



# Behavioral Health Employer Learning Community

*Aligning Hiring and Internal Advancement Opportunity with the  
ELEVATE Pay it Forward Loan Fund*

11.06.2025



# Goals of the Employer Learning Community (ELC)

- Provide executives, HR leaders, and hiring managers from eligible ELEVATE employers the latest updates on ELEVATE programs
- Explore opportunities to use ELEVATE programs to advance your hiring, internal training, and retention goals
- Ask questions and raise issues about how the programs are operating and how they can be improved
- Connect with program partners (education institutions, training providers, etc.)
- Learn from peer organizations about workforce best practices and lessons learned



# Program Context and Goals

## Context

The Elevate Behavioral Health Workforce Fund is a Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Innovation Program approved for **\$75 million over five years** by the Behavioral Health Commission and the San Diego County Board of Supervisors. MHSA Innovation funds are intentional in identifying innovative, new or adaptive approaches in addressing community mental health services.

## Goals

The goal of The Elevate Behavioral Health Workforce Fund is to **attract and retain workers in the public behavioral health field** by deploying funding to support individuals seeking a variety of training, tuition support, upskilling, and incentive opportunities.

## Team

The **Policy & Innovation Center** (PIC) was procured by San Diego County as the Program Administrator of The Elevate Behavioral Health Workforce Fund and will be partnering with two subcontractors **Social Finance** and **Trailhead Strategies** to implement The Elevate Behavioral Health Workforce Fund.



# Agenda

- ELEVATE Behavioral Health Workforce Fund Updates (5 minutes)
- Recap of last meeting (5 minutes)
- Overview of the Behavioral Health Pay it Forward Loan Fund (20 minutes)
- Peer learning with Interfaith (20 minutes)
- Next steps (10 minutes)



# ELEVATE UPDATES





### San Diego Pay It Forward Loan Program

Funding to provide zero-interest, forgivable student loans for behavioral health programs.

### Nurse Practitioner (NP) Expansion Grant Program

Funding to launch and/or expand graduate NP programs to help students to become psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners (PMHNPs) in public settings

### Behavioral Health Apprenticeship Network

Funding for apprentices to become SUD Counselors, case managers, community health workers, and other in-demand roles.

### Peer Support Specialist Training Grant Program

Funding to train, place, and retain Certified Peer Support Specialists in San Diego County.

### Social Work, Counseling, and Therapy Internship Program

Funding to provide paid, high-quality internships and associate supervision opportunities for social work, therapy, and clinical counseling students in public BH.





# ELEVATE In the News



## County to invest in mental health training

\$75M set aside to educate thousands of future workers

By Paul Sisson  
UNION-TRIBUNE

A 2022 report concluded that San Diego County faces a mental health care staffing crisis and



Nadia Privara Brahms, acting director of County Behavioral Health Services, speaks at the launch of the Elevate program on Thursday in San Diego. K.C. ALFRED / U-T

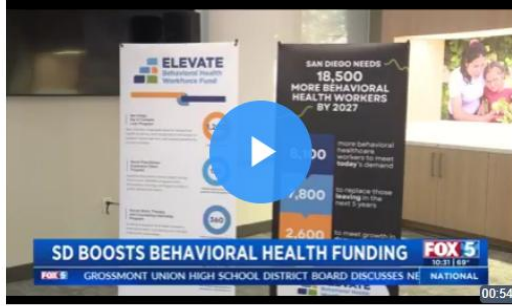
### ELEVATE

From Page 1

treat mental illness. The county selected San Diego's Policy & Innovation Center to create and oversee Elevate in conjunction with the workforce consulting firm Trailhead Strategies. As documented in The San Diego Union-Tribune's 72 Hours Project, the region's mental health care system, like many in the nation, has been operating over capacity for years. County Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer, who spoke at Thursday's launch event, noted that recent efforts to build local mental health care infrastructure, from crisis-stabilization units to special rapid-response teams, does no good without trained caregivers. "With this investment, San Diego isn't just meeting today's crisis — we are building a model for the nation," Lawson-Remer said. "And most importantly, we're ensuring that when a child, a parent or a neighbor is in crisis, they can get the care they need, right here at home."

job certification. Another program, undertaken with the National Association of Mental Illness of San Diego and Pacific Clinics, will seek to train 500 people to pass the state's exam to work as peer support specialists, an informal role filled by those who have themselves navigated treatment. California began offering these certifications in 2022. A third program works with national nonprofit Social Finance to offer zero-interest forgivable loans to mental health care workers who want to pursue the masters-level training necessary to become licensed to work in roles such as clinical social workers, licensed professional clinical counselors and marriage and family therapists. Loans can be at least partially forgiven if graduates work serving the county's Medi-Cal residents for at least five years after graduation. San Diego State University and California State University San Marcos in North County are the initial partners providing these programs, though other local universities may also participate, with 1,200 workers anticipated to be trained connections to help students earn those hours. The program is structured so that students only have to come to campus eight times per semester, with the balance of their coursework available through remote learning. "We've been working over the last two years on developing the curriculum for the program with the Department of Community Psychiatry at UCSD," Macauley said. Her counterpart at UC San Diego is Dr. Steve Koh, who directs the program. Stephanie Gioia-Beckman, a senior director at the Policy & Innovation Center, noted that all of these different job classifications require many hours of supervised work in addition to classroom instruction. Generally, this supervision time has been difficult to secure, and a big part of the Elevate initiative is working with more than 90 mental health providers in the county already contracted with the county to serve patients covered by Medi-Cal to streamline the process of getting clinical practicum hours. "We need a system that kind of marries the curriculum and what's happen-

Oct 10, 2025 1:31 AM EDT  
FOX 5 News at 10:00pm



### El condado y sus socios lanzan una nueva inversión de \$75 millones para fortalecer la fuerza laboral de salud conductual

Hay más información disponible para los trabajadores de salud conductual actuales y futuros en el sitio web de Elevate Behavioral Workforce Fund.



Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer  
@SupLawsonRemer

HUGE!!  
Today San Diego County is launching the nation's first Behavioral Health pipeline.

With paid apprenticeships, 0% loans, and student debt forgiveness, we're bringing 3,000 more mental health and addiction care workers into our region.

Policy & Innovation Center @PolicyInnovate · Oct 9  
@SupLawsonRemer joined behavioral health leaders and partners today to announce the ELEVATE Behavioral Health Workforce Fund — it's a historic \$75 million investment to address San Diego's critical shortage of mental health care providers.



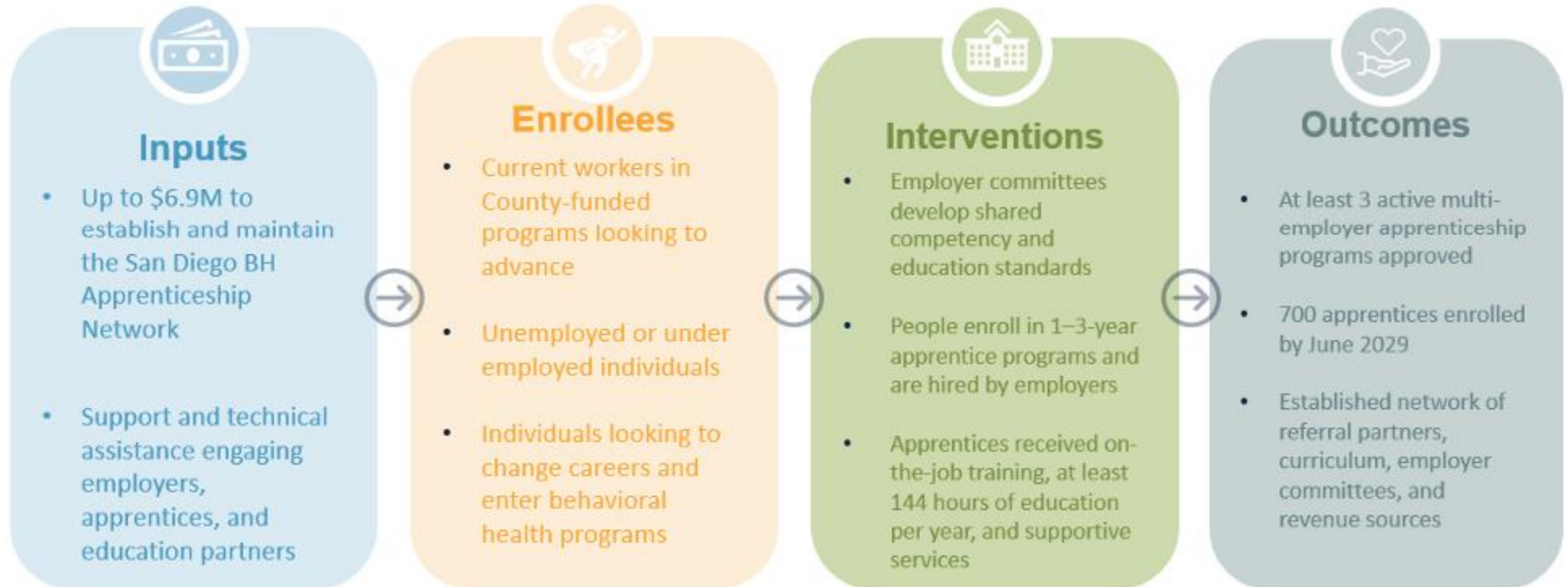
# Recap of Last ELC Meeting



# Behavioral Health Apprenticeship Network

## Problem Statement

- There is a shortage of SUD Counselors, Case Managers, Community Health Workers, and other key BH fields.
- The traditional education model to enter these fields is not producing the needed professionals and can be particularly challenging for adult learners and individuals with lived experience.



# “What’s in it for me?” // The WIFM for Employers



*In Partnership with*  
FOUNDATION for CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY COLLEGES

## Behavioral Health Apprenticeship Network:

- Get education and certification costs covered to help current and new staff earn state certifications (e.g., CADC I, BH Wellness Coach) through an apprenticeship tuition assistance program
- Get a steady pipeline of unlicensed professionals, with potential subsidies to offset mentorship/supervision costs
- Build out internal mentorship and supervision structure in your organization for key roles



# Take Action



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## Behavioral Health Apprenticeship Network:

- **Review** the October 2nd ELC [meeting recording](#) (Passcode: u+mFph3A)
- **Complete** 5-minute [Employer Interest Form](#) to help us understand how we might best support your organization explore, plan and/or implement an apprenticeship program.
- **Attend** an Employer Informational Session >>



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In partnership  
with:



## Behavioral Health Apprenticeship Network Employer Information Sessions

Join one of three sessions to learn:

- What is Registered Apprenticeship?
- What is an Apprenticeship Committee?
- How can you get connected to the Network?
- What support exists for you to launch apprenticeship at your organization

**December 2nd**

10AM-11AM

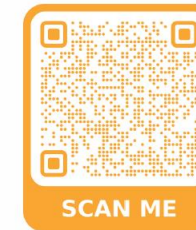
[Register Here](#)



**December 10th**

2PM-3PM

[Register Here](#)



**December 12th**

9AM-10AM

[Register Here](#)



For more information, please contact  
Keith Gemmell at [keith@launchapprenticeship.org](mailto:keith@launchapprenticeship.org)

# THE “WIFM” for Eligible Employers

## “What is in it for me?” (The WIFM)

### ■ Pay It Forward Loan Program:

- Recruit master’s graduates that have take out a loan, and promote that they can receive loan forgiveness on eligible job postings and loan balance reductions for incumbent employees who return to an eligible behavioral health role
- Refer/support current employees to return to school and upskill to become licensed clinicians

### ■ Behavioral Health Apprenticeship Network:

- Get education and certification costs covered to help current and new staff become get certifications (e.g., CADAC I, BH Wellness Coach)
- Get a steady pipeline of unlicensed professionals, with potential subsidies to offset mentorship/supervision costs

### ■ Peer Support Training and Placement Grants:

- Hire CalMHSA Certified Peers
- Get current staff certified
- Receive services and TA to retain peers and support their advancement

### ■ Nurse Practitioner Expansion Program:

- Get supervision, support and technical assistance to incorporate PMHNP’s into your clinical services
- Serve as a host site for post-graduate PMHNP fellows

### ■ Social Work, Therapy, and Counseling Internship and Associate Program:

- (TBD)





# The San Diego Pay it Forward Loan Program





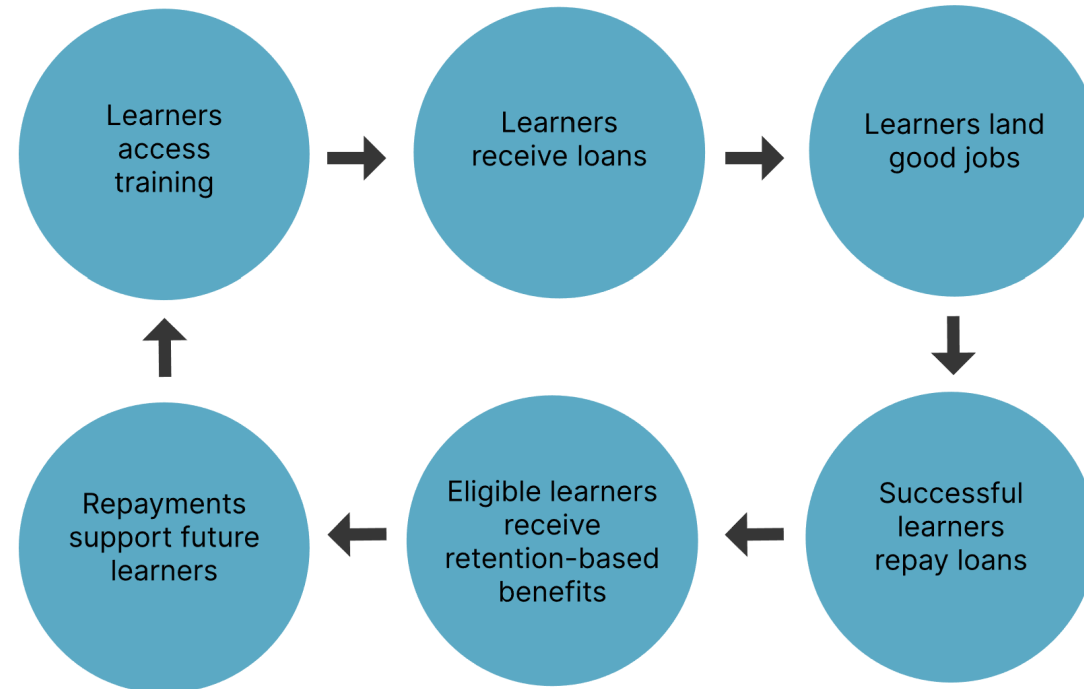
# San Diego Pay It Forward Loan Program

The San Diego Pay It Forward Loan Program supports the training and retention of new and incumbent public BH workers via student-friendly loans and will recycle loan repayments to serve future participants

## Description

- **0% interest** and no student-facing fees
- **Income-based deferment** for borrowers earning below minimum income threshold
- **Incumbent workers** are eligible for retention-based credits toward their loan balances
- **Loan forgiveness** after 5 years of service in public behavioral health
- Borrower repayments “**pay it forward**” to future participants

## How it Works



# Key loan terms

Loan type	<b>Private education loan</b> (subject to Truth in Lending Act disclosure requirements, definitions of post-secondary education expenses, and credit reporting)
Loan size	<b>\$10,000 – \$20,000</b> per academic year <b>\$40,000</b> aggregate maximum per person
Interest rate / APR	<b>0%</b> interest; no student-facing fees
Minimum income threshold	Deferment option if <b>earning below \$50,000</b> per year (and other standard deferment options are available – e.g. medical, financial hardship, natural disaster, military service)
Loan term	<b>10 years</b>
Repayment amount	<b>Fixed</b> monthly payments
In-School / Grace periods	No repayment obligation while <b>in school or during 3-month grace period</b> after graduation / exit
Loan forgiveness	<b>5-year service in eligible public BH role</b> (also for death and TPD)
Incumbent worker retention benefit	Up to <b>5 annual loan credits</b> for incumbent workers returning to eligible public BH role



# Eligibility criteria

## Mandatory criteria

- ✓ Enrolled in an eligible program at SDSU and CSUSM<sup>1</sup>
- ✓ U.S. citizen, U.S. permanent resident, or DACA & TPS status (i.e. authorized to work in the U.S.)
- ✓ At least 18 years of age
- ✓ Resident of California
- ✓ No active bankruptcy or collections accounts > \$15K excluding medical debt
- ✓ Family income < 125% of the median for family size in San Diego County<sup>2</sup>

## Required documentation

- ✓ Copy of photo identification
- ✓ Credit check and identity verification (no minimum credit score or history)
- ✓ Copy of most recent IRS Form 1040 (to confirm income, family size, marital status)



1. Eligible programs are currently MSW (at SDSU and CSUSM), Marriage & Family Therapy (SDSU only), Early Childhood & Family Clinical Counseling (SDSU only). We are actively looking to expand this list.  
2. This currently ranges from \$103,094 for a 1-person family to \$187,121 for a 4-person family (or greater).



# Case Study from the Field: Interfaith's MSW Training Program

# Building a Community Behavioral Health Workforce Center of Excellence

Insights and Lessons Learned from Interfaith Community Service's Talent Initiative in North San Diego County

JUNE 2025



**PRICE**  
PHILANTHROPIES

HELPING PEOPLE HELP THEMSELVES  
**interfaith**  
community services

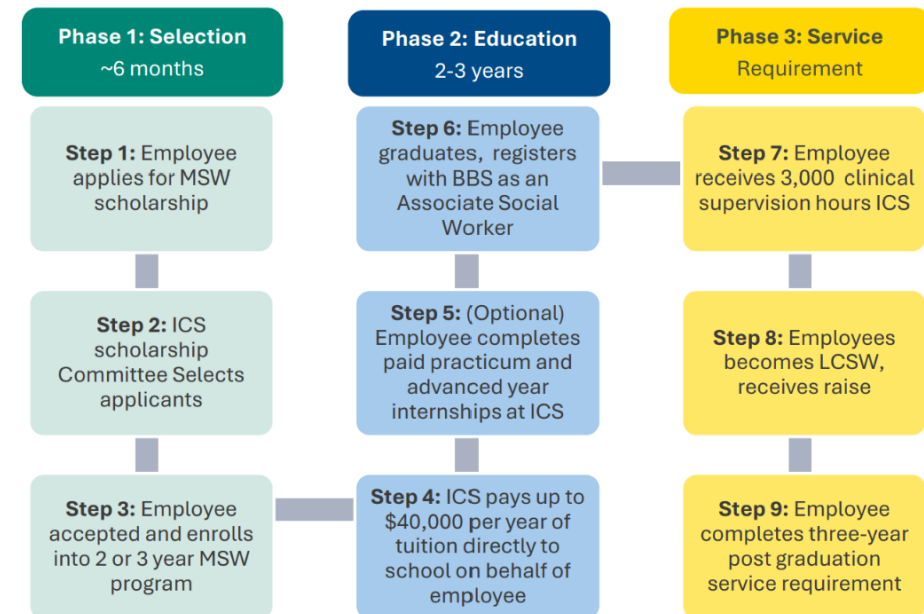
## Section 4: Retaining and Upskilling Current Employees |

### Master of Social Work (MSW) Scholarship Program

A major priority for the COE is to provide current staff with bachelor's degrees working as case managers, SUD counselors, coordinators, specialists, program managers, and other similar roles a feasible and financially viable pathway to becoming Associate Social Workers (ASWs) and Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) at ICS.

In 2023, the COE launched the MSW Scholarship Program, providing eligible employees up to \$40,000 per year to attend an accredited Master's of Social Work program. In exchange, employees must commit to a three-year service agreement post-graduation. If they do not stay with ICS for the entire term of their service agreement, they must repay a pro-rated portion of their scholarship back to ICS. The diagram below demonstrates how the scholarship program operates.

Exhibit 18: ICS MSW Scholarship Program Design



ICS has budgeted \$988,000 of the COE funds for direct scholarships for the MSW scholarship program. As of April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025, ICS has spent \$410,802 dollars, with another \$437,617 obligated for the 16 initial scholarship recipients. \$139,791 remains available. Below is a summary of scholarship recipient information, demographic and current status of students moving through the program.



# Next Steps to Engage

- **BH Apprenticeship Network:** Fill out 5-minute form: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WRL2HJT> and attend an info session (slide 11).
- **Review the** “Building the Behavioral Health Workforce Center of Excellence” report, section 4 about Interfaith MSW Scholarship program.
- **Share the** San Diego [Pay It Forward Loan Program brochure](#) with your employees and other interested partners in your network and [explore the FAQ](#) on the Social Finance website.
- **Register (link):** for the next ELC meeting on December 4th to discuss best practices for hiring and integrating Peer Support Specialists into clinical teams

<https://zoom.us/meeting/register/t3QF-A06QZCBIO7D7KnjCg>



# Questions and Discussion



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