



# The Policy & Innovation Center helps government and community leaders act on smart ideas.

Dear Friends,

This past year proved something we've always believed: when San Diego comes together around bold ideas, real change follows. The Policy & Innovation Center was created to do just that — **to bring research, resources, and people together to tackle the challenges no one can solve alone.**

The results speak for themselves. In just a few short years, the Policy & Innovation Center helped unlock more than **\$122 million** in funding and resources for the region. We are designing and administering a transformational \$75 million behavioral health program on behalf of the County of San Diego that will train 3,000 urgently needed health care providers for the region. We helped lay the foundation for **UniverCity**, expanding four-year college degrees to South Bay, San Diego. And we continue to convene leaders across sectors to shape smarter, more inclusive policy for the future.

Behind every milestone is the same belief: San Diego can be a model for what's possible when innovation is grounded in community, equity, and partnership. We are not just responding to the issues of today, we are building solutions that will stand the test of time.

This annual report is a snapshot of progress made possible by collaboration. The challenges ahead are real — climate change, affordability, economic inequality — but so is our resolve. Our new strategic plan commits our organization to pursuing solutions to these challenges in partnership with others. Together, we will keep turning ideas into action and action into impact.

Thank you for standing with us on this journey. We invite you to read these highlights with pride, knowing these achievements represent what's possible when we work together for the greater good.

With gratitude and determination,



*Susan L. Guinn*  
**Susan L. Guinn, Esq.**  
President & CEO



*BH*  
**Ben Haddad**  
Chair, Board of Directors



# Strategic Plan

## VISION

We envision a future where communities address their toughest challenges to enable everyone in their regions to thrive.



# Strategic Priorities

These strategic priorities form the four pillars of our strategic plan and drive the strategies we will employ to achieve our vision.

## 1 STRENGTHENING REGIONAL RESILIENCY

Forging networks and partnerships, building community capacity, fostering resilience, and strategically channeling public resources.

## 2 CHAMPIONING ECONOMIC MOBILITY

Delivering economic research and analysis, making economic policy recommendations, fostering community prosperity, and motivating action.

## 3 ENHANCING COMMUNITY HEALTH & WELLBEING

Providing research and data on community and behavioral health issues, facilitating cross-sector coalitions, piloting scalable solutions, and identifying policy recommendations.

## 4 PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Supporting climate and water quality research, partnering to advance regional environmental goals, identifying practical policy solutions, and inspiring collective action.

WE ARE

## COMMITTED TO EVIDENCE

- We base our conclusions on rigorous research.
- We create data-informed, independent public policy insights.

WE ARE

## STRONGER TOGETHER

- We build coalitions to achieve shared goals.
- We support our partners' success.

WE

## CHAMPION INNOVATION

- We galvanize new ideas and new practices.
- We leverage diverse perspectives and disciplines.

WE ARE

## DRIVEN BY IMPACT

- We strive to create measurable change.
- We focus on the communities we serve.



# Trusted Source of Information

## ECONOMY & JOBS

We produce analyses and plans that aim to strengthen the labor market and our regional economy, create data-driven reports to support and advance quality jobs, and identify emerging trends that can help employers and local governments maximize opportunities for inclusive growth.

## HOUSING

We analyze market trends and innovations including affordability, financing solutions, and building systems, and provide technical assistance to governments, including through a project for the City of San Diego that ultimately aims to increase the number of new homes in the city by 60%.

## EDUCATION

We develop strategies to expand educational opportunity. Our research helped bring bachelor's degree programs to Chula Vista, the largest city in California without a four-year institutions, where the first bachelor's students matriculated this year.

## WORKFORCE

We help policymakers invest in strategies that maximize regional workforce opportunity. Our research identified high-priority communities to guide San Diego Workforce Partnership's career-center expansion and workforce development efforts.

## WATER

We research the challenges facing San Diego's water utilities, and the tension underlying the need for affordable, reliable, and safe drinking water systems. Our work helps policymakers understand the tradeoffs of different policies across affordability, reliability, and stability, so they can make informed decisions.

## TRANSPORTATION

We reveal the potential impacts of new infrastructure investment, providing economic insights to inform viable options for freight and passenger train service between San Diego and Tijuana for the Caltrans Binational Rail Plan.

***“Our partnership with the Policy & Innovation Center has been a meaningful step toward advancing equitable solutions in water affordability, innovative technology, and community focused green stormwater infrastructure for our region. We value this collaboration and look forward to continuing our shared work to create lasting, positive change in the communities we serve.”***

**LARA BARRETT**

*Land Use/Environmental Planner III,  
County of San Diego*



***“The Policy & Innovation Center continues to be an invaluable partner to San Diego, and this annual report reflects the depth of their commitment to our community. Their work aligns closely with our shared mission to expand opportunity and build a stronger, more inclusive economy. The Policy & Innovation Center is not only a trusted resource but also an inspiration for how organizations can drive meaningful impact across our region.”***

**RACHEL BEREZA**

*President and Chief Executive Officer,  
San Diego Workforce Partnership*







# Trusted Partner

According to the Policy & Innovation Center’s most recent partner survey, over 95% of our partners place their trust in us, recognizing the relevance of our shared work. They express a strong desire to continue collaborating with us and affirm that our efforts add meaningful value to the region. Even more inspiring, **every single partner that responded to the survey—100%—reports satisfaction with our research products and convening services**, underscoring the strength of our relationships and the quality of what we do. These results reflect not only our commitment to excellence, but also the power of partnership in driving regional progress and innovation.

The organizations shown reflect the Policy & Innovation Center’s partners in FY25.

*“The Policy & Innovation Center brings experts together to find solutions that help San Diego be a leader, particularly when it comes to achieving measurable success in housing and climate policy.”*

HEIDI VONBLUM  
Planning Director, City of San Diego





# Brookings Institution Partnership

The Policy & Innovation Center is the only regional organization in the country that possesses a long-term research partnership with the Brookings Institution, the nation's oldest and most respected public policy think tank. In this fourth year of our partnership, Brookings and the Policy & Innovation Center worked together to bring national insights to bear on key challenges for the San Diego region, and to translate lessons from San Diego's local experience into actionable federal policy proposals.

- BROOKINGS AND THE POLICY & INNOVATION CENTER COLLABORATED TO PUBLISH A PROPOSAL FOR A **FEDERAL REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION BLOCK GRANT** THAT COULD DELIVER TENS OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS ANNUALLY TO SAN DIEGO.
- BROOKINGS EXPERTS INFORMED GROUNDBREAKING POLICY & INNOVATION CENTER RESEARCH THAT EXAMINES THE CAUSES OF, AND OFFERS POTENTIAL **SOLUTIONS TO, RISING WATER AFFORDABILITY CHALLENGES** IN THE SAN DIEGO REGION.



*Emily Wier,  
Vice President, Chief Policy  
& Strategy Officer,  
Policy & Innovation Center*



*Alan Berube,  
Senior Vice President,  
Policy & Innovation Center*



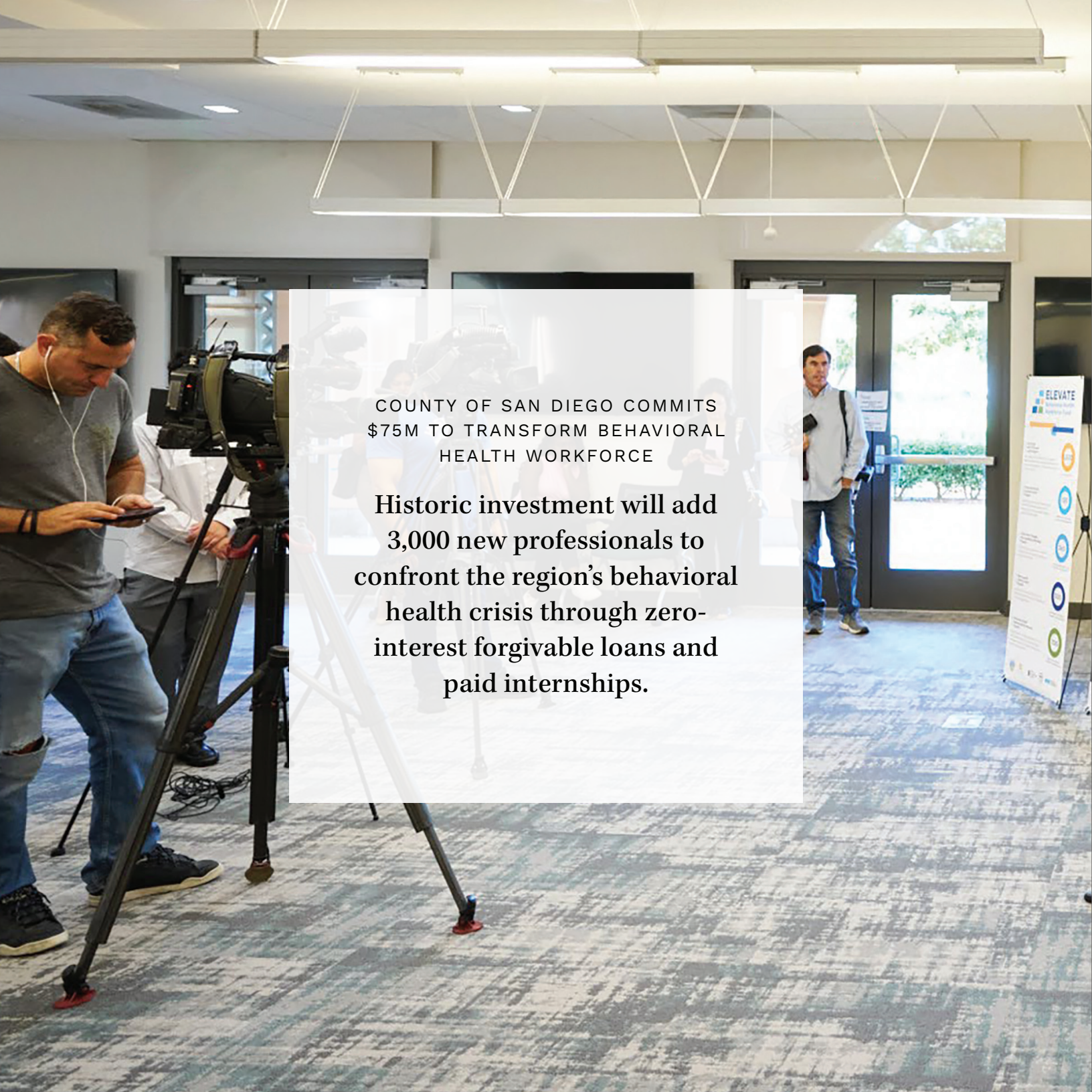
*Adie Tomer, Brookings Institution Senior Fellow  
Caroline Smith, County of San Diego Assistant Chief Administrative Officer  
Greg Stuart, Broward Metropolitan Planning Organization Executive Director*

*“The Policy & Innovation Center represents exactly the kind of locally rooted, evidence-based approach to regional problem-solving that Brookings champions. By combining cutting-edge research with stakeholder engagement and policy incubation, the Policy & Innovation Center exemplifies how metropolitan areas can bridge the gap between analysis and action.”*

**ROBERT PUENTES**  
*Vice President & Director, Brookings Metro*







COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO COMMITS  
\$75M TO TRANSFORM BEHAVIORAL  
HEALTH WORKFORCE

Historic investment will add  
3,000 new professionals to  
confront the region's behavioral  
health crisis through zero-  
interest forgivable loans and  
paid internships.



At podium: **Ben Haddad**, Policy & Innovation Center Board Chair and Principal at California Strategies  
L-R: **Andy Hall**, CEO of Trailhead Strategies  
**Kia Kavooosi**, Director of Impact Investments at Social Finance  
**Stephanie Gioia-Beckman**, Senior Director of Workforce and Community Impact, Policy & Innovation Center  
**Terra Lawson-Remer**, San Diego County Supervisor and Board Chair  
**Nadia Privara Brahms**, Director of Behavioral Health Services at County of San Diego Health & Human Services Agency  
**David Valencia**, a recent graduate from SDSU's marriage and family therapist program



# Systems Change

This first-of-its-kind \$75 million Behavioral Health Program, called ELEVATE, will strengthen the San Diego region's behavioral health ecosystem by delivering 3,000 new, highly trained workers where they're needed most. Thanks to funding from the County of San Diego and State of California, we are transforming the ecosystem of education, employer support, and apprenticeship hubs to build a future where everyone can access mental health services.

- **ZERO-INTEREST LOANS AND STIPENDS** SO STUDENTS CAN PURSUE BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CAREERS WITHOUT THE CRUSHING WEIGHT OF DEBT.
- RETENTION INCENTIVES THAT REWARD CURRENT EMPLOYEES FOR **ADVANCING THEIR EDUCATION** WHILE KEEPING THEIR TALENTS IN OUR PUBLIC SYSTEM.
- AN **APPRENTICESHIP NETWORK**—PAID, EARN-AND-LEARN PATHWAYS WITH STANDARDIZED CURRICULA, SHARED RECRUITMENT, AND PORTABLE CREDENTIALS TO SPEED UP HIRING AND DRIVE COMPLETION.
- EXPANSION OF **PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS**, PRIORITIZING THOSE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE AND MULTILINGUAL SKILLS, BECAUSE COMMUNITIES DESERVE CARE THAT REFLECTS THEIR REALITIES.
- **MORE NURSE PRACTITIONERS** TRAINED AND PLACED IN BEHAVIORAL HEALTH SETTINGS; WITH THE SUPPORT THEY NEED TO SUCCEED LONG-TERM.
- PAID INTERNSHIPS AND STRONGER SUPERVISION CAPACITY, SO TRAINEES DON'T JUST LEARN—**THEY LAND REAL JOBS.**



*“Our firm has been working with the Policy & Innovation Center since 2024 to design and implement a \$75M ELEVATE Behavioral Health Workforce Fund to address the critical shortage of essential behavioral health professionals in San Diego. It’s a bold effort with high stakes for the industry as the County and its service providers work to expand access to critical substance use and mental health services for San Diego residents.”*

ANDY HALL  
President & Chief Executive Officer, Trailhead Strategies

*“The Policy & Innovation Center has been a wonderful partner in developing and implementing the new ELEVATE Behavioral Health Workforce Fund to support training, recruitment, and retention of workers within the public specialty behavioral health system locally. We are thrilled to see this critical opportunity come to fruition and look forward seeing how it enhances opportunities for the local workforce.”*

NADIA PRIVARA BRAHMS  
Behavioral Health Services Director, San Diego County





# Powering Collective Solutions

Facilitated by the Policy & Innovation Center and the Brookings Institution, the Government & Agency Council is comprised of representatives from the County of San Diego, 18 municipalities, and core local agencies. Its purpose is to promote cross-jurisdiction collaboration, secure and leverage federal and state funding, find solutions, share expertise, and determine research gaps to support action. This year, focus areas included workforce development, the post-election outlook for the San Diego region, and water affordability.

The Policy & Innovation Center’s Federal Impacts Roundtables have brought together leaders from industry, government, philanthropy, higher education, and the nonprofit sector to examine the local implications of changing priorities in Washington, D.C.; gain perspective from peer regions adapting to similar transitions; and identify emerging priorities and approaches for continued information-sharing and problem-solving across sectors. The Policy & Innovation Center will continue to convene these leaders in 2026, with an eye toward designing and informing bottom-up initiatives that can deliver broad-based prosperity in a new federalist era.

**Members of the Government & Agency Council include:**

- |                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| County of San Diego         | City of La Mesa                               |
| City of San Diego           | City of Lemon Grove                           |
| City of Carlsbad            | City of National City                         |
| City of Chula Vista         | City of Oceanside                             |
| City of Coronado            | City of Poway                                 |
| City of Del Mar             | City of San Marcos                            |
| City of El Cajon            | City of Santee                                |
| City of Encinitas           | City of Solana Beach                          |
| City of Escondido           | City of Vista                                 |
| City of Imperial Beach      | San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) |
| Port of San Diego           | Metropolitan Transit System (MTS)             |
| San Diego Airport Authority |   |



***Monica Montgomery Steppe,***  
*San Diego County Supervisor*



# Staff Expertise

## Research Team

**Daniel Enemark** *VP, Chief Economist*  
PhD - Political Economy  
Expertise: Macroeconomics, workforce development, racial equity, behavioral health, labor economics, policy analysis, research design and econometrics

**Jamal Russell Black** *Senior Officer, Analytics & Impact*  
PhD (in progress) - Climate Economics  
Expertise: Energy and water affordability, equitable decarbonization, geospatial analysis, interactive data mapping and visualization

**Karen Boyd** *Economist, Director of Research*  
PhD - AI ethics; MBA  
Expertise: AI ethics, research methods, workforce development, value sensitive design, technology in organizations, qualitative analysis, quantitative analysis

**Fernanda Herrera** *Economist*  
PhD - Economics  
Expertise: Cost-benefit analysis, impact assessment, forecasting, supply-demand equilibrium, probability-based economic modeling

## Policy & Programs Team

**Emily Wier** *VP, Chief Policy & Strategy Officer*  
Master of Environmental Management  
Expertise: Public policy development and analysis, including climate, water, housing, land use, economic development; strategy and partnerships state and local government affairs

**Josh Jacobsen**  
*Senior Officer, Government Relations and External Affairs*  
BSB - Business Marketing  
Expertise: Government affairs, communications, website and event management

**Alicia L. Jurek** *Senior Officer, Economics*  
PhD - Criminal Justice & Criminology  
Expertise: Research methods, quantitative analysis, inclusive economic development, education, criminal justice, representative bureaucracy, organizational theory

**Gabriela Gonzalez Martinez** *Economic Analyst*  
MIA (in progress) - Master of International Affairs  
Expertise: Data analysis, workforce development, equity-centered research, spatial analysis, survey design, data visualization, community-engagement for research

**Niloufar Nasrollahzadeh** *Economic Analyst*  
MPP - Master of Public Policy  
Expertise: Data analysis, data visualization, quantitative/qualitative research methods, policy analysis, water policy, health policy, economics

**Gabriela Stone** *Economic Analyst*  
MGH - Master of Global Health  
Expertise: Equity-centered research, global & public health, mixed-methods research, public policy analysis, and social epidemiology/biostatistics

**Emmerie Schoolsky** *Project Manager, Stormwater Engineer*  
B.S. - Environmental Engineering  
Expertise: Engineering, water/green stormwater infrastructure, project management

**Leeanne Singleton** *Director, Strategic Initiatives*  
Master of Public Administration  
Expertise: Water/green stormwater infrastructure, project management, city planning, grant strategy, partnerships and community engagement

## Behavioral Health Team

**Stephanie Gioia-Beckman**  
*Senior Director, Workforce & Community Impact*  
B.S. - Psychology  
Expertise: Policy development, government and community relations, workforce strategy, leading cross-sector collaborations, advancing systems-level reforms and designing programs that strengthen access, equity, and outcomes across behavioral health and public health

**Kristin Garrett Montgomery**  
*Sr. Officer, Behavioral Health Strategy & Operations*  
MPH - Health Services Administration  
Expertise: Community health, healthcare, children's behavioral health. Program development and management, policy development, collective impact, non-profit leadership and operations

**Genie Wungsukit**  
*Admin. Asst., Behavioral Health Workforce & Retention*  
B.S. - Cognitive and Behavioral Neuroscience  
Expertise: Leveraging technological tools to create efficient workflows, program and event coordination, cross-cultural communication and collaboration that drives mission-aligned impact

## Executive

**Susan L. Guinn** *President & Chief Executive Officer*  
BSN & ESQ.  
Expertise: Bringing legal and policy rigor to complex challenges, leveraging philanthropic and private sector resources, innovation, entrepreneurship, public/private partnerships and contract compliance

**Alan Berube** *Senior Vice President*  
MPP - Master of Public Policy  
Expertise: City and regional economies, inclusive economic development, demographics, income dynamics, federal/state regional development policies, nonprofit leadership

## Finance Team & Operations Team

**Christine Dolan** *VP, Chief Financial Officer*  
MBA & M.S. - Management and Leadership  
Expertise: Nonprofit financial management, strategic and organizational planning, fiscal policy and compliance, systems implementation, process improvement, and data-informed decision-making

**Arnold Cerdinio** *Accountant*  
CPA (1987 - Philippine CPA Board)  
Expertise: For profit (manufacturing and insurance) and non-profit financial management, full cycle-accounting to financial statement preparation, contract administration, reconciliation of accounts (A/R, A/P, inter-company, bank), payroll, construction and project accounting, budgets and forecasting, office management

**Tiffany Frost** *Operations Administrator & Compliance Specialist*  
AA - Psychology  
Expertise: Operations, compliance, project administration, standard operating procedures

**Gloria Rivera** *Accounting Associate*  
AA (in progress) - Liberal Arts  
Expertise: Office management and organization, payment processing and expense management, confidentiality and discretion, communication and interpersonal skills, invoice processing and reconciliation

**Vicki Vasquez** *Executive Assistant & Board Liaison*  
MA. Ed. - Master of Arts, Education  
Expertise: Administrative mastery, communication, project and task management, strategic support, relationship building, technology proficiency, problem solving and adaptability



# Organizational Excellence

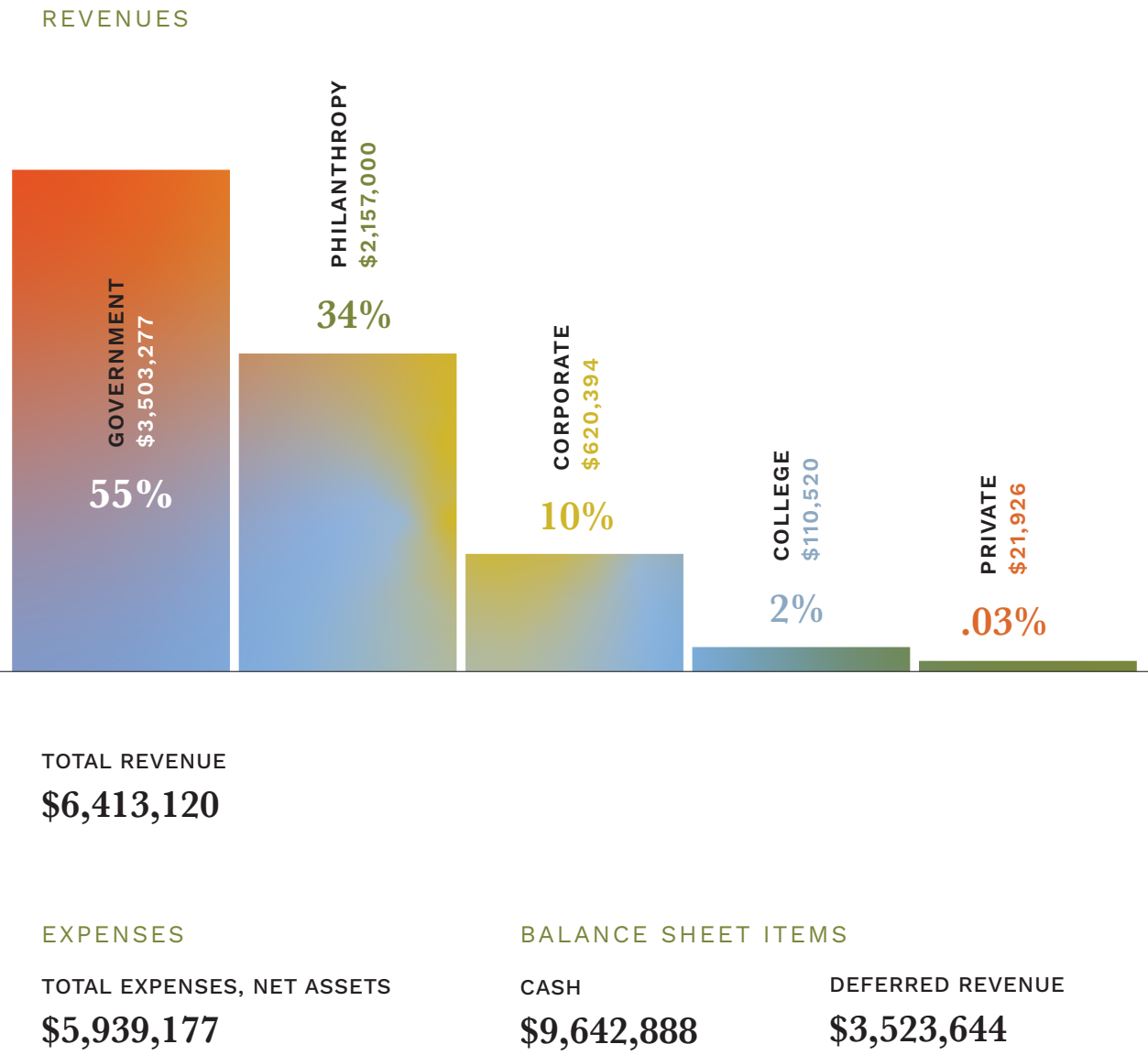
- TRUSTED TO STEWARD COMPLEX, **MULTI-MILLION-DOLLAR CONTRACTS AND GRANTS** WITH ACCOUNTABILITY AND PRECISION.
- STRONG **GOVERNANCE AND OPERATIONS** ENSURE PARTNERS AND FUNDERS CAN RELY ON THE POLICY & INNOVATION CENTER TO DELIVER WITH INTEGRITY.
- CLEAN **THIRD PARTY AUDITS** EVERY YEAR OF EXISTENCE.

## Awards



The Policy & Innovation Center provided research for the *State of San Diego Latinos* report.

## Fiscal Year 2025 Financials July 1, 2024 to June 30, 2025, Unaudited





# Policy & Innovation Center Board of Directors

Ben Haddad

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Principal, *California Strategies*

Jim Howell

BOARD TREASURER, FINANCE & ADMIN COMMITTEE CHAIR  
Vice President & Chief Financial Officer, *San Diego Foundation*

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President & CEO, *Del Mar Venture Group*

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Mark A. Stuart

BOARD MEMBER  
President & CEO, *San Diego Foundation*

Susan L. Guinn, Esq.

President & CEO, *Policy & Innovation Center*



“The San Diego Foundation deeply values the Policy & Innovation Center’s commitment to research and data-driven insights. Their work not only informs smarter decisions but also strengthens our shared ability to create meaningful, long-term change for communities throughout San Diego.”

MARK A. STUART  
President & Chief Executive Officer, San Diego Foundation







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