

Compete Connect

July 2026 Edition

From the CEO's Desk



Deborah L. Wince-Smith
President and CEO
Council on Competitiveness

Dear Council on Competitiveness Community,

The third edition of our 2026 "Competitiveness Conversations Across America," *San Diego: Building the Next Economy's Strategic Innovation Stack — Compute, AI, Energy, Bio, Autonomy, and Security*, was as incredibly insightful and engaging as the past dozen.

Under the vision of Council Executive Committee Member and UC San Diego Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla, we brought together more than 45 incredible speakers and 200 leaders from industry, academia, the U.S. Department of Energy national laboratories, and the global competitiveness community to unpack the key elements driving the region's model of place-making innovation — a compelling example of how decades of sustained investment in research, talent, entrepreneurship, national security, and public-private collaboration can transform a region into an innovation powerhouse.

Today, San Diego ranks among the world's leading telecommunications and biotechnology hubs, and it is making great strides in building world-class competencies and capabilities in fusion research, biomanufacturing, sensors, advanced microelectronics, and autonomous systems across an array of industries.

Throughout the Conversation, leaders examined the forces that continue to shape San Diego's innovation economy, explored opportunities to strengthen further its momentum, and identified lessons to amplify and deploy across the country to help communities build resilient innovation ecosystems. The Council and UC San Diego teams look forward to sharing in the weeks ahead a summary report of key findings.



Photo credit: Wonderstruck Photography by Miss Kehaulani

Pictured: Dr. Pradeep Khosla, Chancellor, UC San Diego; The Hon. Deborah Wince-Smith, President and CEO, Council on Competitiveness; Mr. Chad Evans, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Council on Competitiveness

The Council launched our week in San Diego with a special workshop – in partnership with IFF and ANSI – aimed at discussing and codifying a set of smart regulatory and standards principles to empower the global competitiveness of U.S.-based, transformative technologies and industries – from bio, to advanced materials, to AI and quantum, and more. Two dozen leaders from across sectors debated, assessed, and worked together to frame an initial draft of principles. I want to thank Phyllis Marquitz, Senior Vice President at IFF, and ANSI President and CEO Laurie Locascio for their support and engagement.

Looking ahead, the Council team is advancing several important initiatives:

- We are receiving input from our members and working to evolve a 10X policy initiative around “Advanced Innovation and Manufacturing (AIM) Zones.” Thanks to many of you for responding so positively to the concept and working to provide further insights, as well as thinking of how you might support and grow such an AIM Zone in your own region. Much more to come.
- Following the Nebraska edition of the “Competitiveness Conversations Across America,” we are working to scope a series of task forces to explore issues raised across the bioeconomy value chain.
- In the coming weeks, we will release summary reports from the recent “Competitiveness Conversations Across America,” as well as the Technology Leadership & Strategy Initiative’s (TLSI) Dialogue 32, which took place in Fort Worth at Lockheed Martin’s F-35 Lightning II production line.
- And we are seeking interest from our Members to host a 2027 edition of the “Competitiveness Conversations Across America.” If you would like to learn more about this opportunity, please contact our EVP and COO [Chad Evans](#).

A final note: I invite you to join us for a landmark moment – the [40th Anniversary Gala Dinner and 2026 National Competitiveness Forum](#), taking place December 16-17 at the Willard InterContinental Hotel in Washington, D.C.

As we celebrate four decades of impact, we will bring together our members and other critical leaders to chart the actions needed to define the competitiveness drivers for the coming decades. The NCF will feature an ambitious agenda to secure U.S. productivity and economic growth, prosperity, and security. (Please contact [Chad Evans](#) for registration details, as Council Members receive a significant discount).

To support the 40th Gala and the 2026 NCF, sponsorships are available, with a range of benefits. We are grateful to an initial slate of early sponsors, including the University of Colorado Boulder; the University of Tennessee, Knoxville; the University of Texas at San Antonio; and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. The Council has set an ambitious sponsorship goal, critical to the success of our flagship annual gathering and to sustaining our year-round work advancing U.S. competitiveness. Thank you for considering this opportunity. [Click here to view the sponsorship brochure](#).

We are grateful for your support of the Council and your commitment to advancing U.S. competitiveness.

Sincerely,

Deborah L. Wince-Smith
President & CEO
Council on Competitiveness

Council News

40 Years of Impact: Register for the 2026 National Competitiveness Forum

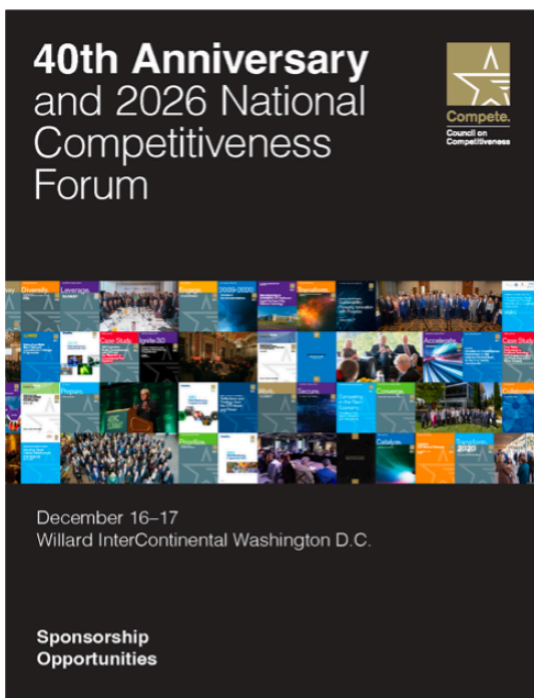
Join the Council on Competitiveness in Washington, D.C., December 16-17, 2026, for our 40th Anniversary Gala and [2026 National Competitiveness Forum \(NCF\)](#) at the Willard InterContinental Hotel.

Four decades after our founding, the Council will convene the nation's leading voices from industry, academia, labor, and the U.S. Department of Energy national laboratory enterprise for a landmark gathering focused on the future of U.S. competitiveness. The NCF will feature an ambitious agenda to accelerate breakthroughs, scale emerging technologies, modernize innovation systems, and ensure the United States sets the global bar for competition in the next economy.

[Registration is open - click here to join us to celebrate 40 years of impact.](#)

(NOTE: Council Members should contact [Chad Evans](#) for your discount code).

Interested in Sponsoring?



Sponsorship opportunities are available and remain a critical source of support for the Council's annual work. The 2026 sponsorship brochure is available [here](#), and sponsorship inquiries should be directed to [Chad Evans](#).

Thank you to our first four sponsors:

- The University of Colorado Boulder
- The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
- Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory
- The University of Texas at San Antonio

Council Community News

Vanderbilt University Launches New College Focused on Creativity and Innovation

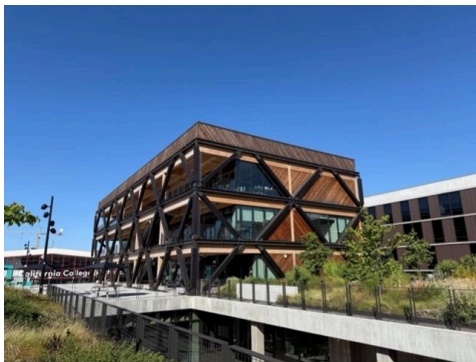


Photo Credit: Vanderbilt University

Dr. Daniel Diermeier, President of Vanderbilt University and Council National Commissioner and Executive Committee Member, has announced plans to develop the Jen-Hsun and Lori Huang College of Art, Architecture and Design in San Francisco. Supported by a \$75 million matching gift from the Huang family, the new college will bring together art, design, technology, engineering, and entrepreneurship — reflecting the growing importance of creativity as a driver of innovation in the AI era and preparing students to lead across industries. You can learn more about the new college [here](#).

Executive Committee Member Josh Parker Makes the Case for Universities to Use Balance Sheets as Catalysts for Innovation



Photo credit: Ancora

Council Executive Committee Member and National Commissioner Josh Parker, Founder, Chairman, and CEO of Ancora, argues universities must rethink how they finance their futures by treating their balance sheets as strategic assets, not as passive records of owned property. As traditional funding sources face growing pressure—from changes to the federal endowment tax to evolving philanthropic trends—Parker makes the case for unlocking the value embedded in campus real estate to strengthen liquidity, preserve institutional control, and support long-term investment in research, talent, and innovation. Read Mr. Parker's piece in *University Business* [here](#).

Council Institutions Power Newest National Science Foundation Innovation Engines

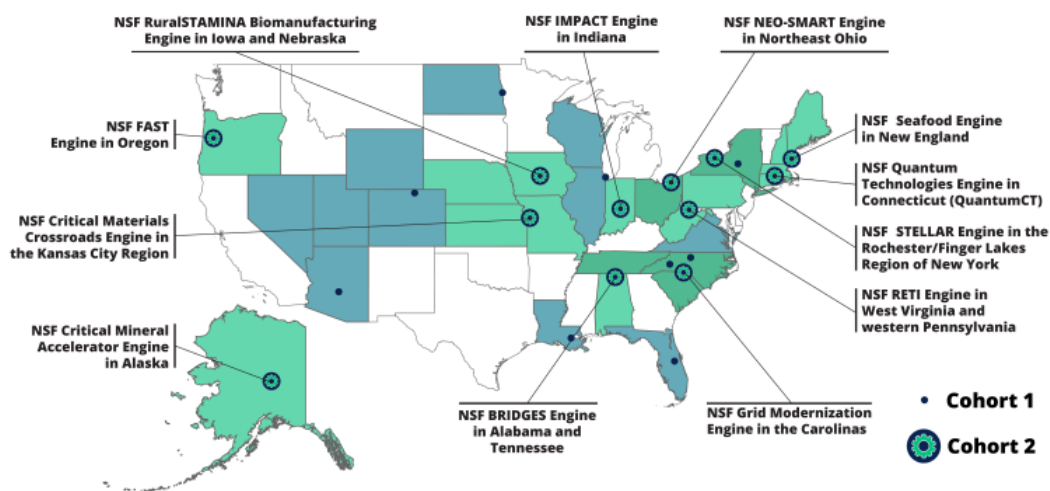


Photo credit: National Science Foundation

On July 14, the National Science Foundation (NSF) announced the latest cohort of 12 Regional Innovation Engines. Each NSF Engine in Cohort 2 will receive an initial investment of \$15 million over two years, with the opportunity to compete for up to \$160 million in funding over the next decade. Spanning 20 states, the new Engines will advance U.S. competitiveness by translating research into commercial impact, preparing talent for high-growth industries, and fostering greater cross-sector partnerships.

Several Council on Competitiveness member institutions are playing leading roles in these major regional-innovation initiatives. Congratulations to these Council Members. Read more from the NSF [here](#).

- RuralSTAMINA Biomanufacturing Engine (Iowa and Nebraska): Led by Iowa State University in partnership with the University of Nebraska–Lincoln.
- FAST Engine (Oregon): Led by Oregon State University.

- RETI Engine (West Virginia and Western Pennsylvania): Includes leadership from the University of Pittsburgh and Carnegie Mellon University to advance next-generation energy technologies.
- NSF Seafood Engine (New England): Core partners include MITRE, Arizona State University, and Northeastern University.
- BRIDGES Engine (Alabama and Tennessee): Co-led by the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- IMPACT Engine (Indiana): Includes Eli Lilly and Company and the University of Notre Dame as named partners.

Council National Laboratory Partners Advance the Department of Energy's Genesis Mission

The U.S. Department of Energy's Genesis Mission represents one of the nation's most ambitious scientific initiatives, bringing together artificial intelligence, advanced computing, quantum technologies, experimental facilities, and world-class research talent to accelerate discovery across energy, manufacturing, biotechnology, materials, climate, and national security. Through more than 170 projects spanning the U.S. Department of Energy national laboratory system, universities, industry, and other partners, the initiative seeks to transform the way science is conducted while strengthening the United States long-term innovation capacity and capability.

Council on Competitiveness national laboratory partners are playing critical roles across the Genesis Mission, contributing expertise, infrastructure, and leadership across the initiative's expansive portfolio, including:

- Argonne National Laboratory – 14 Phase I projects led; 41 supported
- Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory – 13 Phase I projects led; 38 supported
- Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory — 10 Phase I projects led; 19 supported
- Los Alamos National Laboratory — 7 Phase I projects led; 31 supported
- National Laboratory of the Rockies — 4 Phase I projects led; 24 supported
- Oak Ridge National Laboratory — 9 Phase I projects led; 32 supported
- Pacific Northwest National Laboratory — 16 Phase I projects led; 42 supported

Learn more about The Genesis Mission on the initiative's landing page [here](#).

Argonne National Laboratory Turns 80



Photo Credit: Argonne National Laboratory

Eight decades ago, a handful of pioneering scientists set out to harness the atom. What they built became one of America's most consequential research institutions. Council member and Argonne Director Paul K. Kearns marked the milestone this month, celebrating a laboratory whose discoveries — spanning nuclear science, clean energy, quantum computing, and national security — have

Competitiveness News

New White House Report Lays Out National Science Priorities

White House Office of Science and Technology Policy Director Michael Kratsios has released *Science: A New Golden Age*, outlining a vision to renew the U.S. scientific enterprise and accelerate discovery. The report calls for a mission-driven approach to research and development; and for leveraging philanthropy to advance breakthroughs in critical fields and to sustain U.S. leadership in science and innovation. [Click here to read the full report](#).

GFCC Report: Building the Human Edge in the AI Economy



The Council's sister organization, the [Global Federation of Competitiveness Councils](#) (GFCC), has released a major new report, [The Human Edge: Global Perspectives on AI and Prosperity](#), examining how nations can strengthen competitiveness in the age of AI. Led by Professor Aleks Subic, Vice Chancellor and Chief Executive Officer of Torrens University Australia, and Chair of the GFCC Global Task Force on Human and AI, the report draws on insights from leaders across 32 nations, offering seven strategic recommendations to build AI-ready talent, redesign work for human-AI collaboration, strengthen trust and governance, and ensure many benefit from the deployment of AI.

Senator Outlines a Roadmap for U.S. Biotechnology Leadership



In a new essay for *American Scientist*, Senator Todd Young outlines biotechnology's role in defining the frontier for innovation, economic competitiveness, and national security. The article argues sustaining U.S. bio leadership requires deeper collaboration to accelerate commercialization, modernize regulatory frameworks, strengthen supply chains, develop the future workforce, and harness AI to drive scientific breakthroughs. [Read the full essay](#).

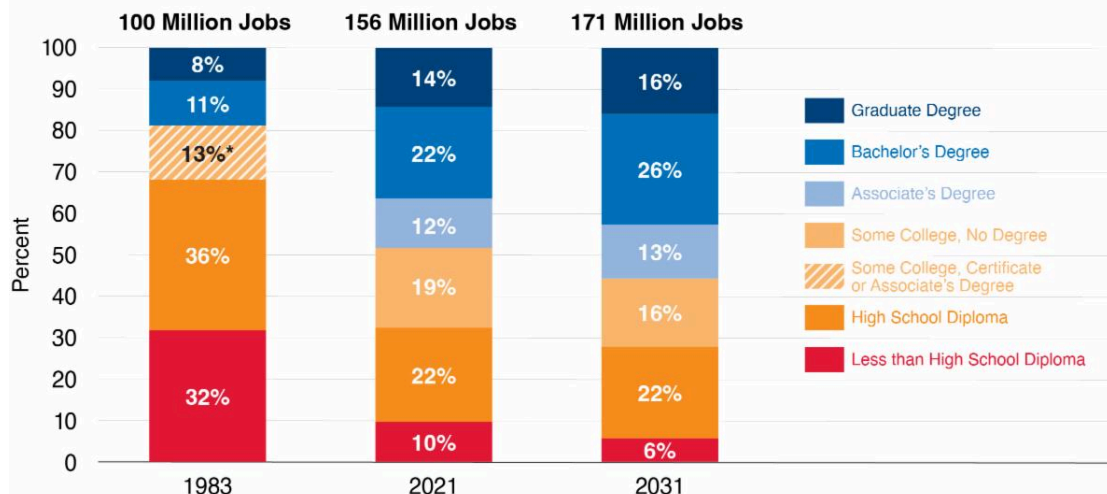
Photo credit: American Scientist

Postsecondary Skills Drive U.S. Job Market

Importance of College Degree in the Job Market

Forty-two percent of jobs in 2031 will require at least a bachelor's degree, while only 28 percent will go to workers with a high school diploma or less

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce forecast using data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS); US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS); US Bureau of Labor Statistics; IHS Markit; Lightcast; and US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS), 1983.



*Note: Before 1992, the education variable in the Current Population Survey was identified as years of schooling. We are therefore unable to differentiate between "some college or certificate" and "associate's degree" in those years.

Columns may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

The U.S. job market is undergoing a fundamental transformation. In 1983, when the U.S. economy supported roughly 100 million jobs, most positions were accessible to workers with no education beyond high school. By 2031, as the economy grows to an estimated 171 million jobs, nearly three-quarters of all jobs will require some form of postsecondary education or training, including 42 percent requiring at least a bachelor's degree, according to Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce. And the fastest-growing sectors — including healthcare, professional and business services, and advanced technology — are driving demand for workers with increasingly sophisticated skills and credentials.

From a competitiveness perspective, those nations that can produce, attract, and upskill talent will be best positioned to lead the next economy. Ensuring a robust pipeline of educated talent equipped for AI, advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, and other strategic industries is essential for sustained productivity growth. Read the full Georgetown CEW report [here](#).

New to Our Community



Dr. Shashank Priya
Vice President for Research and
Innovation
Michigan State University

Dr. Priya joins the Council's Technology
Leadership & Strategy Initiative.

Photo credit: Michigan State University

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