

SAN DIEGO

▶▶ LIFE. CHANGING.

SAN DIEGO'S INNOVATION ECONOMY

Overarching Messaging Document

- **San Diego is a dynamic, thriving innovation ecosystem**, comprised of the world's smartest companies, a talented and loyal workforce, top-tier universities, and easy access to international markets.
- San Diego has embraced the 'life changing' ethos. It differs from other entrepreneurial cities in its ability to provide hardworking entrepreneurs an environment in which they can thrive personally and professionally. **Our lively regional culture fuels our entrepreneurs' creativity and fosters holistic wellness**, enabling innovators to achieve the balance they need in order to do extraordinary things.
- San Diego's award-winning "[San Diego: Life. Changing.](#)" campaign tells the **authentic stories of the mission-driven people and companies** that call the region home.
- San Diego galvanizes innovators who leverage their technologies to make the world a better, safer, and healthier place to live. **Smart people come here to solve hard problems.**
- **San Diego is the fifth most populous county in the U.S. and home to the eighth largest city**, yet manages to maintain an approachable, friendly vibe. The region is small enough to get things done but large enough to make a difference.
- **San Diego leads the world in biotechnology, clean technology, sports innovation, defense technology and telecommunications.** Other areas also experiencing rapid growth include cybersecurity, the Internet of Things (IoT), and social innovation. Specific areas of stand-out expertise include genomics, solar and biofuel technologies, wireless communications, unmanned aerial vehicles, and digital health.
- **San Diego's world-class universities and research centers foster a talented workforce**, attract the brightest academics, and produce research that serves as the foundation for numerous paradigm-shifting, life-saving technologies.
- **San Diego is taking proactive measure to promote economic inclusion so its economy can remain competitive**, focusing on the areas of talent development, small businesses, and affordability.
- **A distinguishing competitive advantage for San Diego lies in its proximity to Mexico.** A strong Cali Baja economic partnership enables the fusion of the two country's strengths, combining the top-tier San Diego engineering talent with the hardware prototyping, emerging software development clusters, and manufacturing capabilities of Baja.

SAN DIEGO INNOVATION ECONOMY

Sector Facts

Life Sciences

- San Diego is the third largest life sciences cluster in the U.S. ([JLL](#), 2024)
- San Diego's life sciences industry contributed \$30B in regional GRP (Lightcast, 2023)
- San Diego ranks fourth in the U.S. for life sciences research talent ([CBRE](#), 2024)
- San Diego research institutions received \$1.2 billion in National Institutes of Health and \$117 million in National Science Foundation awards ([Biocom](#), 2024)
- San Diego life sciences firms captured nearly three-quarters of the estimated \$3 billion in foreign investment injected into the regional economy in 2020 ([Go Global: San Diego's Trade and Investment Initiative](#), 2021)
- San Diego ranks third in the U.S. for life sciences and biotech jobs ([Biospace](#), 2021)
- Life Sciences firms in San Diego produce more than 178,000 jobs with total earnings of \$178.63 billion (about \$550 per person in the US) annually ([Biocom](#), 2024)
- Life sciences activity in San Diego County accounts for \$56.6 billion in gross regional product ([Biocom](#), 2024)
- San Diego county is home to more than 2,000 life sciences establishments ([Biocom](#), 2024)
- San Diego is fourth among U.S. Biopharma hubs ([R&D World](#), 2024)

Small Businesses & Startups

- San Diego is the third best city in the country for startups ([Crowdfund Capital Advisors](#), 2022)
- San Diego startups Drata and Equip make LinkedIn's "Top Startups 2023: The 50 U.S. Companies on the Rise" ([LinkedIn](#), 2023)
- Region startups raised \$4.8 billion in venture capital funding in 2024 ([Connect](#), 2024)
- San Diego selected as an inclusive innovation hub ([California Office of the Small Business Advocate](#), 2022)
- Local companies raised \$4.06 billion privately in 2023, with 11 of the 174 rounds being \$100 million-plus fundings ([Connect](#), 2023)
- 112 San Diego startups were acquired in 2023 (Connect, 2023)
- San Diego ranks as one of the most innovative cities in America ([Fabricator](#), 2022)
- San Diego startups represent 2% of U.S. startups ([StartupBlink](#), 2024)
- San Diego ranks among top Innovation Hub globally ([Nature](#), 2024)

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

- San Diego scores a perfect 100 on laws, policies, and services that support LGBTQ people on the HRC evaluation ([HRC.org](https://www.hrc.org/), 2022)
- California State University San Marcos named #1 on Social Mobility Index ([CollegeNet](https://collegenet.org/), 2022)
- SDG&E contracts \$450 million with minority-owned firms in San Diego ([Semptra](https://www.sempra.com/), 2023)
- Booz Allen Hamilton named among America's Best Employers for Diversity ([Forbes](https://www.forbes.com/), 2024)
- Illumina named:
 - Best Places to Work for LGBTQ Talent ([Corporate Equality Index](https://www.corporateequalityindex.com/), 2022)
 - Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index ([Bloomberg](https://www.bloomberg.com/), 2021)
 - America's Most JUST Company for Workers in Pharma/Biotech ([Forbes](https://www.forbes.com/), 2021)
- San Diego ranks fourth in LGBTQ-owned business openings ([Yelp](https://www.yelp.com/), 2023)
- San Diego is the sixth best city in the country for women in STEM ([CommercialCafe](https://www.commercialcafe.com/), 2021)
- San Diego, Oceanside, Chula Vista are three of the "Best Cities for LGBTQ Inclusion" ([HRC Foundation's Municipal Equality Index](https://www.hrc.org/foundation/municipal-equality-index), 2021)
- Chula Vista is first city in California to be designated as a Certified Welcoming City ([Certified Welcoming](https://www.certifiedwelcoming.com/), 2021)

Research Institutions

- Scripps Research's Ardem Patapoutian awarded the Nobel Prize for helping discover how humans sense temperature and touch ([The Nobel Prize](https://www.nobelprize.org/), 2021)
- Salk Institute's Terrence Sejnowski named among 2024 Brain Prize recipients ([Lundbeck Foundation](https://www.lundbeckfoundation.com/), 2024)
- San Diego ranks among top 20 leading science cities ([Nature Index](https://www.nature.com/), 2021)
- UC San Diego:
 - Ranks sixth nationally in research spending, ahead of Harvard, UCLA and Stanford ([National Science Foundation](https://www.nationalsciencefoundation.org/), 2021)
 - Conducted \$1.76 billion in sponsored research in fiscal year 2023 ([UC San Diego Today](https://www.ucsd.edu/), 2023)
 - Ranks ninth among top biomedical research institutions in the US ([Nature Index](https://www.nature.com/), 2023)
 - Houses the seventh-largest collection of highly cited researchers in the world ([Clarivate](https://www.clarivate.com/), 2023)

Talent & Universities

- San Diego is first in college-educated resident inflow ([USA Today](https://www.usatoday.com/), 2024)
- San Diego is among the Best Cities for young professionals in America ([Niche](https://www.niche.com/), 2024)
- San Diego is one of the best cities for job growth ([MoneyGeek](https://www.moneygeek.com/), 2022)
- San Diego leads the U.S. in annual wage growth at 4.8 percent ([JLL](https://www.jll.com/), 2024)
- Southwestern College:
 - First winners of the Corbin Gwaltney Award for Best All-Around Student Newspaper ([Society of Professional Journalists](https://www.societyofprofessionaljournalists.com/), 2022)

- San Diego State University:
 - Ranks fifth among Best Online Master's in Education programs ([U.S. News & World Report](#), 2024)
 - Ranks among Best of the Best LGBTQ-friendly Universities ([Campus Pride](#), 2023)
 - Ranks among top 50 Green Colleges in the US ([The Princeton Review](#), 2024)
- UC San Diego:
 - Ranked third nationally among public universities ([Academic Ranking of World Universities](#), 2024)
 - Ranked fifth among public universities for NIH funding ([UCSD Today](#), 2024)
 - Ranked Best Undergraduate Bioinformatics/Biotechnology Program ([U.S. News & World Report](#), 2022)
 - Ranked among top 20 universities in the world ([U.S. News and World Report](#), 2022)
- California State University San Marcos:
 - Ranks first nationally out of more than 1,400 schools for social mobility ([CollegeNet](#), 2022)
 - Library received 2024 Library Excellence in Access and Diversity Award ([INSIGHT Into Diversity](#), 2023)
- Miramar College:
 - Ranked among the top 20 percent of community colleges in California for: least expensive tuition, diversity in U.S. community colleges, highest graduate earnings, least debt for graduates ([Community College Review](#), 2021)
- MiraCosta College:
 - Only community college in California to offer a craft brewing certificate program that meets the standards set by Master Brewers Association of the Americas ([MiraCosta College](#), 2022)
 - Automotive Technology Program accredited by the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence ([MiraCosta College](#), 2021)
- University of San Diego:
 - Named one of the top law programs in the country ([U.S. News & World Report](#), 2022)
 - Ranked ninth best college campus in America ([Niche](#), 2024)
 - Ranked sixth Best Catholic College in America ([Niche](#), 2024)
- Point Loma Nazarene University:
 - Ranked seventh Best Christian College in America ([Niche](#), 2024)
- National University:
 - Ranks first nationally among Best Online Colleges in America ([Niche](#), 2024)
 - Ranks fourth among Best Online Computer Science Degrees ([Forbes](#), 2024)

Tech & Software

- San Diego is home to more than 140,000 STEM workers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023)
- Dexcom Stello names among Best Invention ([TIME](#), 2024)
- San Diego's tech industry contributed \$33.2 billion in regional GRP (Lightcast, 2023)
- Software startups made up more than 50 percent of San Diego County's new innovation startup companies established in 2023 ([Connect](#), 2024)
- San Diego named top U.S. metro for growth in tech talent ([LinkedIn News](#), 2022)
- 157 of 273 private funding rounds for San Diego companies were tech or consumer companies ([Connect](#), 2021)
- San Diego ranks as the fifth best city to start a tech career ([Learn to code with me](#), 2021)
- San Diego ranks top 10 Science and Technology cluster worldwide ([WIPO](#), 2024)
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International Business & Cross-Border

- San Diego International Airport:
 - Nation's busiest single runway airport, generating more than \$12 billion in annual economic impact and supporting more than 7,000 jobs ([SAN](#), 2022)
 - Ranked 14th best large airport in the U.S. ([Forbes](#), 2022)
 - Achieved highest rating by airport carbon accreditation program ([Aviation Pros](#), 2022)
- San Diego/Tijuana named World Design Capital 2024, the first binational region to be awarded the distinction ([World Design Organization](#), 2021)
- San Diego/Tijuana is a top medical device cluster globally (University of San Diego, 2022)
- The Port of San Diego's new all-electric cranes offer the heaviest lift capacity on the West Coast for heavy cargo like solar, wind, and industrial energy equipment ([Port of San Diego](#), 2024)
- More than 1,700 foreign-owned enterprises have operations in San Diego (Dun & Bradstreet, 2024)
- Foreign-owned enterprises employ 79,000 San Diegans (Dun & Bradstreet, 2024)
- San Diego-Tijuana offers a combined population of more than 7.1 million people, a 27,000 square mile footprint, two international airports, and the busiest land port of entry in the western hemisphere ([Go Global: San Diego's Trade and Investment Initiative](#), 2021)
- The U.S. is the largest exporter of services in the world, and San Diego is a top 10 services exporter among U.S. metros ([Go Global: San Diego's Trade and Investment Initiative](#), 2021)
- \$3.5 billion in foreign investment into San Diego in 2020 ([Go Global: San Diego's Trade and Investment Initiative](#), 2021)
- \$33 billion in total exports from San Diego in 2023 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023)
- \$46 billion in total imports to San Diego in 2020 ([Go Global: San Diego's Trade and Investment Initiative](#), 2021)
- Seven international ports of entry ([Go Global: San Diego's Trade and](#)

[Investment Initiative](#), 2021)

- Home to two international airports, including world's first cross-border airport terminal ([Go Global: San Diego's Trade and Investment Initiative](#), 2021)

Defense

- San Diego hosts the largest concentration of military assets in the world ([San Diego Military Advisory Council](#), 2024)
- San Diego's defense spending resulted in \$63.2 billion in GRP ([San Diego Military Advisory Council](#), 2024)
- The military injected \$40.5 billion in direct spending into San Diego's economy in fiscal year 2024 ([San Diego Military Advisory Council](#), 2024)
- Defense spending in the San Diego region produces 369,600 jobs ([San Diego Military Advisory Council](#), 2024)
- Military-related spending in San Diego County had an overall increase of 17.6 percent from pre-pandemic fiscal year 2019 levels and continues to be a significant driver of the local economy ([San Diego Military Advisory Council](#), 2023)
- For every dollar the government spends on defense in San Diego, \$1.56 is added to the local economy ([San Diego Military Advisory Council](#), 2024)
- San Diego-area defense contractors received \$20.519 billion in contracts during the 2024 fiscal year supporting more than 222,000 jobs in more than 2,000 local companies ([San Diego Military Advisory Council](#), 2024)

Cybersecurity

- San Diego's cybersecurity cluster accounts for more than 26,000 jobs, including 13,383 cyber-specific roles, and a total economic impact of \$4 billion annually ([EDC, San Diego Cyber Center of Excellence](#), 2023)
- In San Diego, 59 percent of private sector cybersecurity jobs are in industries outside of technology, such as manufacturing, architecture, and engineering ([EDC, San Diego Cyber Center of Excellence](#), 2023)
- San Diego's cyber cluster jobs are up eight percent and establishments up by 17 percent since 2021 ([EDC, San Diego Cyber Center of Excellence](#), 2023)
- San Diego's cyber talent pool has grown by nearly 10 percent since 2018 ([EDC, San Diego Cyber Center of Excellence](#), 2023)
- In 2020 alone, the U.S. Navy's Naval Information Warfare Systems Command set aside \$7.1 billion for private-industry Cyber and AI contracts, \$1.6 billion of which was specifically for the San Diego region. That \$1.6 billion is equal to 46 percent of the total economic contributions of San Diego's cyber cluster ([Securing the Future: AI and San Diego's Cyber Cluster](#), 2021)

Aerospace

- The aerospace industry in the San Diego region has an annual economic impact of nearly \$30 billion ([EMSI](#), 2021)
- In North County alone, the aerospace cluster generates 13,800 total jobs and an average of \$1.6 billion in wages annually ([EMSI](#), 2021)
- The industry has an annual economic impact of \$1.8 billion in North County San Diego, taking into account direct, indirect, and induced effects ([EMSI](#), 2021)
- Aerospace delivered more than 16,900 manufacturing jobs (EDC, 2023)

Information & Communications Technologies (ICT)

- Roughly 60,000 IT professionals call San Diego home, representing just more than four percent of total regional employment ([San Diego Cyber Center of Excellence](#), 2021)
- San Diego is home to Qualcomm, the largest smartphone chipmaker in the world, which:
 - Boasts \$118,900 average annual pay, one of the highest paying employment sectors in the region ([Qualcomm's Contribution to San Diego's Economy](#), 2019)
 - Has an economic impact of \$4 billion annually and 10,030 local workers ([Qualcomm's Contribution to San Diego's Economy](#), 2019)
 - Employs roughly 12 percent of the region's total tech talent ([Qualcomm's Contribution to San Diego's Economy](#), 2019)

Cleantech

- San Diego named the greenest city in the U.S. ([Wallethub](#), 2024)
- San Diego International Airport runs on 100 percent carbon free renewable electricity ([SAN](#), 2022)
- San Diego is the fourth most sustainable city in the U.S. ([Rocket Homes](#), 2021)
- San Diego's cleantech sector supports more than 41,000 jobs and has an economic impact of \$9.9 billion ([Cleantech San Diego](#), 2023)
- The San Diego region ranks second in the nation for solar installations ([Cleantech San Diego](#), 2023)
- The San Diego region has more than 131,000 electric vehicles on the road supported by 6,529 public charging stations ([Cleantech San Diego](#), 2023)
- San Diego is home to 9,744 jobs in the solar industry ([Cleantech San Diego](#), 2023)
- San Diego companies investing in energy storage projects totaling 1,452MW in SDG&E territory ([Cleantech San Diego](#), 2023)
- San Diego region ranks ninth as a U.S. Cleantech Innovation Hub ([Cleantech San Diego](#), 2021)
- The San Diego region is a Smart Cities Readiness Challenge award winner ([Smart Cities Council](#), 2019)
- SDG&E makes "World Changing Ideas" list for emissions reduction tool ([Fast Company](#), 2022)
- Port of San Diego is the first in the U.S. to launch an electric tug boat and all electric cranes ([San Diego Union Tribune](#), 2024)
- In 2014, San Diego International Airport became the world's first LEED Platinum commercial terminal ([San Diego International Airport](#))
- Illumina among first in the world to receive approval of net-zero GHG emissions target ([Illumina](#), 2022)

Sports & Active Lifestyle

- San Diego is the Happiest City in America ([hims](#), 2024)
- San Diego ranks sixth friendliest city in America ([Preply](#), 2024)
- Ranks fourth among healthiest cities in the U.S. ([WalletHub](#), 2024)
- Barrio Logan neighborhood ranked sixth coolest neighborhood in the world ([TimeOUT](#), 2022)

- Ranked one of the best cities in the world ([World's Best Cities](#), 2025)
- San Marcos ranked among top 20 Best Places to Live for Families ([Fortune](#), 2022)
- San Diego Mojo volleyball team play in the Pro Volleyball Federation ([PVF](#), 2024)
- Oceanside's Frontwave Arena to house Clippers G League team relocating from LA ([NBA](#), 2024)
- San Diego Padres made 2022 playoffs ([CBS8](#), 2022)
- San Diego Padres made 2024 Wild Card Series ([San Diego Union Tribune](#), 2024)
- San Diego Wave made 2023 playoffs ([Axios](#), 2023)
- Padres' Petco Park:
 - Ranked as the top MLB stadium ([USA Today](#), 2022)
 - Named MLB's most walkable stadium ([Walk Score](#), 2024)
- Port of San Diego named world's best cruise port ([Global Traveler USA](#), 2022)
- San Diego tops list of Most Fun Places to Live in the U.S. ([U.S. News & World Report](#), 2021)
- San Diego is among the top three best cities for recreation in the U.S. ([Wallet Hub](#), 2021)
- Coronado Beach ranked third Best Beaches in the U.S. ([Travel + Leisure](#), 2024)
- Encinitas ranked ninth Best Beach Town to Live In ([Stacker](#), 2021)
- Carlsbad ranked among top 20 of the Best Cities to Raise a Family in America ([Niche](#), 2024)
- San Diego athletes won 27 medals in 12 sports at the 2024 Paris Olympics ([San Diego Union Tribune](#), 2024)

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