

Summary 2026 OEWD Budget Town Halls & Survey

Executive Summary

The Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD), which encompasses the Office of Small Business (Small Business Commission) and Film SF (San Francisco Film Commission) hosted two Budget Town Halls on January 22 and February 11, 2026. This report synthesizes input from those sessions and from OEWD’s survey, which was open for six weeks and received 124 responses from business owners, community-based organizations and nonprofits, job seekers, employees, and San Francisco residents.

Together, these conversations point to a strong desire for strengthening neighborhood vitality, human-centered workforce development, streamlined business services, and commercial district activation—grounded in clean, safe streets, affordable housing and commercial space, and stable, predictable funding with simplified contracting and reimbursement requirements.

Stakeholders consistently emphasized:

- **Neighborhood Vitality**
 - Fund and activate cultural districts; protect neighborhood character and small businesses.
 - Use arts/culture programming and family-friendly events to drive foot traffic and tourism.
- **Human-Centered Workforce**
 - Paid, “earn-while-you-learn” training; clear pathways for youth, immigrants, Trans communities, unhoused, and underserved groups.
 - Accessible career navigation (multilingual, culturally competent), portable benefits, union-supported protections.
- **Streamlined Business Support**
 - Concierge-style permitting; one-stop start-up navigation;

- Early capital (grants/loans), technical assistance (bookkeeping, marketing, HR), and shared services.
- **Clean, Safe, Accessible Corridors**
 - Coordinated clean-and-safe packages (ambassadors, lighting, maintenance).
 - Targeted support where conditions around transit hubs suppress hiring and sales.
- **Affordable Space & Vacancy Reduction**
 - Incentives for landlords to reduce long-term vacancy; shared workspaces; affordable arts/cultural spaces.
 - Structured pathways from activations to stable tenancy (step-rent, subsidy bridge).
- **Inclusive Tech & Emerging Sectors**
 - AI/tech, green economy, healthcare/wellness, childcare and trades. pathways designed for local residents;
 - Integrate arts-tech-culture to widen participation and diversify industry.
- **Equity, Representation & Accountability**
 - Invest in rooted CBOs and multilingual access.
 - Transparent outcomes; inclusive planning with CBDs/BIDs and community organizations.
- **Stable, Multi-Year Funding & Policy Reform**
 - Multi-year, flexible investments; streamlined grants; public-private partnerships.
 - Explore revenue strategies and policy levers to sustain services and deter vacancy.
 - Simplified reporting and contracting.

Summary of Town Hall Feedback

OEWD held two Budget Town Halls: January 22 and February 11, 2026. The following synthesizes focus group responses to three questions about San Francisco's path to a thriving, inclusive economy by 2030, the OEWD programs most effective today, and the emerging sectors with the greatest opportunity.

Question 1: Vision for a Thriving, Inclusive Economy

Participants were asked: “Imagine San Francisco in 2030—what does a thriving, inclusive economy look like? What bold strategies and actions help us get there?”

Response: A city where...

- **Economic prosperity is shared across all neighborhoods.**
- **Businesses and cultural districts thrive**, supported by equitable funding and streamlined processes.
- **Artists, immigrants, and diverse communities can afford to live and work**, maintaining cultural vibrancy.
- **Youth and marginalized populations have clear career pathways** and livable wages.
- **Basic needs are met**—affordable housing, healthcare, safety, and clean streets.
- **Human-centered workforce** remains strong despite automation and AI trends.
- **Diverse leadership and fear-free communities** ensure equal access to resources and opportunities.

Key Themes & Strategies

Workforce Development & Education:

- Expand trade schools and career pathways for youth and marginalized groups.
- Strengthen connections between employers and higher education (City College, USF, SFSU).
- Invest in arts and cultural career pathways and paid training for non-English speakers.
- Create coordinated workforce systems rooted in equity.
- Support trans employment, youth of color, and unhoused youth programs.
- Promote higher-level paid training and tech diversity.

Human-Centered Economy vs. Automation:

- Preserve entry-level jobs and provide livable wages.
- Resist full automation—emphasize human interaction and empathy.
- Employers commit to hiring people even at higher labor costs.
- Acknowledge tension: AI is inevitable, but balance with human workforce strategies.

Business & Entrepreneurship:

- Streamline permitting and reduce barriers for micro-businesses.

- Provide lease support, zero-interest loans, and multilingual assistance.
- Offer early capital and guidance for scaling businesses.
- Create flexible entrepreneurship processes.
- Promote neighborhood-based economic development.
- Incentivize shopping through passport/stamp programs and cultural activations.

Arts, Culture & Tourism:

- Invest in film production attraction and cultural programming to put SF on the map.
- Support artists with access to affordable space and funding.
- Activate neighborhoods with arts-based events and place-based cultural strategies that showcase diverse cultural representation.
- Attract foreign tourists and create destination-focused experiences.

Equity & Inclusion:

- Provide multilingual resources.
- Support immigrants and refugees with employment pathways.
- Increase financial equity.
- Fund neighborhood-based CBOs equitably.

Policy & Structural Changes:

- Simplify grant contracting and payment processes.
- Adopt customer-centric government services.
- Promote public-private partnerships for workforce.

Suggested Actions:

- **Zero-interest loans and multilingual permitting support** for small businesses.
- **Citywide workforce alliance committee** for equity-driven job creation.
- **Invest in cultural districts and arts infrastructure.**
- **Create walk-in economic support centers** for public access.
- **Neighborhood revitalization** modeled after downtown recovery.

Question 2: Impactful OEWD Programs & Improvements

Participants were asked: “Which OEWD programs or services have had the greatest impact in your field of work, and what made them effective? How can these programs be improved?”

Programs with Greatest Impact

Neighborhood-Focused Programs

- Programs tailored to unique neighborhoods and community-specific needs.

- Vacant to Vibrant initiative (activating empty spaces).
- Legacy Business Program (supporting long-standing cultural institutions).
- Community Ambassadors (hospitality skills, safety).

Business Support

- Grants, zero-interest loans, and technical assistance.
- SF Shines (previously impactful, needs retooling for neighborhood access).
- PermitSF (streamlined permitting).
- SBA/SBDC, Office of Small Business, Urban Solutions.
- Incubator programs for home-based family childcare businesses.

Workforce Development

- Young Adult Job Center (helping youth exit homelessness).
- Paid training programs and stipends (game-changer for focus and retention).
- Industry-specific certifications (culinary, tech).
- Programs for marginalized communities (immigrants, Trans, veterans, formerly incarcerated).
- Language at Work pilot (UCSF) and English at Work programs.
- Employer-led work-based learning programs.

Cultural & Arts Programming

- Cultural events that activate neighborhoods and attract visitors.
- Entertainment zones

What Made Them Effective

- **Culturally competent outreach** and language services.
- **Wraparound supports** where provider offered mental health, case management, childcare.
- **Hands-on technical assistance** for businesses.
- **Paid training and stipends** for workforce programs.
- **Community-based approach** leveraging trusted CBOs.
- **Networking and cohort models** for business owners and service providers.
- **Programs that intersect art, tech, and culture** for broader engagement.

Improvements Needed

- **Funding & Access:** Restore/expand funding; multi-year flexible investments; reach neighborhoods lacking strong CBOs.

- **Permitting & Bureaucracy:** Faster permits; reduce delays; simplify reporting/admin.
- **Program Design:** Expand bilingual resources; flexible schedules; earn-and-learn; extend certification timelines; integrate mental health.
- **Coordination & Communication:** Stronger inter-agency coordination; networks among providers; regular partner updates.
- **Equity & Inclusion:** Prioritize rooted CBOs; ensure no exclusion due to language/immigration status; add categories for professional services.

Question 3: Emerging Sectors & Inclusive Access

Participants were asked: “Which emerging sectors hold the greatest potential for San Francisco’s economy, and how can we ensure these opportunities are inclusive and accessible to all?”

High-Potential Sectors

Technology & AI

- AI, GenAI, data centers, chip production.
- Inclusive tech careers and training for marginalized communities.
- AI integration in workforce (agentic AI, automation).
- FinTech and IT services.
- Backend tech support for nonprofits.

Green & Environmental Industries

- Green energy and sustainability.
- Environmental sciences and protections.
- Low-carbon transportation and infrastructure.

Healthcare & Wellness

- Mental health and wellness services.
- Community health worker (CHW) programs.
- Health equity initiatives.
- Cold plunge, saunas, and wellness-focused businesses.

Construction & Trades

- Housing construction and infrastructure.
- Professional and trade certifications.
- Apprenticeships for youth and underserved communities.

Arts, Culture & Creative Industries

- Cultural tourism and preservation.
- Small music venues, galleries, theaters, experiential retail, nightlife.
- Events and festivals (e.g., First Fridays, night markets).

Hospitality & Tourism

- Conventions, entertainment, and experiential businesses.
- Neighborhood-based tourism leveraging cultural districts.
- Air, land, sea, and space tourism concepts.

Food & Manufacturing

- Culinary arts and food manufacturing.
- Commercial kitchen spaces for small businesses.
- Charcuterie, coffee, and catering services.

Other Emerging Areas

- Childcare businesses (including home-based).
- Marginalized banking and financial inclusion.
- Last-mile distribution and logistics.
- Indoor recreation (e.g., pickleball courts).

Inclusive Access Strategies

- **Education & Workforce:** STEM pipelines; paid internships; multilingual training; life skills.
- **Community-Centered Design:** Invest in underserved neighborhoods; partner with cultural districts; co-creation.
- **Financial & Structural:** Scholarships, grants/loans for minority & women-led businesses; tax large employers/AI firms.
- **Policy & Partnerships:** Inclusion/accessibility standards for tech firms; simplify permitting/reporting.

Key Principles

- **Balance innovation with equity:** Tech and AI growth must include pathways for locals.
- **Invest in people, not just companies:** Workforce development and basic needs first.
- **Neighborhood-driven economic development:** Cultural districts and neighborhood commercial corridor as engines of tourism and community wealth.
- **Intersectionality of industries:** Combine arts, tech, and culture for inclusive growth.

Survey Findings

In addition to the Budget Town Halls, OEWD launched a Programs Survey to gather feedback from stakeholders. The survey was open for more than six weeks.

125 people responded, **72** or 58% of which had participated in or benefited from the following OEWD programs:

- Events and activations, **32**
- Business grants and loans, **32**
- Business counseling programs, **19**
- Other programs (Legacy Business, Vacant to Vibrant, Grantee, etc.), **15**
- Job placement career development, **13**
- Employee recruitment services, **11**
- Job training programs, **9**
- Permitting support and reform, **9**

Respondents Included:

- Service provider, **42**
- Business owner, **40**
- San Francisco Resident, **28**
- Job Seeker, **11**
- Other (NCAN Partner, OEWD staff), **4**

Major Findings:

- **High Satisfaction:** 89% of program participants reported being satisfied or very satisfied with OEWD services (64 out of 72 participants)
- **Top Programs (Tied):** Events and activations (32) and Business grants and loans (32) were most utilized, followed by Business counseling (19)
- **Diverse Stakeholders:** Service providers lead participation (42), followed closely by business owners (39) and SF residents (28)
- **Geographic Spread:** Strong participation from 94103 (15), 94115 (13), 94110 (13), and 94102 (12), showing both downtown and neighborhood reach
- **Critical Themes:** Funding sustainability, Legacy Business Program support, and neighborhood-specific economic vitality emerge as top priorities

Respondents highlighted areas where OEWD is performing well:

- **Legacy Business Program Impact:** Participants noted that the Legacy Business Program has helped stabilize long-standing small businesses, including through support with long-term leases. They emphasized that programs like this play a vital role in preserving the unique character of San Francisco’s neighborhoods.
- **Staff Excellence:** Respondents frequently praised OEWD staff for being knowledgeable, supportive, and easy to work with.
- **Economic Vitality Grants:** Community partners highlighted that Economic Vitality grants have been essential for supporting small businesses, activating community-centered events, and operating neighborhood resources (e.g. Japantown Visitor Center).
- **Client-Centered Approach:** Many respondents appreciated OEWD’s responsiveness to the needs of small business owners, as well as the consistent professionalism and helpfulness of staff across the department.
- **Financial Support:** Several participants credited OEWD grants with helping their small businesses remain operational during difficult times and appreciated the department’s readiness to provide support during crises.
- **Comprehensive Support:** Respondents valued the expertise, guidance, and cross-departmental collaboration they experienced, noting that support from OEWD and its partner agencies was thoughtful and aligned with community needs.

Question 5 asked respondents what resources or services should the city offer or maintain to better support Job Seekers, Business/Employers and Commercial Districts. The following is a summary of responses for each category.

Job Seekers, 58 responses

- **Easier Access to Job Listings**
 - Centralized, user-friendly job board (City jobs + local businesses).
 - Ability to browse all openings without restrictive filters.
 - Integration of multiple agencies’ listings in one place.
- **Career Navigation & Counseling**
 - One-on-one career counseling and coaching.
 - Resume and interview support (including multilingual services).
 - Clear pathways for entry-level, mid-career, and senior-level roles.
- **Job Training & Workforce Development**
 - Paid training, apprenticeships, and “earn while you learn” programs.

- Vocational training aligned with in-demand sectors (tech, construction, transportation).
- Industry-specific certifications and scholarships (Early Childhood Education, CPR, bilingual education).
- AI-related training and exposure for future workforce needs.
- **Job Fairs & Networking**
 - More citywide job fairs and employment events.
 - Stronger connections between job seekers and local businesses.
 - Outreach through community-based organizations (CBOs).
- **Equity & Inclusion**
 - Programs for underrepresented communities (BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, unhoused youth).
 - Transgender equity hiring initiatives.
 - Language access and technology assistance for residents with low educational attainment.
- **Workforce Stabilization & Benefits**
 - Paid short-term placements and subsidized wage programs.
 - Portable benefits and emergency income assistance for freelancers.
 - Union-supported training and worker protections.
- **Specialized Pathways**
 - Creative apprenticeships and fellowships.
 - Support for entrepreneurship (construction, hauling, transportation licensing).
- **Additional Support**
 - Better outreach and communication about available resources.

Businesses/Employers, 56 responses

- **Financial Support**
 - More grants and low-interest loans for businesses, sole proprietors, and legacy businesses.
 - Direct grant programs like SF Shines, Opportunity Grants, and Vacant to Vibrant should be maintained and expanded.
 - Create a Business Stabilization Fund financed by large corporations and high-wealth stakeholders.
- **Permitting & Compliance**
 - Streamline permitting processes, including conditional use authorizations.
 - Maintain and expand the Small Business Concierge model across departments for easier navigation of permits, licensing, and compliance.

- Provide one-stop “start a business” support system to reduce red tape.
- **Technical Assistance & Training**
 - Workshops on licenses, permits, taxes, and grant opportunities.
 - Affordable marketing, tech, and bookkeeping training.
 - Create a City-run Shared Services Hub for bookkeeping, payroll, HR, and compliance support.
- **Workforce & Hiring Support**
 - Free job posting assistance on platforms like LinkedIn and Indeed.
 - Wage subsidies and hiring incentives for creative businesses.
 - Sector-based talent pipelines and partnerships with arts education and workforce programs.
- **Legacy & Cultural Business Support**
 - Continue and expand the Legacy Business Program and succession planning support.
 - Maintain programs that promote local businesses and activate events.
- **Neighborhood Activation & Events**
 - More activation grants to keep neighborhoods lively.
 - Support for community engagement events and partnerships with CBOs.
- **Infrastructure & Environment**
 - Maintain pedestrian-friendly streets.
 - Improve trash pickup and street cleaning to attract customers.
 - Restore and maintain full MUNI service for accessibility.
- **Policy & Advocacy**
 - Address rent costs and vacancy rates through policy changes.
 - Explore revisions to Prop 13 and lending practices to reduce long-term vacancies.

Commercial District Interventions, 50 responses

- **Activation & Events**
 - More street closures for food fairs, festivals, and night markets.
 - Support family-friendly community events and pop-ups to drive foot traffic.
 - Ensure events don’t overlap with other citywide activities.
 - Reduce red tape and fees for public activations.
- **Marketing & Promotion**
 - Grants for marketing, beautification, and community engagement.
 - Maintain a city-run directory and promotion platform for local businesses.
 - Support digital marketing training for merchants.
- **Infrastructure & Accessibility**

- Affordable space strategies, including shared workspaces and incentives for arts and cultural tenants.
- **Funding & Support for CBDs/BIDs**
 - Provide funding for CBDs/BIDs that handle cleaning and safety services.
 - Expand support to historically underserved neighborhoods (Tenderloin, Bayview).
- **Cultural & Neighborhood Investments**
 - Support San Francisco Cultural Districts Program.
 - Advocacy for maintaining neighborhood character and historic resources.
- **Vacancy Reduction & Landlord Incentives**
 - Incentives for landlords to reduce long-term vacancies and support mixed-use recovery.
 - Explore tax incentives, risk-sharing models, and structured lease frameworks.
- **Integrated District Strategies**
 - Combine clean-and-safe, activation, and business support into district-level stabilization packages.
 - Activation-to-stability programs with planned transitions (e.g., pilot → permanent model).

Specific District-Level Priorities Identified

- **Japantown Specific (Multiple Responses):** More funding support for small businesses, the Visitor Center and community ambassadors
- **Safety and Cleanliness:** Conditions around 16th Street and 24th Street BART are negatively impacting both shoppers and the workforce.
- **CBD/BID Funding:** More funding for CBD/BIDs who provide cleaning and safety services within the districts.
- **Activation and Programming:** Continue support for street festivals and family-friendly community events and pop-ups that bring foot traffic to local corridors.
- **Integrated District Strategy:** District-level stabilization packages that combine clean-and-safe + foot traffic + business supports. Coordinate safety ambassadors, cleaning, lighting, signage, street-level programming, and business activation tools together as a single district strategy.
- **Equity Focus:** More support for historically low-income and blighted neighborhoods.
- **Yerba Buena Emphasis:** More support for the Yerba Buena neighborhood as this is a key convention, cultural, and transit hub for SF.

Final Summary

The following summarizes the priority areas where participants in the Town Halls and the survey reached consensus:

- **Expand Economic Access**
 - Provide zero-interest loans and multilingual permitting support for small businesses.
 - Create walk-in economic support centers for public access.
- **Strengthen Workforce Systems**
 - Establish a citywide workforce alliance for equity-driven job creation.
 - Scale paid training, apprenticeships, and earn-and-learn programs with strong employer engagement.
 - Offer multilingual career counseling and resume support.
- **Invest in Neighborhoods and Culture**
 - Fund cultural districts and arts infrastructure to drive tourism and community wealth.
 - Support neighborhood revitalization modeled after downtown recovery.
 - Maintain and expand legacy business programs, succession planning, and cultural activations.
- **Improve Program Design and Delivery**
 - Restore and expand multi-year, flexible funding for OEWD programs.
 - Streamline permitting and simplify reporting and administrative processes.
 - Expand bilingual resources, and flexible schedules.
- **Advance Equity and Inclusion**
 - Prioritize rooted CBOs and ensure no exclusion based on language or immigration status.
 - Provide grants for minority- and women-led businesses.
- **Urgent and Emerging Priorities**
 - Expand geographic equity by increasing support for neighborhoods.
 - Integrate district strategies: combine safety, cleanliness, activation, and business support into coordinated corridor-level initiatives.
 - Address commercial affordability: tackle rent challenges through landlord incentives, shared workspace models, and creative lease structures.

We also heard several broader policy and systems-level themes from Town Halls and survey participants. While these areas fall largely outside OEWD's purview, they reflect community priorities for advancing equity and economic prosperity:

- **Clean, Safe, and Accessible Public Spaces**
 - Investment in lighting for commercial corridors
 - Maintain pedestrian-friendly streets and consider parking needs for businesses.

- Restore full MUNI service for accessibility.
- Increase police presence, safety ambassadors, and lighting in commercial corridors.
- More trash pickup, cleaning services, and public trash cans.
- Address homelessness and improve conditions around transit hubs (e.g., 16th & 24th Street BART).
- **Equity, Representation, and Inclusion**
 - Stronger equity, representation, and accountability measures
 - Transgender workplace safety and broader inclusion
 - Restoration of DEI initiatives to address discrimination concerns
- **Housing, Stability, and Basic Needs**
 - Affordable housing and rent stability
 - Family-supportive, safe neighborhoods
 - Services and supports for unhoused residents
 - Integration of mental health supports and basic-needs infrastructure
- **Policy and Structural Change**
 - Progressive revenue strategies to sustain city services (e.g., billionaire tax)
 - Support for low-carbon transportation and sustainable urban design
- **Economic Access and Support**
 - Guaranteed income programs
 - Free or subsidized transportation and housing assistance
 - Childcare-friendly work opportunities
 - Improved communication about available services and job opportunities across City departments and service providers

###