los Alamitos 1, Gardena 1, Long Beach 1.

~ BAE Systems: counted by the same technique used since Issue 1 - reading the site's full job board rather than any location filter - which returned 1,852 postings across 93 pages this cycle. 33 San Diego-county postings were found and 5 excluded for hybrid or remote tags, leaving 28. The -13 is a verified decline, not a method effect.

^ Parsons: 6 hybrid and 3 remote roles were excluded on the detail record's remoteType field, 4 of them inside the two clusters (3 Pasadena, 1 San Diego). Including those four the count would read 21 rather than 17. "Field Location" roles carry no fixed county and are excluded from both clusters.

@ HII Mission Technologies moved to full-board enumeration this cycle for robustness. Its location filter also matches California, Maryland, but those rows fall out at the county step: run side by side on the same date, the filter and a full 616-record board enumeration returned the identical 21 in-cluster postings. September: 22 in-cluster found (San Diego 19, Coronado 2, National City 1), one excluded as hybrid.

¶ RTX and Kratos counted manually by David York on September 18, 2026 (CAPTCHA-gated and embedded portals). Goleta, Edwards, and Lompoc stripped per Index rules. Both are now verified for a second consecutive month.

What the numbers say

Concentration eased. Northrop Grumman (822) and SpaceX (577) together hold 51 percent of every tracked opening, down from 58 percent in August, and the top six - adding GA-ASI, RTX, Boeing and L3Harris - cover roughly 85 percent of the Index, down from 89 percent. Growth was broader this month than last: ten of the sixteen added roles, and eight of those ten did so for reasons unrelated to how the openings are published. The LA/OC corridor reads 63 percent of the sample and San Diego 37 percent, a three-point shift toward San Diego driven almost entirely by GA-ASI. San Diego's 1,005 open roles are anchored by GA-ASI (417), Northrop (301), L3Harris (60) and Leidos (58).

Sort the movers into three buckets. Publishing and method effects: Lockheed (+126) and Amentum (+17) - neither is a clean August comparison and neither should be read as hiring. Verified growth: GA-ASI (+68), RTX (+46), Northrop (+33), L3Harris (+22), Boeing (+17), Leidos (+10), Shield AI (+8), Teledyne (+4). Verified declines: SpaceX (-46), BAE (-13), Parsons (-13), HII (-6), V2X (-4), Kratos (-1). The growth bucket outweighs the decline bucket by more than three to one, and it is led by the primes rather than the mid-tier - the reverse of August.

One qualifier on Parsons. Four of its thirteen lost roles are a counting-rule effect rather than a closure: hybrid-tagged Pasadena and San Diego reqs that this report excludes by design. It is worth flagging because Parsons is small enough in the Index that four roles move the percentage a long way. Whether August applied the same hybrid test cannot be established, because that month's raw records were not retained. Raw posting records are archived from this issue.

New this issue: the expanded sample

> *Three large Southern California A&D employers have never been in this Index. From this issue they are counted and published - alongside the sixteen, not inside them.*

The Openings Index holds the same sixteen employers every month, which is what makes its month-over-month change meaningful. The company list is reviewed quarterly so that the sample keeps pace with the market, and this quarter's review added three employers whose scale is now well established - the case for each appears elsewhere in this issue. **The Aerospace Corporation** holds the single largest federal award record in the three counties ($8.57B), **General Dynamics NASSCO** holds three of the ten largest and is the county's biggest shipyard employer, and **Castelion** took roughly $150M across three production awards inside this issue's window alone.

Employer	Sep	LA/OC	SD	Primary SoCal sites
The Aerospace Corporation ~~	**257**	257	0	El Segundo, Los Angeles AFB
Castelion	**144**	144	0	Torrance
General Dynamics NASSCO	**30**	0	30	San Diego (shipyard)
ADDITIONS	**431**	**401**	**30**	**Pulled September 20, 2026**
EXPANDED SAMPLE (19)	**3,152**	**2,117**	**1,035**	**67% LA/OC - 33% San Diego**

~~ The Aerospace Corporation's applicant tracking system publishes no work-model field on either its listing or its job-detail records, so its 257 cannot be filtered the way every other count in this report is. Instead we read all 257 job descriptions: **222 state an explicit on-site requirement and only 2 mention hybrid work.** The count is therefore close to fully on-site, with at most a handful of hybrid roles inside it. Two screening methods were tested and rejected: job titles, which produced false positives on "Remote Sensing" (a discipline) and "Hybrid Cloud" (a technology); and a keyword scan for remote work, which fired on the company's standard benefits paragraph ("alternate work schedules, including telework options") rather than on the role.

All three were pulled on September 20, 2026, four days after the core sixteen, because the decision to add them was made after this issue's main pull. Counting rules are identical: on-site, the three counties only, primary location, deduplicated.

Why they are reported separately. There is no August figure for any of these three, so the expanded total is a level and not a comparison. The 431 is what the three employers add to the count, not growth in the market. The Index and the expanded sample are therefore reported as two lines, and only the Index carries a month-over-month change.

What the additions change. The three add 431 roles, 401 of them in the LA/OC corridor, moving the regional split from 63/37 to 67/33. Measured on the Index's own scale, The Aerospace Corporation at 257 would rank fourth and Castelion at 144 eighth - Castelion alone carries more open roles than the seven smallest tracked employers combined. **None of that is growth. It is the same market measured across three more employers**, and it lands almost entirely in the South Bay.

El Segundo shows the effect most clearly. Across the sixteen tracked employers the city carries Boeing's 131, Teledyne's 9 and Lockheed's 3, plus an unstated share of RTX's 138 corridor roles. Add The Aerospace Corporation's 257 - 248 tagged El Segundo and 9 at Los Angeles Air Force Base, which sits inside the city - and El Segundo reaches **400 tracked requisitions**. That is third among all tracked locations, behind the city of San Diego (696 across fourteen employers) and Hawthorne (558, SpaceX alone), and ahead of Palmdale's 292 - in a city of roughly 16,000 residents.

By role family

This issue carries no role-family chart. Earlier issues split the six largest employers into engineering, trades, program, IT and support. Two of the six publish category-level data; the other four were Intrepidus estimates drawn from a July reading of posting titles. Building the chart from measured data requires posting titles for all six, and RTX - fourth in the Index this month - is counted manually because its careers site is CAPTCHA-gated, so no title data exists for it. A figure that is roughly 15 percent measurement and 85 percent estimate does not sit well beside a record-level employer count, so it has been removed.

What the September counts do support: **engineering** remains the dominant category at every tracked prime, skewing toward space and restricted programs in LA/OC - Northrop's Redondo Beach (167) and Palmdale (134) and Lockheed's Palmdale (139) are its three largest single prime sites in the corridor - and toward unmanned systems and C4ISR in San Diego, where GA-ASI's Poway (285) and San Diego (132) sites alone carry 41 percent of the county's tracked openings. Likely hardest to fill: cleared RF/EW and autonomy engineers in San Diego, where GA-ASI, Northrop, L3Harris and Shield AI are now competing for the same clearance-constrained pool - and where, unlike August, the primes are bidding hardest.

What the Market Pays[4]

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

The wage benchmarks below are the most recent BLS publishes. They come from Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics, **May 2025 estimates** - the current reference period - released May 15, 2026 for the LA-Long Beach-Anaheim (MSA 31080) and San Diego-Chula Vista-Carlsbad (MSA 41740) metros. OEWS publishes annually, so these figures are restated each month rather than re-pulled; the next reference period is May 2026 and has not been released. The LA/OC aerospace-engineer benchmark is **$161,520**, 2.09 times the corridor's all-occupation mean.

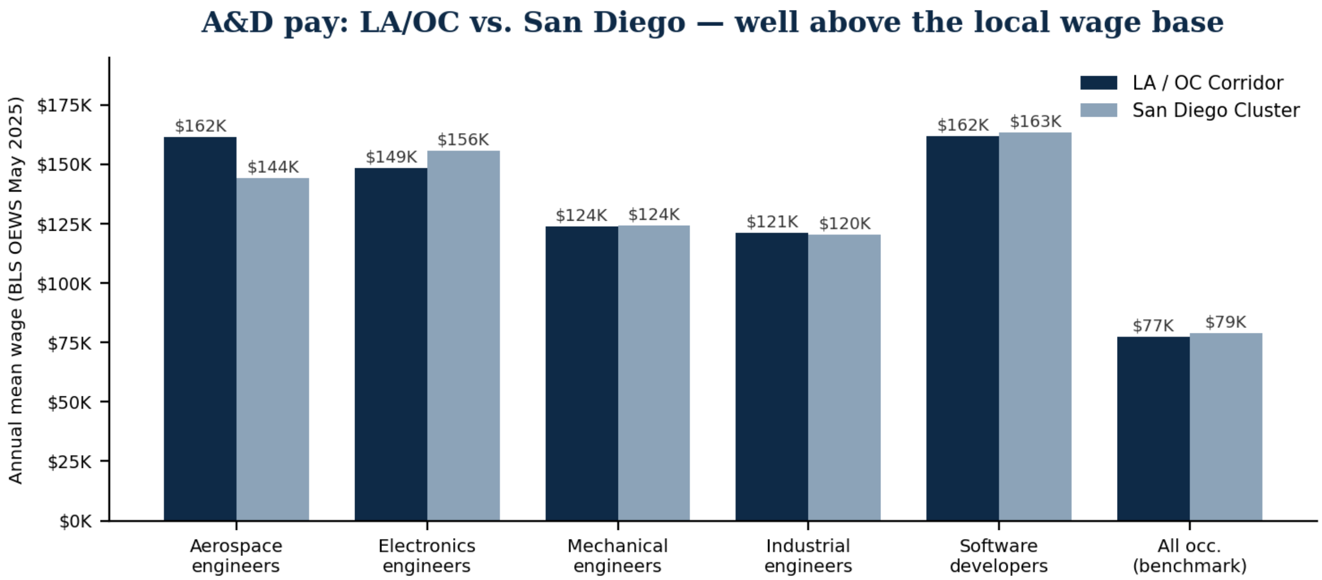

Figure 2: Average annual wage by occupation, LA/OC vs. San Diego (BLS OEWS, May 2025).

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.

Why this matters more this month than last. The Index's two largest verified gains, GA-ASI (+68) and RTX (+46), are both concentrated in occupations priced above - in RTX's case well above - the local base, and GA-ASI's growth lands almost entirely in San Diego, where the electronics-engineer premium is already the tightest constraint in the region. Employers adding cleared engineering headcount in San Diego this quarter are bidding into a market where the official statistics say electronics engineers earn $155,740 and aerospace engineers $144,280, and where no A&D layoff has released candidates in three months.

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 (quarterly refresh)

Across the three counties, **133,617 active federal prime-award records** carried a Los Angeles, Orange, or San Diego place of performance with FY2026 activity as of a September 18, 2026 pull of USASpending.gov, together accounting for **$29.4B in obligations** - $19.8B of it Department of War. Los Angeles County holds the largest share by record count (93,920 records, $14.2B), San Diego the largest defense concentration relative to its size ($12.7B total, $9.5B DoW - 75 percent of its book), and Orange County the smallest ($2.5B). Together the three counties represent 57 percent of California's $51.5B in federal contract obligations this fiscal year.

Year over year, on a lag-matched basis

A raw year-over-year figure would mislead here. Department of War procurement data reaches FPDS-NG and USASpending on roughly a 90-day delay, so the most recent months of any fiscal year are materially under-reported and an unmatched comparison measures reporting maturity rather than activity. The method below is a **lag-matched window**: the same October-through-June slice of each year, cut 90 days before the pull date, so both sides carry the same reporting maturity.

County	FY2025 (Oct 1 - Jun 20)	FY2026 (Oct 1 - Jun 20)	Change
San Diego	$7.84B	$12.05B	+53.7%
Los Angeles	$14.46B	$12.70B	-12.2%
Orange	$0.43B	$2.29B	+429%
Three-county total	$22.73B	$27.03B	+18.9%

Prime awards, types A/B/C/D, place of performance in the named county, USASpending.gov, pulled September 18, 2026. Both windows end June 20 to match the FPDS-NG reporting lag in each year.

Read this carefully, because two of these three numbers are fragile. San Diego's +54 percent is the one we would stand behind: it is broad-based across shipbuilding, ship repair and unmanned systems, and it lines up with the county's 41-role gain at Northrop and 68 at GA-ASI. Orange County's +429 percent is arithmetic on a tiny base - $432M to $2.29B - and a single large action can produce it; we publish it for completeness and would not build a hiring argument on it. Los Angeles County's -12 percent is the figure that deserves the most caution: LA's book is dominated by a handful of very large multi-year records, including a $8.57B Aerospace Corporation FFRDC line, and the timing of when those obligate moves the county total far more than any change in local activity. **LA County postings rose this month while its lag-matched obligations fell. We do not think the second fact predicts the first.**

The anchor programs (largest active contracts with SoCal work)

Awardee	Obligations on record	Place of performance	Program
The Aerospace Corporation	$8,572M	El Segundo (LA)	FFRDC engineering services
General Dynamics NASSCO	$5,904M	San Diego	T-AO 205 design & construction
Northrop Grumman Systems	$3,486M	Redondo Beach (LA)	Next-Gen OPIR Polar SV 1 and 2
Aerojet Rocketdyne (NASA)	$3,373M	Canoga Park (LA)	RS-25 production restart
General Dynamics NASSCO	$3,365M	San Diego	T-AO 214-221 block buy
SpaceX (NASA)	$3,206M	Hawthorne (LA)	Design, development, test, launch
The Boeing Company	$3,131M	El Segundo (LA)	WGS Block II follow-on
Caltech / JPL (NASA)	$2,974M	Pasadena (LA)	Europa Clipper
General Dynamics NASSCO	$1,897M	San Diego	ESB hull 6 long-lead
General Atomics Aeronautical	$1,896M	Poway (SD)	Performance-based logistics
Northrop Grumman Systems	$1,812M	San Diego	MQ-4C Triton LRIP Lot 5 long-lead
Raytheon	$1,795M	El Segundo (LA)	Next Generation Jammer EMD
General Atomics	$1,743M	San Diego	CVN 79 EMALS long-lead material

Largest FY2026-active A&D; prime-award records by cumulative obligations to date, USASpending.gov, pulled September 18, 2026; place of performance from the award record's ZIP. Each line is a single prime-award record - large programs span multiple records, so a program's full value can exceed any one line. Two non-A&D; records inside the same top twenty are excluded here: Carrington Mortgage Services ($1,073M, Anaheim, HUD) and Fisher Sand & Gravel ($847M, San Diego, DHS border construction). L3Harris Interstate Electronics ($480M, Anaheim), listed in Issue 3, no longer ranks in the top twenty.

Freshly awarded - the forward signal

Every item below was read from the Department of War's daily contract announcements for the window August 21 to September 18, 2026, and each states a Southern California place of performance in the announcement itself.

• **BAE Systems Ship Repair, San Diego - $115.7M (Sept 10, 2026).** Fitting out and post-shakedown availabilities for amphibious transport dock ships LPD-30 and LPD-31, work performed in San Diego, completing December 2028. Options would bring the cumulative value to $527.5M. This is the largest confirmed local-place-of-performance award of the window - and it landed in the same month BAE's tracked San Diego postings fell 13. Award-to-posting lag normally runs two to three quarters; we expect this one to show up later.

• **General Dynamics NASSCO, San Diego - $149.6M (Sept 4, 2026).** USS Pinckney (DDG 91) FY2026 Depot Modernization Period. NASSCO is the county's largest shipyard employer and this is the second consecutive month of large San Diego surface-ship maintenance work. It joins the expanded sample this issue at 30 open on-site roles.

• **Raytheon, El Segundo - $603M ceiling (Aug 25, 2026).** A B-52 AN/APQ-188 radar production and sustainment IDIQ running to August 2031, with work at Forrest, Mississippi; El Segundo; McKinney, Texas; and Warner Robins, Georgia. **This is a ceiling, not an obligation**, and El Segundo is one of four named sites - but RTX's tracked SoCal count rose 46 this month, the second-largest verified gain in the Index. RTX is counted manually and we do not hold a site-level split for it, so we cannot attribute that gain to El Segundo.

• **Castelion, Torrance - $150M across three actions (Aug 25, Sept 14, Sept 17).** An $90.0M SBIR Phase III order for low-cost long-range strike weapon production, a $43.7M order for the first production lot of 444 all-up rounds for the Blackbeard Hypersonic Weapon program, and a $16.4M modification whose announcement states work performed at Torrance through June 2028. Castelion joins the expanded sample this issue at 144 open Torrance roles - three production-scale awards and a 144-role hiring plan in one LA County plant.

• **San Diego ship repair keeps stacking.** Walashek (National City) took $26.6M for LCAC Extended Service Life work on LCAC 43 and 57 at Camp Pendleton (Sept 16), after $12.2M in August. A five-awardee SWRMC non-skid decking IDIQ with a $19.7M ceiling and a five-year ordering period from Sept 29 went to Cabrillo Enterprises, Naval Engineering Support and Prime Time Coatings (all National City), Pacific Armada NW (San Diego) and one Florida firm, with work performed in San Diego (Sept 17).

• **Two smaller items worth naming.** Boeing Long Beach took $34.3M for Replacement Heads Up Display Phase C, work at Long Beach and Mesa, completing July 2029 (Sept 18). Meggitt Defense Systems in Irvine took $9.4M for P-8A liquid air palletized system kits (Aug 31) - a rare Orange County A&D award in a county whose federal work almost never surfaces as a discrete local action.

• **And four that look local but are not.** General Atomics Aeronautical's $14.6M Spain MQ-9A logistics award carries a Poway dateline but states work at Badajoz, Spain. Harper Construction's $223.6M award carries a San Diego dateline and performs in Oklahoma City. PKL Services (Poway) performs at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho. Seemann Composites, a Karman Space & Defense subsidiary listed at Huntington Beach, performs in Gulfport, Mississippi. We list them because the dateline-versus-place-of-performance confusion is the single most common way local A&D contract coverage misreads a federal award.

Out for bid - the earliest signal

Solicitations are the earliest visible demand signal, ahead of awards and well ahead of postings. Five actions with a confirmed Southern California place of performance sit in the next two quarters. We re-verified three of the five on SAM.gov this cycle and say plainly which two we did not:

Action	Agency / place of performance	Status (verified Sept 18, 2026)
SWRMC HM&E fleet technical assistance follow-on (N5523626R0007)	NAVSEA / SWRMC - San Diego	Amendment 0004, posted Sept 9, moved offers to Sept 16. Now closed; no award announced.
MEO Missile Warning / Missile Tracking Epoch 3 & 4 (RFI, FA8810-RFI-26-SYD84-E3E4)	Space Systems Command, System Delta 84 - El Segundo	Updated Sept 8; responses now due Dec 1, 2026, moved from Oct 31.
SWRMC commercial industrial services, non-skid decking	NAVSEA / SWRMC - San Diego	AWARDED Sept 17 to five firms, $19.7M ceiling, five base years from Sept 29.
Kronos Family of Systems CSO, AOI 4; Zero Trust Architecture RFI	SSC - El Segundo	Not re-verified this cycle. Issue 3 status carried: responses were due Aug 28 and Sept 11.
USS Cincinnati (LCS 20) and USS Canberra (LCS 30) FY27 DSRAs	NAVSEA - West Coast; both ships San Diego-homeported	Not re-verified this cycle. Issue 3 status carried: award anticipated on or before Nov 2026.

Both of the two actions we could re-verify have slipped. The SWRMC fleet technical assistance follow-on moved from a September 11 close to September 16 and has now closed without an announced award; the MEO Epoch 3/4 RFI moved its response date a full month, from October 31 to December 1. Neither slip is unusual, but both push the associated hiring further right. We flag explicitly which rows we re-checked and which we carried, because a status table that silently ages is worse than no table.

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 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). Those forecast dates are from the May 2026 briefing and were not re-verified this cycle.

Orange County still has no visible forward solicitation pipeline, and that is structural rather than a gap in our search. Orange County A&D federal work - Boeing Huntington Beach and Seal Beach, L3Harris Interstate Electronics in Anaheim, Meggitt in Irvine, Anduril in Costa Mesa - is performed at contractor facilities under existing vehicles and modifications, so it surfaces as awards (Meggitt's $9.4M P-8A kits this month) rather than as new place-of-performance-tagged solicitations. The county's tracked openings rose anyway: Boeing's Seal Beach and Huntington Beach sites, L3Harris Anaheim and Yorba Linda, and RTX Fullerton all sit inside the LA/OC corridor's 109-role gain.

Risk Signals - WARN Watch

As of the September 18 pull, no tracked A&D company carries an active California WARN notice in LA, Orange, or San Diego counties. The three counties together carry 38 active filings covering 4,229 workers - Los Angeles 18 filings and 2,456 workers, Orange 13 and 1,093, San Diego 7 and 680 - and not one is an aerospace or defense employer. The largest active filings are home care, parking, food processing, hospitality, healthcare and enterprise software: 24Hr Homecare (738), LAZ Parking (247), Sapporo U.S.A (200), Wind & Sea Restaurant (198), Bumble Bee Foods (197), Sodexo (164).

> *Net signal: zero disclosed A&D workers in active WARN notices against 2,721 open roles. The active-window A&D layoff signal is nil for a third straight month.*

The two nearest-adjacent manufacturing names in the active window are FormFactor in San Diego (107, semiconductor test) and SonTek/Xylem (36, hydrological instruments). Neither is A&D, and we are not going to stretch them into the category to manufacture a signal. Jet Propulsion Laboratory's 543-worker filing, effective December 2025, has aged out of the active window and sits in the archive.

What this means practically. Three consecutive months with no A&D layoff filings, against an Index that added 268 roles, means there is no pool of displaced cleared candidates entering this market. Every employer named in the Index is hiring into the same fixed supply. The standard caveat applies and is worth repeating: **state WARN publication runs behind filing**, so an absence of notices in the most recent weeks is an absence of visible data rather than proof that nothing was filed.

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: the primes took the lead back

August's story was a San Diego mid-tier adding roles while the primes flattened. September reversed it. The four largest verified gains in the Index this month are General Atomics (+68), RTX (+46), Northrop Grumman (+33) and L3Harris (+22) - every one of them a prime - while the mid-tier names that drove August gave most of it back: BAE down 13, Parsons down 13, HII down 6. The mid-tier did not collapse; it moved by single-digit and low-double-digit counts on small bases, which is what small bases do. The prime surge is the larger and more durable fact.

Where the prime demand concentrates is unusually legible this month. GA-ASI's growth is Poway (285 open roles) and San Diego (132) - unmanned systems engineering and manufacturing, and now 41 percent of every tracked opening in San Diego County. Northrop's growth is San Diego (+41), not the LA/OC corridor, which eased 8. RTX added 46 across El Segundo, Fullerton and San Diego, with 138 of its 167 in the corridor. And Palmdale is now where two primes' largest Southern California sites sit on the same airfield: Lockheed's 139 open roles - its biggest SoCal site by a wide margin now that its board has repopulated - alongside Northrop's 134 and GA-ASI's 19, **292 tracked on-site reqs in one town**.

Where the roles actually sit, ranked. Because this issue adds three employers, the site picture changes enough to be worth stating plainly. Counting all nineteen employers' postings by city: **San Diego 696** across fourteen employers, **Hawthorne 558** (SpaceX alone), **El Segundo 400** across four, **Palmdale 292** across three, **Poway 285** (GA-ASI alone), Redondo Beach 167, Torrance 157, Woodland Hills 80, Canoga Park 55. One caveat: RTX is counted manually and we hold no site-level split for it, so its 138 corridor roles are absent from the city figures above (El Segundo and Fullerton are its two corridor sites) and its 29 San Diego roles are assigned to the city of San Diego. El Segundo's 400 is therefore a floor.

Awards that land on a specific SoCal floor

A note on sourcing. Every item in this section was read directly from the Department of War's daily contract announcements for August 21 through September 18, 2026 - every publication day in the window, not a sample - and each states a Southern California place of performance in the announcement text. Where a release names a dateline rather than a work location, we say so.

• **BAE Systems Ship Repair, San Diego - $115.7M (Sept 10, 2026).** Fitting out and post-shakedown availabilities for LPD-30 and LPD-31, work performed in San Diego, completing December 2028, options to $527.5M cumulative. Waterfront availabilities of this size pull shipfitters, welders, electricians, pipefitters and planners. BAE's tracked San Diego postings fell 13 this month, which is the opposite of what this award implies - the resolution is almost certainly timing, since award-to-posting lag normally runs two to three quarters.

• **General Dynamics NASSCO, San Diego - $149.6M (Sept 4, 2026).** USS Pinckney (DDG 91) FY2026 Depot Modernization Period, fixed-price incentive fee. NASSCO also holds three of the region's ten largest active prime-award records. It was the most obvious San Diego gap in this report's coverage, and it joins the expanded sample this issue at 30 open roles.

• **Raytheon, El Segundo - $603M ceiling (Aug 25, 2026).** B-52 AN/APQ-188 radar production and sustainment IDIQ to August 2031. **A ceiling is not an obligation**, and the work is shared across Forrest, Mississippi; El Segundo; McKinney, Texas; and Warner Robins, Georgia. Still, it is the largest new El Segundo-named action of the window, and RTX's SoCal postings rose 46.

• **Castelion, Torrance - about $150M across three actions (Aug 25, Sept 14 and Sept 17, 2026).** A $90.0M SBIR Phase III order for low-cost, highly manufacturable long-range strike weapon production; a $43.7M order for the first production lot of 444 all-up rounds for the Blackbeard Hypersonic Weapon program; and a $16.4M modification stating work performed at Torrance through June 2028. Three production-scale awards to one LA County plant inside four weeks is the clearest new-entrant signal this report has seen.

• **San Diego ship repair keeps stacking below the headline.** Walashek (National City) took $26.6M for LCAC Extended Service Life work on LCAC 43 and 57 at Camp Pendleton (Sept 16), following $12.2M in August. A five-awardee SWRMC non-skid decking IDIQ, $19.7M ceiling, five base years from Sept 29, went to three National City firms, one San Diego firm and one Florida firm, with work performed in San Diego (Sept 17). These are small dollars and real trades headcount.

• **Boeing Long Beach - $34.3M (Sept 18, 2026)** for Replacement Heads Up Display Phase C mod kits and spares, work at Long Beach and Mesa, Arizona, completing July 2029. **Meggitt Defense Systems, Irvine - $9.4M (Aug 31, 2026)** for P-8A liquid air palletized system kits: a rare discrete Orange County A&D action.

• **Northrop Grumman, Woodland Hills - $34.4M (announced Sept 14, republished Sept 15).** A ceiling increase for UH-1Y and AH-1Z Link-16 kits, with work split Chicago 23 percent, Woodland Hills 22, Salt Lake City 20, San Diego 9 and Rancho Cucamonga 8. Woodland Hills is Northrop's third-largest SoCal site in this month's Index at 80 open roles.

Four awards that look local and are not

Local coverage of federal contracting turns on one field: whether the company's address is read as the place of performance. All four of these carry Southern California datelines in the announcement and state work elsewhere. **General Atomics Aeronautical, Poway - $14.6M** (Sept 2) performs at Badajoz, Spain. **Harper Construction, San Diego - $223.6M** (Sept 10) builds a depot maintenance hangar in Oklahoma City. **PKL Services, Poway - $25.2M** (Sept 8) performs at Mountain Home AFB, Idaho. **Seemann Composites, a Karman Space & Defense subsidiary listed at Huntington Beach - $31.3M** (Sept 14) performs in Gulfport, Mississippi. None of them creates a Southern California job.

Program watch

• **Palmdale is the region's densest restricted-programs corridor.** With Lockheed's board fully repopulated, Lockheed shows 139 open Palmdale roles and Northrop 134, against Northrop's 160 in August when Lockheed was invisible. Both work restricted programs at Air Force Plant 42; neither company discloses program-level headcount and we do not infer it. What the data supports is the site total - 292 open on-site reqs in one town of 170,000 people, fourth among all tracked locations behind San Diego, Hawthorne and El Segundo, and the only one of the four built on classified aircraft work.

• **The B-21 and Skunk Works corridor is the reason the LA/OC corridor held up** even as SpaceX shed 46 roles. Strip SpaceX out and LA/OC rose from 984 to 1,139 this month.

• **Castelion is building hypersonics in Torrance at production scale.** The Sept 14 order is explicitly for a first production lot of 444 tactical missiles, not a prototype effort, and the Sept 17 modification states Torrance work through June 2028. Its 144 open Torrance roles enter this report for the first time in the expanded sample - a company absent from our coverage last month that out-posts nine of the sixteen Index members.

Hiring & expansion notes

• **Job boards have stabilized.** Lockheed Martin's move to lockheedmartin.eightfold.ai is complete and the board is fully repopulated - if you built a saved search there in August when only 25 reqs were live, rebuild it now against 151. L3Harris's careers.l3harris.com is likewise settled. Both sites were mid-migration during the August pull.

• **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 repeat it as context, not news - but it is the reason LA/OC demand should be expected to firm through next year independent of this month's readings.

• **A note on this month's sourcing.** Issues 1 through 3 paired the contract awards with a company-announcement roundup. This issue's roundup is drawn entirely from primary federal contract announcements, read for every publication day in the window and verifiable line by line. A separate company press-release sweep was not run this cycle, so trade-press items we could not check against company releases are not included.

Monthly Spotlight[6]

THIS MONTH: Why Job-Board Counts Move When Hiring Does Not

> *Each issue features one rotating deep-dive on a topic that shapes local A&D hiring. This quarter: the four mechanics that move a job-board count without a single hiring decision behind it - and how to tell them apart from the real thing.*

Two of this month's largest moves are not hiring at all. Lockheed Martin is up 126 because its job board came back online after a platform migration, and one further count moved on a method change noted in the Index footnotes. The two other large moves, General Atomics at +68 and SpaceX at -46, are real - but each needed a specific step taken to make it comparable. Four mechanics sit behind all of it, and anyone tracking competitor headcount from career sites runs into the same four.

1. Platform migrations

Lockheed Martin: 25 to 151. Lockheed retired lockheedmartinjobs.com for an Eightfold site during August. Mid-migration, 25 requisitions were live on the new board; that was an accurate count of what the company had published, and this report carried it as a floor. The board has now repopulated and shows 151, with Palmdale alone at 139. Nothing about Lockheed's hiring changed in four weeks. The *publication* of it did. Two of the sixteen tracked employers changed platforms inside sixty days, which is a useful reminder of how often this happens.

2. Work-model filters

General Atomics: 368 to 436. GA-ASI's careers site carries an on-site / hybrid / remote facet. Applied at source, September returned 642 California results - 470 on-site, 167 hybrid, 5 remote - against August's 584 split 402 / 180 / 2. Because the same facet was applied on both dates, the +68 is a real move in on-site demand. July's reported 507 is not comparable to either month: it sits inside September's 642-role pool only once hybrid roles are counted. A count is only as comparable as the filter behind it, and the filter has to be the same one each time.

3. Location tagging

SpaceX: 623 to 577. In July SpaceX published its Southern California roles under a single consolidated Hawthorne tag. In August it split them again across Hawthorne, Irvine and Long Beach. Neither month described a different workforce, but the counts differed sharply. September carries the same tag structure as August, which makes this month's 577 - down 46 - a like-for-like read of the same sites.

4. Postings that cannot be placed

L3Harris: 62 postings set aside this month. Some employers publish roles against no single city. L3Harris tags a block of requisitions “Multiple Locations” - 62 inside its California view this month, 72 in August - and there is no way to tell from the posting whether the work sits in Canoga Park, Carlsbad or Rochester, New York. Parsons does the same with a “Field Location” tag, and Leidos publishes multi-site roles that resolve only when you fetch each posting individually. This report excludes what it cannot place, which is why L3Harris is labeled a floor: the true SoCal figure is 155 or higher, never lower.

The practical point for anyone reading a posting-based number: **ask what the source excludes, not just what it counts.** An aggregator that silently assigns those 62 roles to a headquarters city, or drops them, produces a different answer from ours - and neither answer announces its own treatment.

How this report separates the two

Every number in this Index passes through someone else’s software before it reaches us - sixteen employers running at least eight recruiting platforms between them, each exposing location, work model and pagination differently. Four checks now run every month, on every employer, before anything is written:

• **Board-total reconciliation.** Each pull records the size of the employer’s entire job board alongside how many records the technique retrieved. An unexplained shortfall between the two halts the pull.

• **Full-board enumeration by default.** Where a filtered query is unavoidable - Eightfold's radius search, BrassRing's workstyle facet - the board total is captured anyway and reconciled against what came back.

• **A variance gate.** Any employer moving more than 25 percent month over month is re-pulled and examined before publication. Seven tripped it this month - Lockheed, Amentum, V2X, Parsons, RTX, BAE and Shield AI - and each is explained in the Index footnotes.

• **Record-level archiving.** Raw posting IDs are retained from this issue forward, so when a technique changes, prior months can be recomputed on the new basis and the series restated as a whole rather than broken at the join.

What it means for you

• **If you benchmark against this Index:** read Lockheed at 151 as the level, not 25 to 151 as growth. Employer-level comparability notes are in the Index footnotes.

• **If you track competitors from career sites:** check what your saved search returns against the board's own total, and re-check it whenever a company changes platform. Two of sixteen did so in the last sixty days.

• **If you are a job seeker:** location filters are the least reliable part of most job boards. If a company you want appears to have nothing open in your city, page through the whole board before you believe it.

• **And when you read any posting-based market figure** - including this one - ask which of the four mechanics above could be moving it. A count that jumps by a hundred roles in a month is far more often a publishing change than a hiring one.

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

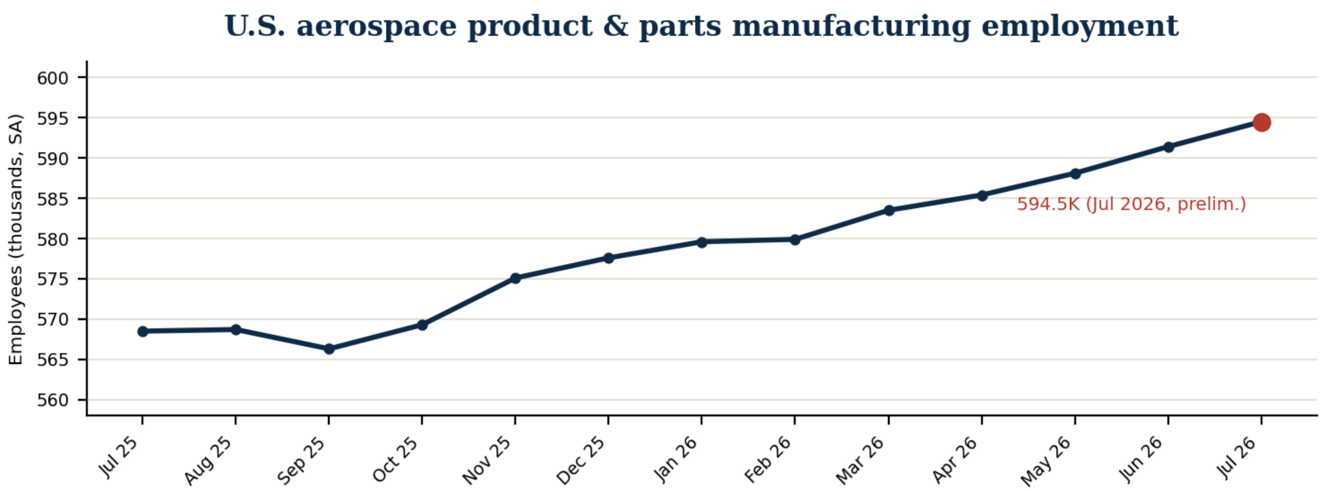

Figure 3: BLS Current Employment Statistics series CES3133640001 - all employees, aerospace product and parts manufacturing, seasonally adjusted. July 2026 preliminary; June 2026 revised to 591.4K from the 591.6K published in Issue 3. Extracted September 18, 2026.

The national industry keeps climbing. **This paragraph is about headcount, not pay** - the wage benchmarks earlier in this report are BLS OEWS May 2025 estimates and are unrelated to the dates below. U.S. aerospace product and parts manufacturing **employment** reached a preliminary **594,500 jobs in July 2026**, up 26,000 or 4.6 percent over twelve months and rising in every month of 2026 so far. That is the most people the industry has employed in any month since **October 1993**, when the series stood at 600,300 on its long post-Cold-War decline. We verified it against the full series back to 1990: no month between November 1993 and June 2026 reached 594,500 jobs. The reference month moves with each print - June's 591,600 put it at November 1993, and July's higher figure carries it one month further back.

The August 28 benchmark revision did not move this series materially. The 2025 monthly values are unchanged and June 2026 was revised down 0.2K. No August 2026 value had been published as of our September 18 pull.

The benchmark snapshot

Metric	National (U.S.)	Southern California	Takeaway
Aerospace mfg. HEADCOUNT (not pay)	594,500 jobs, +4.6% YoY - most since Oct 1993	Index +2.8% to +5.2% month over month*	Local postings now rising with the national industry
Aerospace engineer PAY (OEWS May 2025)	$142,060	$161,520 LA/OC - $144,280 SD	LA/OC pays 14% above national - the country's premium market
Electronics engineer PAY (OEWS May 2025)	$137,280	$148,620 LA/OC - $155,740 SD	San Diego's cleared EW/C4ISR premium exceeds LA/OC
Aerospace technician PAY (OEWS May 2025)	$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	$29.4B 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 Lockheed platform recovery and the Amentum method effect (and, for the lower figure, GA-ASI). Directional comparison only.

Bottom line: for the first time in this series, the local and national signals point the same way. 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; the three-county federal book grew 19 percent on a lag-matched basis, led by a 54 percent rise in San Diego; more than a billion dollars of new LA County capacity is under construction for 2027 occupancy; and tracked postings rose in the same month that national aerospace manufacturing employment hit its highest level since 1993. Three consecutive months without a single A&D layoff notice in the three counties says the constraint here is supply of cleared people, not demand for them.

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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. The wage backbone is BLS OEWS May 2025 and will not move before spring 2027.

A light monthly pulse runs every month; a deeper quarterly flagship lands in September, December, March, and June. **This is a flagship issue.** It carries the quarterly contract census with the series' first lag-matched year-over-year comparison, the re-baselined GA-ASI and Lockheed Martin counts, the company-list review and the three employers it added, the and a full review of every employer's pull technique.

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 (September 16, 2026 for twelve employers; General Atomics and V2X September 18; RTX and Kratos counted manually September 18). 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. **Expanded**

sample: from this issue, three further employers - The Aerospace Corporation, Castelion and General Dynamics NASSCO - are counted on identical rules and published as a separate line. They were pulled September 20, 2026 and have no prior-month baseline, so the expanded total is a level and not a comparison. The expanded sample runs alongside the sixteen through the December flagship and becomes the headline series in March 2027.

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 re-baseline (September 2026) - resolved. Both August and September applied the careers site's on-site workstyle filter at source: August returned 584 California results (402 on-site, 180 hybrid, 2 remote) and September 642 (470 on-site, 167 hybrid, 5 remote). September captured 467 of the 470 on-site listings across ten result pages and counted 436 SoCal on-site roles against August's 368. The two months are like-for-like and the +68 is a market movement. July's reported 507 is still not comparable to either: it sits inside September's 642-role California pool only once hybrid roles are counted, which indicates hybrid-tagged roles were included in the July pull.

Method review - every one of the sixteen documented pull techniques was re-run this cycle and compared, record by record, against a full enumeration of that employer's job board. Fifteen returned identical in-cluster sets. Amentum moved to full-board enumeration of its 2,771-posting board, so its prior-month figures are not comparable. L3Harris and HII also moved to full-board enumeration, in their cases for robustness rather than coverage - the prior technique returned the identical in-cluster set on the same date (151 and 21 postings respectively). BAE's technique has always read the full board and did not change. Separately, Lockheed Martin's migration to lockheedmartin.eightfold.ai is complete and its count is no longer a floor; L3Harris remains a floor because postings tagged "Multiple Locations" cannot be placed.

Wages - BLS Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics, May 2025 release (published released May 15, 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 September 18, 2026. The year-over-year comparison uses a lag-matched window - October 1 to June 20 in each fiscal year, cut 90 days before the pull date - because Department of War procurement data reaches FPDS-NG on roughly a 90-day delay and an unmatched comparison would measure reporting maturity rather than activity. Award headlines were read from the Department of War's daily contract announcements for every publication day between August 21 and September 18, 2026. Solicitation status from SAM.gov, checked September 18, 2026; NIWC Pacific forecast dates from its May 7, 2026 briefing and not re-verified this cycle.

Layoff / WARN watch - California EDD WARN filings via CaliforniaWarn.com, data current to September 18, 2026; active filings are those upcoming or effective within the last 90 days. 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, retrieved via the BLS public API on September 18, 2026 and verified against the full series back to 1990; 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. Fourth issue. All sixteen tracked employers counted this cycle. Figures are drawn from public sources (company career sites, USASpending.gov, BLS, California WARN filings, and government announcements); where a number is our own count - chiefly the Openings Index - it is labeled. Change arithmetic: all sixteen employers 2,453 to 2,721 (+268, +10.9%); excluding Lockheed Martin and Amentum from both months 2,423 to 2,548 (+125, +5.2%); additionally excluding GA-ASI 2,055 to 2,112 (+57, +2.8%).

2 Openings Index - scope & method. See Methodology above for the full definition, the exclusion list, the GA-ASI re-baseline, the method changes made this issue, and the expanded sample. Per-employer counts, methods and confidence ratings appear in the count sheet below. Expanded-sample detail: The Aerospace Corporation El Segundo 248 and Los Angeles AFB 9 (434-posting board, 308 detail fetches, one Remote - US posting excluded, no work-model field published); Castelion Torrance 143 plus one Torrance/Washington DC posting counted to Torrance, one Allen TX posting excluded, 145 unique IDs; NASSCO San Diego 92113 21 and 92108 9 from a 53-posting board. Employer-level site detail behind this month's counts: Northrop Redondo Beach 167, Palmdale 134, Woodland Hills 80, El Segundo 51, Northridge 42, Manhattan Beach 22, Commerce 13, Azusa 10, San Diego 301. SpaceX Hawthorne 558, Irvine 19. GA-ASI Poway 285, San Diego 132, Palmdale 19. Boeing El Segundo 131, Seal Beach 23, Huntington Beach 5, Long Beach 5, Los Angeles 2. L3Harris Canoga Park 55, Carlsbad 32, San Diego 27, Yorba Linda 20, Anaheim 17. Lockheed Palmdale 139, San Diego 9, El Segundo 3.

3 Contracts & the Demand Signal. Census, year-over-year comparison and anchor table: USASpending.gov, pulled September 18, 2026 (filters in Methodology). FY2026 to date: Los Angeles 93,920 records / $14.15B / $8.99B DoW; San Diego 22,898 / $12.66B / $9.48B DoW; Orange 16,799 / $2.55B / $1.32B DoW; total 133,617 / $29.37B / $19.79B DoW. California statewide 221,037 records / $51.47B. Lag-matched Oct 1 - Jun 20 window: FY2025 $22.73B (LA $14.46B, SD $7.84B, OC $0.43B) against FY2026 $27.03B (LA $12.70B, SD $12.05B, OC $2.29B). Award headlines from the Department of War daily contract announcements, read for every publication day from August 21 to September 18, 2026: BAE Systems Ship Repair LPD-30/31 availabilities, Sept 10 ($115,659,256; options to $527,532,907; San Diego; completion December 2028); General Dynamics NASSCO USS Pinckney DDG 91 FY2026 Depot Modernization Period, Sept 4 ($149,599,723); Raytheon B-52 AN/APQ-188 radar production and sustainment IDIQ, Aug 25 ($603,000,000 CEILING; work at Forrest MS, El Segundo CA, McKinney TX, Warner Robins GA; completion Aug 20, 2031); Castelion Corp. Torrance, Aug 25 ($89,997,162 SBIR Phase III), Sept 14 ($43,650,000, first production lot of 444 all-up rounds, Blackbeard Hypersonic Weapon) and Sept 17 ($16,369,996 modification P00014, work at Torrance to June 30, 2028); Walashek Industrial & Marine LCAC E-SLEP for LCAC 43 and 57, Sept 16 ($26,621,152; work at Camp Pendleton; completion June 2029); SWRMC commercial industrial services non-skid decking multiple award, Sept 17 ($19,720,480 ceiling across five awardees; five base years from Sept 29, 2026; work in San Diego); Boeing Long Beach Replacement Heads Up Display Phase C, Sept 18 ($34,286,429; Long Beach and Mesa AZ; completion July 2, 2029); Northrop Grumman Woodland Hills UH-1Y/AH-1Z Link-16 kit ceiling increase P00005, announced Sept 14 and republished Sept 15 ($34,388,301; Chicago 23%, Woodland Hills 22%, Salt Lake City 20%, San Diego 9%, Rancho Cucamonga 8%); Meggitt Defense Systems Irvine P-8A liquid air palletized system kits, Aug 31 ($9,373,421); Epsilon C5I San Diego VISION multi-INT order, Aug 21 ($9,327,502); Lockheed Martin RMS Aegis design agent field engineering, Sept 3 ($17,788,458; San Diego 27%); General Dynamics Mission Systems LCS ICMS sustainment, Aug 27 ($31,769,754; San Diego 15%). Four awards with Southern California datelines and stated work elsewhere are listed in the body and excluded from any local read. Solicitation status verified on SAM.gov September 18, 2026: N5523626R0007 amendment 0004 posted Sept 9 moved offers to Sept 16 at 10:00 AM PDT; FA8810-RFI-26-SYD84-E3E4 updated Sept 8 with responses due December 1, 2026. Rows marked not re-verified carry Issue 3 status. 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 on August 24, 2026 and restated unchanged this issue (the series does not update before spring 2027). 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. Every award in this section was read from the Department of War daily contract announcements at war.gov for the window August 21 to September 18, 2026; full citations are in footnote 3. Site-level posting counts are from this issue's Openings Index pull. The Palmdale site total of 292 is the sum of Lockheed Martin 139, Northrop Grumman 134 and General Atomics 19 tracked on-site reqs; neither company discloses program-level headcount and none is inferred here. The LA/OC ex-SpaceX comparison is 984 in August against 1,139 in September. Anduril's Long Beach and Lakewood campus was announced January 26, 2026 and is included as context only. This issue did not run a separate company press-release sweep; that is stated in the body rather than papered over.

6 Monthly Spotlight. All employer movements and board totals are from this issue's Openings Index pull and the per-employer pull logs retained for each issue. L3Harris “Multiple Locations” exclusions: 62 inside the California search view on September 16, 2026, against 72 in August; Parsons “Field Location” and Leidos multi-site rows resolved by per-posting detail fetch. BAE Systems: the site's California location search returned zero results on September 16, 2026; full-board enumeration of 1,852 postings returned 33 San Diego-county postings, 28 after excluding hybrid and remote tags. HII Mission Technologies: the site’s locationsearch=California parameter also matches California, Maryland; full-board enumeration of 615 postings returned 22 in-cluster postings, 21 after excluding one hybrid role. Platform count: Eightfold, Workday, Phenom, BrassRing, SuccessFactors, Lever, iCIMS and two bespoke career sites across the sixteen tracked employers.

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), retrieved via the BLS public API September 18, 2026. July 2026 preliminary at 594.5K; June 2026 revised to 591.4K from the 591.6K published in Issue 3; July 2025 at 568.5K gives +26.0K and +4.6% year over year. The October 1993 reference was verified by querying the full series from 1990: the last month at or above 594.5K was October 1993 (600.3K), and the maxima for 2000-2010, 2010-2020 and 2020-2026 are 526.7K, 543.0K and 594.5K respectively. The August 28, 2026 preliminary benchmark revision left the 2025 monthly values unchanged. No August 2026 value had been published 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). Collaborative Combat Aircraft received $0.17B in enacted FY2026 appropriations against a $0.18B base request; the June 24, 2026 supplemental request totaled $86.1B, of which $67.1B was for Department of War activities department-wide (CRS IN12700), with no published CCA line. 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.

September count sheet

Employer	Sep	Aug	Method (September)	Confidence
Northrop Grumman	822	789	Eightfold API, LA r=75 + SD r=60 merged, deduped; 88 hybrid and 1 remote dropped on workLocationOption	High
SpaceX	577	623	Official careers site, 1,995 unique Greenhouse IDs parsed and deduped	High (same tags as August)
General Atomics / GA-ASI	436	368	BrassRing, Onsite workstyle facet applied at source; 467 of 470 on-site listings captured	High; floor (467/470)
RTX / Raytheon	167	121	Manual count by David York (CAPTCHA-gated site)	High (manual)
Boeing	166	149	Official Phenom site, click-through pagination, all 14 pages, 197 records	High
L3Harris	155	133	Full-board enumeration, 2,098 postings, filtered by city; Multiple Locations excluded	Floor; validated against prior method
Lockheed Martin	151	25	Eightfold API, migration complete and board repopulated	High; not comparable to Aug
Leidos	64	54	Workday cxs API (117 records) + detail fetch on all 30 multi-location rows	High
FLIR / Teledyne	46	42	Workday cxs full board (713) + detail fetch on 55 multi-location rows; 20 TDY excluded	High
Shield AI	37	29	Lever API, 499 postings, onsite workplaceType only	High
BAE Systems	28	41	Full-board ddo read, 1,852 postings - same technique as prior issues	High; unchanged method
Amentum	22	5	Full-board enumeration, 2,771 postings + 328 detail fetches	High; method changed this issue
HII Mission Technologies	21	27	Full-board enumeration, 615 postings	High; validated against prior method
Parsons	17	30	Workday cxs, detail fetch on all CA rows; 6 hybrid and 3 remote excluded on remoteType	High
Kratos	9	10	Manual count by David York (embedded portal resists automation)	High (manual)
V2X	3	7	Full-board enumeration via the site's jobs API, 735 postings	High
EXPANDED SAMPLE ADDITIONS — pulled September 20, 2026, no prior-month baseline				
The Aerospace Corporation	257	—	Workday cxs full board (434) + detail fetch on 308 rows; tenant exposes no work-model field	High on level; hybrid NOT excluded
Castelion	144	—	castelion.com single-page list, 145 unique job IDs, deduped	High

Employer	Sep	Aug	Method (September)	Confidence
General Dynamics NASSCO	30	—	SuccessFactors full board (jobs.nassco.com), 53 postings	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 core + 3 expanded)

Core Index (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.

Expanded sample (adds 3, from this issue): The Aerospace Corporation (El Segundo, FFRDC), Castelion (Torrance, hypersonic strike), General Dynamics NASSCO (San Diego, shipbuilding and repair). Counted on the same rules, pulled September 20, 2026, published as a separate line until March 2027.

Quarterly company-list review

Three employers were added this issue and are published as the expanded sample (see the Openings Index section). The reasoning for each:

• **The Aerospace Corporation (El Segundo)** holds the single largest federal award record in the three counties at $8.57B. It was the most obvious gap in the list, and at 257 open roles it would rank fourth among the existing sixteen.

• **General Dynamics NASSCO (San Diego)** holds three of the region's ten largest active prime-award records ($5.90B, $3.37B, $1.90B) and is the county's largest shipyard employer. Our ship-repair coverage ran through BAE alone, which is why BAE's small base was swinging the San Diego narrative month to month.

• **Castelion (Torrance)** took roughly $150M across three production awards inside this issue's window, including a first production lot of 444 tactical missiles. A year ago it would have been too early. At 144 open roles it is not.

• **Still under review:** Anduril (Costa Mesa; Long Beach campus mid-2027), Rocket Lab (Long Beach), Viasat (Carlsbad), Impulse Space (Redondo Beach). These carry forward again.

How the two series relate. The sixteen-employer Index is the headline figure in this issue because it is the only series with a month-over-month history. The expanded sample publishes as a second line and carries levels only. No employer was removed: all sixteen current members posted verified Southern California openings this month, and the smallest, V2X at three roles, is still a real reading of base-services hiring.

One qualifier on the addition, and how far we could close it. The Aerospace Corporation's careers platform publishes no work-model field on either its listing or its job-detail records, so its 257 cannot be filtered the way the other eighteen counts are. Rather than publish an unqualified upper bound, we read all 257 job descriptions: **222 state an explicit on-site requirement and 2 mention hybrid work**. That is not the same as a platform-level filter, and we do not present it as one, but it is enough to say the figure is close to fully on-site rather than unknown.