

MONTHLY MARKET INTELLIGENCE

SoCal Aerospace & Defense Hiring Report

Southern California — LA/OC + San Diego • October 2026 Edition • Issue 5

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.

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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. 5, a monthly pulse. All sixteen tracked employers, and all three employers in the expanded sample, are counted from their official career systems as of October 20, 2026. RTX is counted by hand because its careers site is CAPTCHA-gated. The quarterly items - the federal contract census, the company-list review and the full audit of every pull technique - are carried at their September readings.

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The Monthly Pulse¹

Southern California's aerospace and defense market posted **3,092 on-site openings** on October 20, 371 more than September's 2,721 (+13.6 percent) and the highest reading in the series to date.

SpaceX accounts for nearly half of the gain. Its count rose 185, from 577 to 762, on the same Hawthorne and Irvine location tags as September, with a Long Beach tag reappearing for four roles, so the comparison is like-for-like. SpaceX's whole careers board grew from 1,995 postings to 2,774 over the same month. Set SpaceX aside and the other fifteen are still up 186 roles, +8.7 percent.

Three more employers rose by more than a quarter and were re-pulled and examined before publication: Lockheed Martin (+75), Shield AI (+36) and BAE Systems (+9). Each was pulled from the same platform in both months. Lockheed's gain is in Palmdale, where 99 of its on-site postings carry posting dates after September 16; 43 of Shield AI's 72 San Diego on-site postings were created in the same window. Set aside all four risers and the remaining twelve are up 66 roles, +3.4 percent. **Every cut is positive.**

Where else it grew. RTX rose 25, to 192, with gains in both clusters (LA/OC +17, San Diego +8). General Atomics rose 28, to 464, led by Poway (+34), on the same on-site workstyle filter as September. Northrop Grumman rose 20, to 842, and remains the largest employer in the Index. L3Harris added 11, led by Canoga Park (+7). Parsons and Teledyne each added three and HII one.

Where it softened. Leidos fell 13, to 51, with its Vista postings down from 15 to 6. Boeing fell 10, to 156, most of it at Seal Beach. Amentum and V2X each slipped one and Kratos was flat at nine. Leidos and Boeing were searched on the same scope as September, so both declines are market movement rather than method.

The layoff signal is small. The state's WARN file shows two RTX notices at El Segundo - seven workers effective October 23 and one effective November 27 - and no other tracked A&D employer in the three counties. Eight workers against 3,092 open roles: the tracked market is expanding.

This month at a glance

Indicator	Reading	Note
Open A&D roles in the Index (16-employer sample)	3,092	All 16 counted as of October 20
LA/OC vs San Diego split	2,085 / 1,007	67% LA/OC corridor, 33% San Diego cluster
Largest single employer	Northrop Grumman	842 combined (624 LA/OC + 218 SD)
Second largest	SpaceX	762, all LA/OC; +185, same Hawthorne/Irvine tags (†)
Top-6 share of tracked roles	~86%	Northrop, SpaceX, GA-ASI, Lockheed, RTX, L3Harris
GA-ASI counted total	464 ▲	Up 28 like-for-like; all 488 on-site California listings captured (††)
Largest single site (all 19 employers)	Hawthorne, 737	SpaceX alone; San Diego 663 across 14 employers is second
Largest SoCal-share award (window)	Lockheed \$871.2M ceiling	F-35 support equipment, 90% El Segundo (Sept 18); no funds obligated at award
Aerospace engineer avg wage - LA/OC	\$161,520	2.09x local all-occupation average (BLS OEWS May 2025)
Expanded sample (19 employers)	3,538	Index plus Aerospace Corp (245), Castelion (174), NASSCO (27); additions +15 on September
A&D WARN notices - SoCal	RTX, 8 workers	Two El Segundo notices: 7 effective Oct 23, 1 effective Nov 27
U.S. aerospace mfg. HEADCOUNT	596,500 (Aug, prelim.)	Most since October 1993; +4.9% year over year
Hiring outlook (tracked sample)	Expanding ▲	Headline +13.6%; +8.7% excluding SpaceX; +3.4% excluding all four risers

SoCal Openings Index²

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. Every figure in this section, and every share and concentration figure in this issue, describes those sixteen. The three employers in the expanded sample are reported below the Index table, never inside it.

This month's count

3,092 open A&D roles across the 16 tracked employers as of October 20, 2026 - 2,085 in the LA/OC corridor and 1,007 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 October against September.

By employer

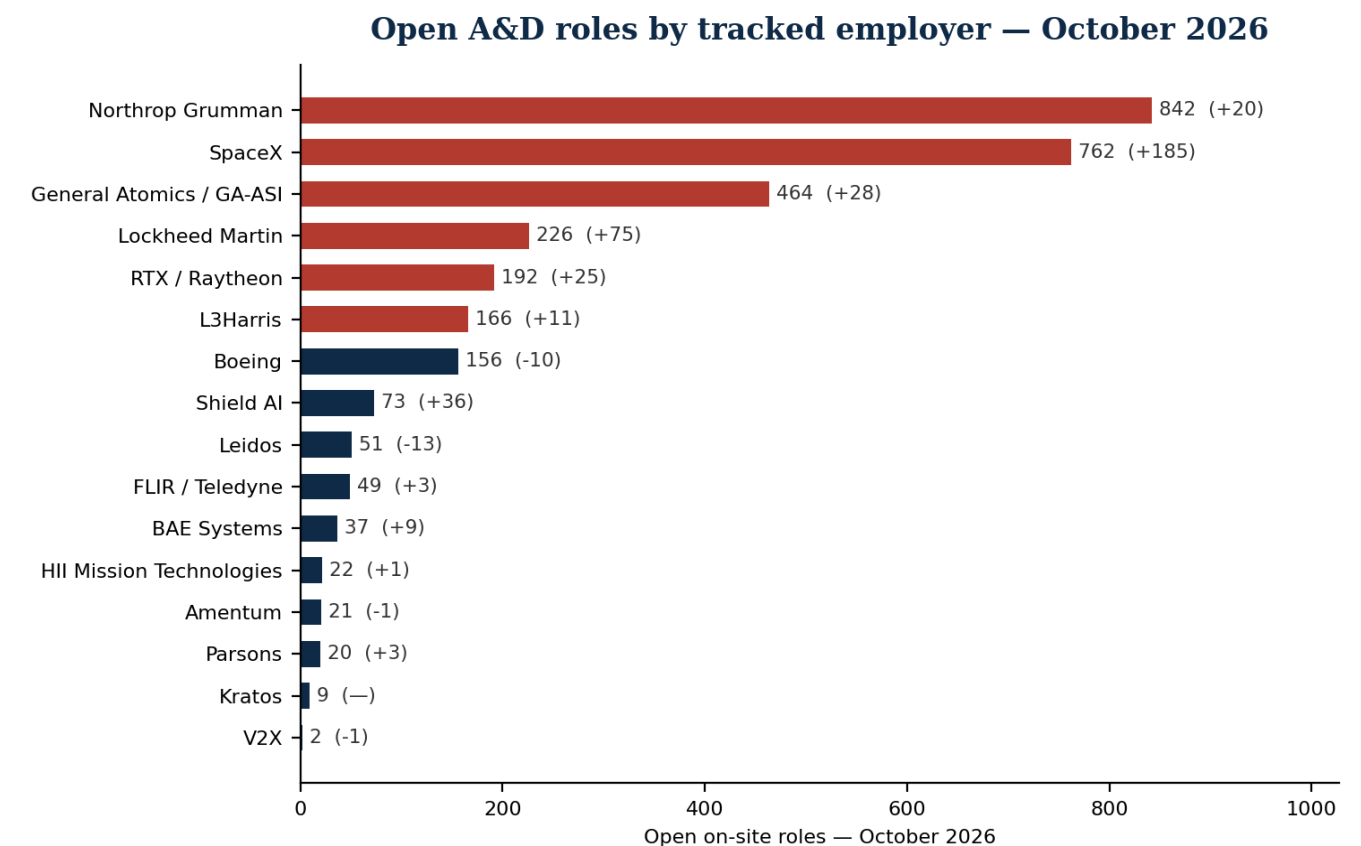


Figure 1: Openings by tracked employer, October 2026, sorted by total. Red = top six; navy = the rest. Change vs September shown in parentheses.

Employer	Oct	Sep	Chg	LA/OC	SD	Primary SoCal sites
Northrop Grumman ‡‡	842	822	▲ +20	624	218	Redondo Beach, Palmdale, El Segundo, San Diego
SpaceX †	762	577	▲ +185	762	0	Hawthorne, Irvine, Long Beach
General Atomics / GA-ASI ††	464	436	▲ +28	21	443	Poway, San Diego, Palmdale
Lockheed Martin **	226	151	▲ +75	215	11	Palmdale (Skunk Works), San Diego
RTX / Raytheon ¶¶	192	167	▲ +25	155	37	El Segundo, Fullerton, San Diego
L3Harris §	166	155	▲ +11	97	69	Canoga Park, Carlsbad, San Diego, Yorba Linda

Employer	Oct	Sep	Chg	LA/OC	SD	Primary SoCal sites
Boeing	156	166	▼ -10	156	0	El Segundo, Seal Beach, Long Beach
Shield AI §§	73	37	▲ +36	1	72	San Diego (HQ)
Leidos	51	64	▼ -13	3	48	San Diego, Vista
FLIR / Teledyne ‡	49	46	▲ +3	23	26	Torrance, San Diego, El Segundo
BAE Systems ~	37	28	▲ +9	1	36	San Diego (ship repair)
HII Mission Technologies @	22	21	▲ +1	2	20	San Diego, National City, Palmdale
Amentum ##	21	22	▼ -1	7	14	San Diego, Lancaster
Parsons ^	20	17	▲ +3	17	3	Los Angeles, Pasadena, San Diego
Kratos °	9	9	—	0	9	San Diego
V2X ^^	2	3	▼ -1	1	1	Glendale, Coronado
TOTAL	3,092	2,721	▲ +371	2,085	1,007	67% LA/OC - 33% San Diego

‡ Northrop Grumman is counted from this issue with each posting's primary location read from the posting record itself. The careers site's radius search lists a multi-location posting's sites nearest the search point first, so the same posting can carry a different first location in the Los Angeles and San Diego searches. Measured both ways on an earlier October 20 snapshot, the record-based method read 843 against 859 for the search-ordered method used in September, and 61 San Diego-listed postings carry an LA/OC or out-of-region primary in their own records. On September's basis Northrop reads about 859 (580 LA/OC, 279 San Diego), a like-for-like change of about +37; the cluster split is not comparable with September. 66 hybrid postings excluded on workLocationOption. Sites: Redondo Beach 199, Palmdale 162, El Segundo 77, Woodland Hills 71, Northridge 51, Manhattan Beach 32, Azusa 16, Commerce 15, Carson 1; San Diego 218.

† SpaceX carried the same Hawthorne and Irvine tags in September and October, and a Long Beach tag reappeared, so the change is like-for-like: Hawthorne 737 (from 558), Irvine 21 (from 19), Long Beach 4 (none in September). The careers board itself grew from 1,995 to 2,774 unique postings. SpaceX moved more than 25 percent and was re-pulled before publication; the move is a market reading, not a publishing change. Vandenberg (30), "Flexible - Any SpaceX Site" (12) and "Remote - XX" rows are excluded.

†† General Atomics / GA-ASI: both months applied the careers site's on-site workstyle filter at source, so the change is like-for-like. October returned 658 California results (488 on-site, 157 hybrid, 13 remote) against September's 642 (470, 167, 5), and all 488 on-site listings were captured. Poway 319 (from 285), San Diego 124 (from 132), Palmdale 21 (from 19). Adelanto, in San Bernardino County, is excluded.

** Lockheed Martin: Palmdale 212 (from 139), El Segundo 3, San Diego 11 (from 9). Same platform as September; the primary location is now read from the posting record, as for Northrop, which reads 3 fewer than September's search-ordered method. Lockheed moved more than 25 percent and was re-pulled: 99 of its Palmdale on-site postings carry posting dates after September 16, so the gain is read as market movement. 16 hybrid postings excluded.

¶ RTX / Raytheon: counted by hand because its careers site is CAPTCHA-gated, with Goleta, Edwards, Lompoc, Riverside County and San Bernardino County excluded under the Index rules. LA/OC 155 (from 138), San Diego 37 (from 29). The count carries no site-level split.

§ L3Harris remains a floor: postings tagged only "Multiple Locations" are excluded as unplaceable - 60 inside the California search view this month, against 62 in September. The California view and a full enumeration of the 2,188-posting board returned the identical 166 in-cluster postings on the same date. Canoga Park 62, Yorba Linda 21, Anaheim 12, Gardena 1, Los Angeles 1; Carlsbad 37, San Diego 32.

‡ FLIR / Teledyne counted across Teledyne's full careers board (749 postings), on-site roles only. In-cluster temporary-duty postings excluded: Hawthorne 13, Poway 4. Also excluded: one El Segundo posting tagged Remote and two "San Diego - CS" postings whose location section states the role is remote. Torrance 16, El Segundo 4, Chatsworth 2, City of Industry 1; San Diego 26.

§§ Shield AI: Lever board of 656 postings (499 in September), on-site workplaceType only. San Diego 72, Los Angeles 1. Shield AI moved more than 25 percent and was re-pulled: 43 of the 72 San Diego on-site postings were created after September 16. Six San Diego hybrid postings excluded.

~ BAE Systems: full-board read of 2,025 postings, the same technique as prior issues. San Diego 35, Chula Vista 1, El Segundo 1; two San Diego postings excluded for hybrid in the title. BAE moved more than 25 percent on a base under 50; at this size one month is not a trend.

@ HII Mission Technologies: full-board enumeration of 669 postings. San Diego 15, National City 4, Coronado 1, and two Palmdale manufacturing program-management postings - the first LA/OC HII postings recorded in this series (none in July, August or September).

Amentum: full-board enumeration of 2,811 postings. San Diego 13, San Marcos 1, Lancaster 4, Los Angeles 2, Long Beach 1.

^ Parsons: work model read from each posting's remoteType field; Office postings counted. Three in-cluster Hybrid postings (San Diego 2, Pasadena 1) and six "Field Location" postings excluded. Los Angeles 7, Pasadena 4, Irvine 2, Fountain Valley 2, Playa Del Rey 1, Torrance 1; San Diego 3.

^^ V2X: full-board enumeration of 707 postings through the site's jobs API. Glendale 1, Coronado 1. The one-role decline on a base of three trips the 25 percent variance gate arithmetically; it is not a trend reading.

° Kratos counted by Intrepidus this issue from the careers site's own State and City filters (California 52; San Diego 9). The site lists "Remote" as a separate state, so remote roles fall outside the California count.

What the numbers say

Concentration edged up. Northrop Grumman (842) and SpaceX (762) together hold 52 percent of every tracked opening, and the top six cover roughly 86 percent of the Index. The LA/OC corridor reads 67 percent of the sample and San Diego 33 percent, against 63 and 37 in September. Without SpaceX's Hawthorne gain and Lockheed's Palmdale gain the corridor would read about 65 percent; with Northrop on September's method, about 66 percent (footnote ‡‡). San Diego's 1,007 open roles are anchored by GA-ASI (443), Northrop (218), Shield AI (72) and L3Harris (69); Northrop's San Diego figure is measured on the record-based method this issue, and on September's basis the county would read 1,068.

Sort the movers. Growth: SpaceX (+185), Lockheed (+75), Shield AI (+36), RTX (+25), GA-ASI (+28), Northrop (+20), L3Harris (+11), BAE (+9), Parsons (+3), Teledyne (+3), HII (+1). Declines: Leidos (-13), Boeing (-10), Amentum (-1), V2X (-1). Flat: Kratos. Eleven of the sixteen employers added roles.

Where the roles sit, ranked by city

Rank	City	Roles	Employers
1	Hawthorne	737	1 (SpaceX)
2	San Diego	663	14
3	El Segundo	461	7, incl. The Aerospace Corporation
4	Palmdale	397	4 (Lockheed, Northrop, GA-ASI, HII)
5	Poway	319	1 (GA-ASI)
6	Redondo Beach	199	1 (Northrop)
7	Torrance	191	3 (Castelion, Teledyne, Parsons)
8	Woodland Hills	71	1 (Northrop)
9	Canoga Park	62	1 (L3Harris)

All nineteen employers, on-site postings by primary city, October 20, 2026. RTX is counted by hand with no site split: its 37 San Diego roles are assigned to the city of San Diego and its corridor roles are absent, so El Segundo is a floor. Northrop's cities use the record-based primary location.

The expanded sample - first month-over-month read

Three large Southern California A&D employers are counted alongside the sixteen, not inside them. This is their second month, and the first with a comparison.

Employer	Oct	Sep	Chg	LA/OC	SD	Primary SoCal sites
The Aerospace Corporation ~~	245	257	▼ -12	245	0	El Segundo, Los Angeles AFB
Castelion °°	174	144	▲ +30	174	0	Torrance
General Dynamics NASSCO	27	30	▼ -3	0	27	San Diego (shipyard)
ADDITIONS	446	431	▲ +15	419	27	Pulled October 20, 2026
EXPANDED SAMPLE (19)	3,538	3,152	▲ +386	2,504	1,034	71% LA/OC - 29% San Diego

~~ The Aerospace Corporation's careers platform publishes no work-model field, so its count cannot be filtered for hybrid the way the other counts are and is an upper bound. One posting located "Remote - US" is excluded. For scale, a read of every job description in September found 222 of 257 stating an on-site requirement. El Segundo 238, Los Angeles AFB 7, from a 424-posting board.

°° Castelion's careers page now lists two sites it did not list in September - Rio Rancho, New Mexico (35 postings) and Midland, Texas (6) - alongside Torrance and Allen, Texas. Postings whose first-listed location is Torrance are counted (174 of 227); the board carries no remote or hybrid tagging. NASSCO: full board of 75 postings, San Diego 92113 (22) and 92108 (5).

All three were pulled on October 20, 2026, the same day as the core Index. The additions rose 15 in total: Castelion up 30 while The Aerospace Corporation eased 12 and NASSCO 3. **The sixteen-employer Index remains the headline series**; the expanded sample is the same market measured across three more employers.

What the Market Pays³

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.

A&D pay: LA/OC vs. San Diego — well above the local wage base

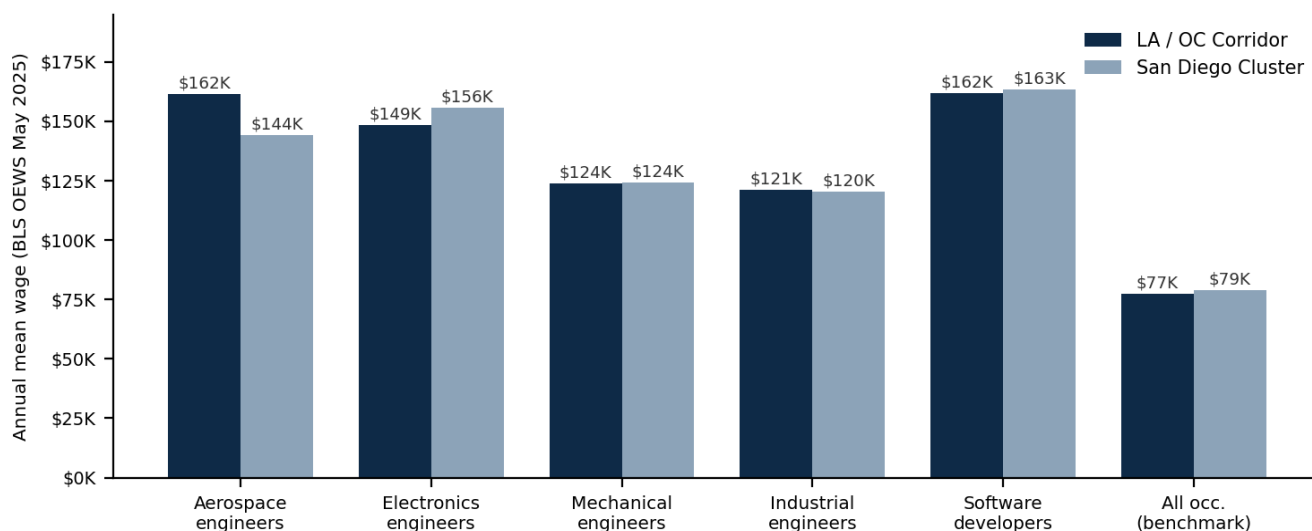


Figure 2: Average annual wage by occupation, LA/OC vs. San Diego (BLS OEWS, May 2025).

Occupation	LA / OC	vs. LA avg	San Diego	vs. SD avg	National
Aerospace engineers	\$161,520	2.09x	\$144,280	1.82x	\$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 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. **In San Diego the order reverses:** electronics engineers there (\$155,740) out-earn San Diego aerospace engineers (\$144,280) and their LA/OC counterparts. 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.

Above-national pay on a high local base. Southern California pays above the national average on every occupation tracked here - by 1.5 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 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). These are wages, not a cost-of-living measure.

Where this month's demand meets these rates. The month's two largest gains at a single employer site are both in the corridor: SpaceX's Hawthorne (+179) and Lockheed's Palmdale (+73). In San Diego, GA-ASI's Poway gain (+34) and Shield AI's (+35) land in the county where electronics engineers already out-earn aerospace engineers by \$11,460.

Contracts & the Demand Signal⁴

Federal contract awards are a directional signal of future hiring - work awarded today is staffed over the following quarters.

Unless flagged otherwise, every award below states a **Southern California place of performance** in its announcement. A local place of performance establishes relevance but does not by itself prove incremental local hiring. Values are as announced; ceilings and options are labeled.

The scale of the federal book (quarterly, restated)

The contract census is quarterly. As of the September 18, 2026 pull of USASpending.gov, **133,617 federal prime-award records** carried a Los Angeles, Orange, or San Diego place of performance with FY2026 activity, together accounting for **\$29.4B in obligations** - \$19.8B of it Department of War. On a lag-matched basis (October 1 to June 20 in each fiscal year, cut 90 days before the pull to match the FPDS-NG reporting delay) the three-county book was up 18.9 percent: San Diego +53.7 percent, Los Angeles -12.2 percent, Orange +429 percent on a small base. These figures are restated from the September pull.

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

Largest FY2026-active A&D prime-award records by cumulative obligations, USASpending.gov, pulled September 18, 2026 (quarterly; restated). Each line is a single prime-award record.

Freshly awarded - the forward signal

Read from the Department of War's daily contract announcements for every publication day from September 18 to October 19, 2026. The October 2, 6, 8, 9, 13, 14, 16 and 19 lists carried no Southern California work locations.

- **Lockheed Martin - \$871.2M ceiling increase, El Segundo 90 percent (Sept 18).** F-35 support equipment for site activation and non-recurring hardware sustainment, completing February 2031. **This raises an IDIQ ceiling; no funds were obligated at award.** It is still the largest action of the window with a majority Southern California share.
- **Raytheon - \$511.5M, AN/SPY-6 options and spares (Sept 30).** Work is 10 percent San Diego and 2 percent Cerritos, completing November 2031, with about \$511.5M obligated. A small local share of a large, fully funded production line.
- **Northrop Grumman, San Diego - \$66.0M (Oct 5).** MQ-4C Triton retrofit, 31 percent San Diego and 1 percent Irvine, completing June 2030.
- **L3Harris Interstate Electronics, Yorba Linda - \$46.9M, options to \$207.1M (Oct 1).** Trident II flight test instrumentation, 55 percent Yorba Linda, completing September 2031. No funds were obligated at award. L3Harris lists 21 open Yorba Linda roles this month.
- **General Atomics Aeronautical, Poway - \$38.8M (awarded Oct 1, announced Oct 15).** Taiwan MQ-9B contractor logistics support, work performed in Poway, completing August 2029.
- **San Diego ship and test support.** Oceaneering, \$67.4M for submarine rescue operations maintenance (Sept 30); Epsilon Systems Solutions, \$31.2M option for SIMA repair support (Oct 7); Bowhead Base Operations, a \$24.5M IDIQ supporting amphibious vehicle testing at Camp Pendleton (Sept 29); L3 Technologies' San Diego telemetry unit, \$10.8M for 176 radios (Sept 29).
- **Smaller LA/OC items.** Woodward HRT, \$41.5M for V-22 hydraulic drive unit repairs in Santa Clarita (Sept 18); Boeing, \$42.2M IRST Block II production, 30 percent Santa Ana (Sept 30); Impulse Space, Redondo Beach, \$31.3M SBIR Phase III modification for a Mira space vehicle (Sept 22); VACCO Industries, South El Monte, \$16.8M for Virginia-class valves (Sept 23).
- **El Segundo: F/A-18 line shutdown planning.** Boeing received \$16.7M on Sept 29 to plan the shutdown of the F/A-18E/F and EA-18G production lines, with 37 percent of the work in El Segundo - the same day the Navy selected Boeing for F/A-XX, to be built in St. Louis. Boeing's El Segundo count was 130, against 131 in September.

- **And several that look local but are not.** Digital Force Technologies (San Diego, \$500M) and PVP Advanced EO Systems (Lake Forest, \$250M) won Army counter-UAS IDIQs whose work locations are set order by order. Boeing Long Beach's \$33.4M C-17 avionics lab work is performed in Oklahoma City. Curtin Maritime (Long Beach) and RQ Construction (Carlsbad) won work performed outside the region. None states Southern California work.

Out for bid - the earliest signal

Action	Agency / place of performance	Status (SAM.gov, Oct 20, 2026)
SWRMC HM&E fleet technical assistance follow-on (N5523626R0007)	NAVSEA / SWRMC - San Diego	Offers closed Sept 16. No award notice posted.
MEO Missile Warning / Tracking Epoch 3 & 4 RFI (FA8810-RFI-26-SYD84-E3E4)	Space Systems Command - El Segundo	Responses due Dec 1, 2026, 4:00 PM PT.
USS Cincinnati (LCS 20) and USS Canberra (LCS 30) FY27 DSRAs (N00024-26-R-4441)	NAVSEA - West Coast competition	Proposals were due July 9. No award notice posted.
Application Arsenal enterprise engineering (N6600126R3507)	NIWC Pacific - San Diego	Responses were due Oct 7. No award notice posted.
NIWC Pacific TDL capabilities-based ISEA (N6600126R3505)	NIWC Pacific - San Diego	Responses were due July 20. No award notice posted.
DICE Laboratory sustainment and engineering (RFI, N6600127R3505_0001)	NIWC Pacific - San Diego; TS/SCI workforce	Posted Oct 20; responses due Oct 28, 10:00 AM PT.
Meadowlands sustainment (sources sought, FA8819)	Space Systems Command - El Segundo	Posted Oct 15; responses due Nov 18, 12:00 PM PT.

Two rows leave the table: the SWRMC non-skid decking IDIQ, awarded September 17, and the Kronos Family of Systems AOI 4 and Zero Trust Architecture actions, both inactive on SAM.gov (due August 26 and September 18). NIWC Pacific's C2 Systems Modernization forecast is not carried this issue. The LCS availabilities are competed coast-wide, so they are probable rather than committed San Diego work.

Risk Signals - WARN Watch

Two RTX notices at El Segundo are the only A&D filings in the three counties. The California Employment Development Department's WARN file, which covers notices processed July 1 to October 14, 2026, shows RTX at 1212 E. El Segundo Blvd. - **7 workers**, notice dated August 25, effective October 23 - and RTX at 2000 E. El Segundo Blvd. - **1 worker**, notice dated September 22, effective November 27. No other tracked employer, core or expanded, filed in Los Angeles, Orange, or San Diego counties.

Net signal: 8 disclosed A&D workers in WARN notices against 3,092 open roles. The layoff signal is minimal.

Across all industries, EDD's file shows notices dated August 1 or later covering 3,154 workers in Los Angeles County (110 filings), 660 in San Diego (21) and 250 in Orange (6). Constellis, a security-services contractor, filed a series of five-worker notices at Los Angeles County locations, including one in Palmdale effective October 31; it is not an aerospace or defense manufacturer and is not counted here. The standard caveat applies: **WARN publication runs behind filing**, and EDD's file did not yet include notices processed after October 14.

This Month in Southern California⁵

A roundup of the developments that affect the local labor market, refreshed every issue.

The month's defining story: Hawthorne and Palmdale account for most of the gain

Two employer sites account for most of October's growth. SpaceX's Hawthorne count rose from 558 to 737 and Lockheed Martin's Palmdale count from 139 to 212 - together 252 of the Index's 371-role gain. Both were pulled from the same platforms in both months, and both show heavy recent posting activity rather than a change in how the boards are published. Hawthorne is the largest single city across all nineteen tracked employers this month at 737 roles, ahead of the city of San Diego at 663 across fourteen employers.

San Diego held its level on a different mix. GA-ASI's Poway site rose 34 and Shield AI nearly doubled to 72 San Diego on-site roles, while Leidos fell 10 in the county and Northrop's figure moved onto the record-based method described in the Index footnotes. On September's basis the county reads 1,068 against 1,005; on this issue's method it reads 1,007.

Company and program news (primary-source dates)

- **B-21 production facility breaks ground at Palmdale (Sept 29; Air Force release Oct 8).** The Department of the Air Force and Northrop Grumman began construction of more than one million square feet of new production space at Air Force Plant 42, part of an agreement to raise annual production capacity by 25 percent, using \$4.5B of FY2025 reconciliation funding applied to the program. Northrop lists 162 on-site Palmdale openings this month.
- **L3Harris expands Canoga Park by more than \$100M (Oct 8).** The company is adding about 35,000 square feet of manufacturing and assembly space for THAAD liquid divert and attitude control, RS-25 engines and the Next Generation Interceptor's attitude control system - the site's largest expansion in more than a decade, self-funded and begun this summer. L3Harris lists 62 open Canoga Park roles, up from 55. Separately, L3Harris announced a THAAD propulsion contract from Lockheed Martin valued at more than \$6B over seven years (Sept 29); that release does not name work sites.
- **More MQ-9B orders.** The Coast Guard bought four MQ-9B aircraft with ground stations and support for \$247.8M through a CBP contract (order Sept 25, Coast Guard release Oct 9; no work location stated), and GA-ASI's \$38.8M Taiwan MQ-9B support award is performed in Poway. GA-ASI also reported delivering an FQ-42 Vengeance collaborative combat aircraft to Creech AFB on Sept 18 (company release Sept 21).
- **Navy selects Boeing for F/A-XX (Sept 29).** Boeing's release places the program in St. Louis. The same day's contract list carried a \$16.7M order to plan the F/A-18E/F and EA-18G line shutdown, 37 percent of it in El Segundo.
- **Castelion named for Army PrSM Increment 4 prototyping (Sept 29).** The Army selected five firms - Anduril, Castelion, Lockheed Martin, Mach Industries and RTX - for prototype agreements, with a fly-off and down-select in FY2027. No values or work locations were announced. Castelion lists 174 Torrance roles this month, up from 144.
- **Leadership.** Kratos promoted Bill Wilson to President of its C5ISR Systems Division (Sept 28, San Diego). General Dynamics, NASSCO's parent, named Danny Deep chief executive effective January 1, 2027 (Oct 7).

Program watch

- **Space Development Agency.** Northrop Grumman delivered 21 Tranche 1 Transport Layer satellites (release Sept 28), and the SDA reported on Oct 10 that they had launched from Vandenberg, bringing 84 Tranche 1 satellites to orbit. Northrop does not state the build site in the release. The MEO missile warning Epoch 3 and 4 RFI out of El Segundo closes December 1.
- **Ship repair.** Awards this window were support and maintenance rather than large availabilities (Oceaneering, Epsilon, Prevailance at 55 percent San Diego). The LCS 20 and LCS 30 availabilities and the SWRMC technical assistance follow-on remain without award notices.
- **Shield AI and X-BAT.** Shield AI reported a \$150M Navy modification to its X-BAT agreement, matched by \$150M of its own (company release Oct 8). Its San Diego on-site postings rose from 37 to 72.

Hiring & expansion notes

- **L3Harris named workforce growth without a number.** Its October 8 account of the Canoga Park expansion cites workforce growth but states no headcount, and this report does not infer one.
- **Castelion is posting outside California.** Rio Rancho, New Mexico (35) and Midland, Texas (6) carry 41 of Castelion's 227 postings. Those roles fall outside the counted area; the Torrance count rose from 144 to 174.
- **SpaceX's careers board grew by 779 postings in a month.** 2,774 unique postings nationally on October 20, against 1,995 in September. Hawthorne accounts for 737 of them.

Monthly Spotlight⁶

THIS MONTH: Palmdale's Restricted-Programs Corridor

Each issue features one rotating deep-dive on a topic that shapes local A&D hiring. This month: the airfield town where four tracked employers post nearly 400 on-site openings, and where new production space is under construction.

Palmdale carries 397 tracked on-site openings this month - Lockheed Martin 212, Northrop Grumman 162, General Atomics 21 and HII 2. That ranks it fourth among all tracked cities, behind Hawthorne, San Diego and El Segundo. Lockheed alone added 73 Palmdale roles since September, from 139 to 212.

The place

Northrop's B-21 work and Lockheed's Skunk Works sit at **Air Force Plant 42**. The Air Force Test Center describes the plant as more than 5,800 acres with 3.2 million square feet of industrial space, eight production sites suited to advanced and classified programs, and Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman as its best-known tenants. The plant is owned through Wright-Patterson AFB and operated as part of Edwards AFB, which sits in Kern County outside this Index.

The programs

Northrop Grumman's B-21 Raider is assembled in Palmdale. In February the company said it had invested more than \$5B in digital and manufacturing infrastructure for the program and that more than 8,000 industry and Air Force personnel support it nationally, with more than 400 suppliers in 40 states - program-wide figures, not a Palmdale

headcount. On September 29 construction began on a B-21 production facility at Plant 42 with more than one million square feet of new space, tied to a 25 percent increase in annual production capacity.

Lockheed Martin's Skunk Works opened a 215,000-square-foot "intelligent, flexible factory" in Palmdale in 2021, which the company described as the cornerstone of more than \$400M in campus investment with space for more than 450 employees. Neither company discloses program-level headcount, and this report does not infer it. What the data shows is the site total: 212 open Lockheed roles in Palmdale this month.

The pipeline

Antelope Valley College runs a 26-unit Aircraft Fabrication and Assembly certificate, about two semesters long, and the college states that Northrop Grumman requires local applicants without prior experience to have completed it. Northrop, Lockheed and Boeing recruit in its classrooms. An eight-week rapid version runs through JVS SoCal. The college publishes no graduate or placement figures, so the program's output cannot be set against the 397 open roles.

What it means for you

- **If you hire in Palmdale:** you are recruiting against Lockheed (212 on-site roles) and Northrop (162) in one town, with new B-21 production space under construction. Clearance and on-site requirements narrow the pool further than the headline suggests.
- **If you supply the primes:** the B-21 production facility and Lockheed's Palmdale postings both point to sustained demand at Plant 42.
- **If you are a job seeker:** the Antelope Valley College certificate is the stated entry route for Northrop's assembly roles without prior experience, and Lockheed alone lists 212 open Palmdale roles.

National Context: U.S. vs. Southern California⁷

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.

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 (AIA 2026 Facts & Figures, 2025 data). On the federal side, Congress enacted **\$839.2B in FY2026 Department of War appropriations** (P.L. 119-75), including \$167.5B for procurement and \$145.9B for research and development; Golden Dome is funded separately through the FY2025 reconciliation law. These backbone figures are restated from prior issues.

The national trend line

U.S. aerospace product & parts manufacturing employment

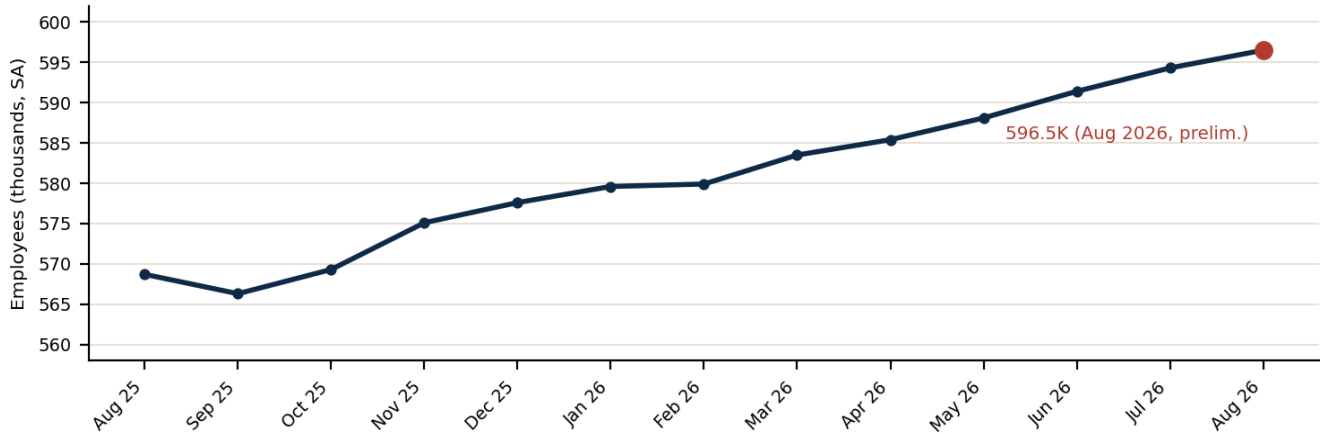


Figure 3: BLS Current Employment Statistics series CES3133640001 - all employees, aerospace product and parts manufacturing, seasonally adjusted. August 2026 preliminary. Retrieved October 20, 2026.

This paragraph is about headcount, not pay. U.S. aerospace product and parts manufacturing **employment** reached a preliminary **596,500 jobs in August 2026**, up 27,800 or 4.9 percent over twelve months. That is the most people the industry has employed in any month since **October 1993** (600,300), verified against the full series back to 1990. July 2026 reads 594,300. September 2026 had not been published for this series as of the October 20 pull.

The benchmark snapshot

Metric	National (U.S.)	Southern California	Takeaway
Aerospace mfg. HEADCOUNT (not pay)	596,500 jobs (Aug), +4.9% YoY - most since Oct 1993	Index +13.6% month over month*	Local postings 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
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
Federal demand backdrop	~\$839.2B FY26 DoW appropriations	\$29.4B FY26 obligations across the three counties (Sept 18 census)	Missile, space and naval priorities landing locally

*Different measures - national is payroll employment year over year; local is tracked job postings month over month (+8.7% excluding SpaceX; +3.4% excluding all four risers). Directional comparison only.

Summary: national aerospace manufacturing employment reached its highest level since 1993 in August, and Southern California's tracked postings reached the highest level in this series in October. The local gain is concentrated - Hawthorne and Palmdale carry most of it - but it survives every exclusion tested. Eight A&D workers in WARN notices against more than 3,000 open roles says the constraint here is the supply of qualified, often cleared, people.

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Appendix & Methodology

How this report stays fresh

The report is built in two layers. The **fresh layer** - the Openings Index, contract awards and the solicitation pipeline, the news roundup and the rotating Spotlight - changes every issue. The **backbone layer** - occupational wages, national benchmarks and the federal contract census - is refreshed when official data is released, not forced monthly. A light monthly pulse alternates with a deeper quarterly flagship. **This is a monthly pulse.**

Methodology & sources

Openings Index - 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 single date (October 20, 2026). No aggregators are used. The Index is not a census of all A&D openings in the region; share and concentration figures describe the tracked sample. **Expanded sample:** The Aerospace Corporation, Castelion and General Dynamics NASSCO, counted on the same rules, pulled the same day, and published as a separate line. The Aerospace Corporation publishes no work-model field, so its count is an upper bound.

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.

Method changes this issue - (1) Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin: the primary location of each multi-location posting is read from the posting record rather than from the radius-search result, which orders locations by distance from the search point; on October 20 this reads about 16 fewer for Northrop and 3 fewer for Lockheed than the search-ordered method, and moves 61 Northrop postings out of the San Diego cluster. (2) Boeing: work model read from each posting's Role Type field (no postings affected). (3) Teledyne: two postings whose location section states remote work are excluded. (4) Kratos: counted by Intrepidus from the careers site's own State and City filters. (5) WARN: read from EDD's WARN file directly.

Accuracy controls - every automated employer's retrieved count was reconciled against its board total, or, where the board total is capped (Leidos), against its location facets; full-board enumeration was used wherever available; every employer moving more than 25 percent was re-pulled and resolved before publication (SpaceX, Lockheed Martin, Shield AI, BAE Systems, V2X); and raw posting IDs for every employer except RTX, which is counted by hand, are archived with this issue's pull log (one Kratos posting is archived by title).

Wages - BLS Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics, May 2025 estimates (released May 15, 2026), Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim (MSA 31080), San Diego-Chula Vista-Carlsbad (MSA 41740) and national annual mean wages, retrieved from the BLS public API and restated this issue. The LA-Long Beach-Anaheim MSA comprises Los Angeles and Orange counties, matching the LA/OC cluster exactly.

Contracts - census and anchor table from USASpending.gov prime awards, place of performance in counties 06037 / 06059 / 06073, FY2026, award types A/B/C/D, pulled September 18, 2026 and restated (quarterly). Award headlines read from the Department of War's daily contract announcements for every publication day September 18 to October 19, 2026. Solicitation status from SAM.gov, checked October 20, 2026.

Layoff / WARN watch - California EDD WARN report (XLSX), notices processed July 1 to October 14, 2026, downloaded October 20, 2026. WARN publication runs behind filing.

National context - BLS CES3133640001 retrieved via the BLS public API on October 20, 2026 and checked against the full series back to 1990; AIA 2026 Facts & Figures; FY2026 appropriations per P.L. 119-75 and CRS R48891.

Evidence standard - role counts, wages, WARN filings, and federal award values are reported as observed data from public sources. Connections between awards and hiring are directional unless individual postings can be tied to a program. Job postings churn daily, so Index counts are snapshots of the pull date.

Section notes & sources (footnotes)

1 The Monthly Pulse. Fifth issue. All sixteen employers counted as of October 20, 2026. Change arithmetic: all sixteen 2,721 to 3,092 (+371, +13.6%); excluding SpaceX from both months 2,144 to 2,330 (+186, +8.7%); excluding SpaceX, Lockheed Martin, Shield AI and BAE Systems 1,928 to 1,994 (+66, +3.4%). Lockheed's Palmdale posting dates and Shield AI's creation dates are read from each platform's posting records on the pull date.

2 Openings Index. Per-employer methods and confidence in the count sheet below; employer-level site detail in the Index footnotes. City ranking counts all nineteen employers by primary city on the pull date. Expanded sample: The Aerospace Corporation El Segundo 238 and Los Angeles AFB 7 (424-posting board; one Remote - US posting excluded; no work-model field); Castleton Torrance 174 of 227 postings (Rio Rancho NM 35, Allen TX 11, Midland TX 6, Washington DC 1 excluded); NASSCO San Diego 92113 22 and 92108 5 from a 75-posting board.

3 What the Market Pays. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, OEWS May 2025, annual mean wages, restated unchanged (the series does not update before spring 2027). Occupation codes: 17-2011, 17-2072, 17-2141, 17-2112, 15-1252, 17-3021, 00-0000.

4 Contracts & the Demand Signal. Department of War contract announcements: Lockheed Martin F-35 support equipment ceiling increase, Sept 18 (\$871,243,964; El Segundo 90%, Fort Worth 10%; no funds obligated at award; completion Feb 2031); Woodward HRT V-22 HPDU repairs, Sept 18 (\$41,515,920; Santa Clarita); Impulse Space Mira SBIR Phase III modification, Sept 22 (\$31,255,231; cumulative \$94,264,131; Redondo Beach); VACCO Industries Virginia-class valves, Sept 23 (\$16,844,319; South El Monte); Raytheon AN/SPY-6 options and spares, Sept 30 (\$511,533,484; San Diego 10%, Cerritos 2%); Boeing F/A-18E/F and EA-18G production line shutdown planning, Sept 29 (\$16,667,607; El Segundo 37%); Bowhead Base Operations MCTSSA support IDIQ, Sept 29 (\$24,499,999; Camp Pendleton); L3 Technologies Telemetry & RF Products radios, Sept 29 (\$10,754,610; San Diego); Oceaneering submarine rescue operations maintenance, Sept 30 (\$67,405,178; San Diego); Prevaliance task order, Sept 30 (\$11,439,428; San Diego 55%); Boeing IRST Block II, Sept 30 (\$42,221,075; Santa Ana 30%); L3Harris Interstate Electronics Trident II flight test instrumentation, Oct 1 (\$46,850,128; options to \$207,054,517; Yorba Linda 55%; no funds obligated at award); Northrop Grumman MQ-4C Triton retrofit, Oct 5 (\$66,041,453; San Diego 31%, Irvine 1%); Epsilon Systems Solutions SIMA repair support option, Oct 7 (\$31,153,036; San Diego); General Atomics Aeronautical Taiwan MQ-9B contractor logistics support, announced Oct 15, awarded Oct 1 (\$38,766,471; Poway). Company and agency releases: L3Harris THAAD propulsion (Sept 29) and Canoga Park expansion (Oct 8); Department of the Air Force B-21 production facility groundbreaking (Oct 8); U.S. Coast Guard MQ-9B acquisition (Oct 9). Solicitations verified on SAM.gov October 20, 2026. Census and anchor table restated from the September 18, 2026 USASpending.gov pull.

5 This Month in Southern California. Award citations in footnote 4. Additional sources: GA-ASI FQ-42 release (Sept 21); Boeing F/A-XX release (Sept 29); U.S. Army PrSM Increment 4 release (Sept 29); Kratos leadership release (Sept 28); General Dynamics leadership release (Oct 7); Northrop Grumman Tranche 1 delivery release (Sept 28); Space Development Agency launch release reporting the launch (Oct 10); Shield AI X-BAT release (Oct 8, as published by Airframer). Site counts are from this issue's pull.

6 Monthly Spotlight. Air Force Test Center history page on Air Force Plant 42 (undated web page); Northrop Grumman B-21 release (Feb 23, 2026); Department of the Air Force B-21 production facility release (Oct 8, 2026); Lockheed Martin Skunk Works factory release (Aug 10, 2021); Antelope Valley College Aircraft Fabrication and Assembly program pages (2026-27). Palmdale site counts from this issue's pull: Lockheed 212, Northrop 162 (record-based primary), GA-ASI 21, HII 2; September: Lockheed 139, Northrop 134, GA-ASI 19.

7 National Context. BLS CES3133640001, retrieved October 20, 2026: August 2026 596.5K (preliminary), July 2026 594.3K, August 2025 568.7K (+27.8K, +4.9%). The last month at or above 596.5K before 2026 was October 1993 (600.3K). AIA 2026 Facts & Figures (published June 25, 2026). FY2026 appropriations per P.L. 119-75 and CRS R48891; Golden Dome funding per P.L. 119-21 section 20003 and CRS IN12576.

October count sheet

Employer	Oct	Sep	Method (October)	Confidence
Northrop Grumman	842	822	Eightfold API, LA r=75 + SD r=60 merged, deduped; primary from posting record; 66 hybrid excluded on workLocationOption	High; cluster split not like-for-like
SpaceX	762	577	Official careers site, 2,774 unique Greenhouse IDs parsed and deduped	High (Hawthorne/Irvine tags as Sep)
General Atomics / GA-ASI	464	436	BrassRing, Onsite workstyle facet at source; 488 of 488 on-site listings captured	High
Lockheed Martin	226	151	Eightfold API, LA r=75 + SD r=60; primary from posting record; 16 hybrid excluded	High; primary method changed (-3)
RTX / Raytheon	192	167	Manual count by David York (CAPTCHA-gated site); no site split	High (manual)
L3Harris	166	155	Full-board enumeration, 2,188 postings; identical in-cluster set in California view; Multiple Locations excluded	Floor
Boeing	156	166	California search via results endpoint, 186 records; Role Type field read on every in-region posting	High
Shield AI	73	37	Lever API, 656 postings, onsite workplaceType only	High
Leidos	51	64	Workday cxs searchText California (91) + detail fetch on all rows; reconciled against location facets	High
FLIR / Teledyne	49	46	Workday cxs full board (749) + detail fetch on CA rows; 17 TDY, 1 Remote, 2 stated-remote, 2 Field excluded	High
BAE Systems	37	28	Full-board read, 2,025 postings; 2 hybrid titles excluded	High
HII Mission Technologies	22	21	Full-board enumeration, 669 postings	High
Amentum	21	22	Full-board enumeration, 2,811 postings + 342 detail fetches	High
Parsons	20	17	Workday cxs, detail fetch on all 82 CA rows; Office remoteType only	High
Kratos	9	9	Careers site State and City filters (Intrepidus count)	High
V2X	2	3	Full-board enumeration via the site's jobs API, 707 postings	High
Expanded sample (pulled October 20, 2026)	Oct	Sep	Method (October)	Confidence
The Aerospace Corporation	245	257	Workday cxs full board (424) + 303 detail fetches; no work-model field	Upper bound
Castelion	174	144	castelion.com single-page list, 227 unique job IDs, Torrance-primary counted	High
General Dynamics NASSCO	27	30	SuccessFactors full board, 75 postings	High

Full pull notes and raw posting IDs 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 (3):** The Aerospace Corporation (El Segundo), Castelion (Torrance), General Dynamics NASSCO (San Diego). The company list is reviewed quarterly; no change this month.