



COUNTY of VENTURA

COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICE
SEVET JOHNSON, PsyD
County Executive Officer

Mike Pettit
Assistant County Executive Officer

Scott Powers
County Chief Financial Officer

Danielle Keys
County Human Resources Director
Labor Relations

April 8, 2025

County of Ventura Board of Supervisors

Subject: Authorization for the County Executive Officer to Accept, Receive and Execute a Grant Award from Uplift Central Coast for the Uplift Central Coast Catalyst Partnership Opportunity Grant (Uplift Catalyst Grant) for Ventura County Area805: Innovation Center in Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) in the Amount of \$550,000.

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended your Board authorize the County Executive Officer or her designee to negotiate, accept, receive and execute a grant award, and any necessary agreements for the grant, from Uplift Central Coast for the Uplift Central Coast Catalyst Partnership Opportunity Grant (Uplift Catalyst Grant) to be used for the Ventura County Area805: Innovation Center in Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) in the amount of \$550,000.
2. Authorize the Auditor-Controller to process the accounting transactions necessary to establish appropriations and unanticipated revenue as follows (4/5ths vote required):

Increase/Decrease	Budget Division	Account Level	Amount
Increase	1030	Services & Supplies	\$550,000
Increase	1030	Intergovernmental Revenue	\$550,000

Fiscal/Mandates Impact:

	FY 2024-25	FY 2025-26
Revenues	\$50,000	\$500,000
Costs	\$50,000	\$500,000
Net County Cost	\$0	\$0

Funding Source: Uplift Central Coast Catalyst Partnership Opportunity Grant
Match Requirement: None

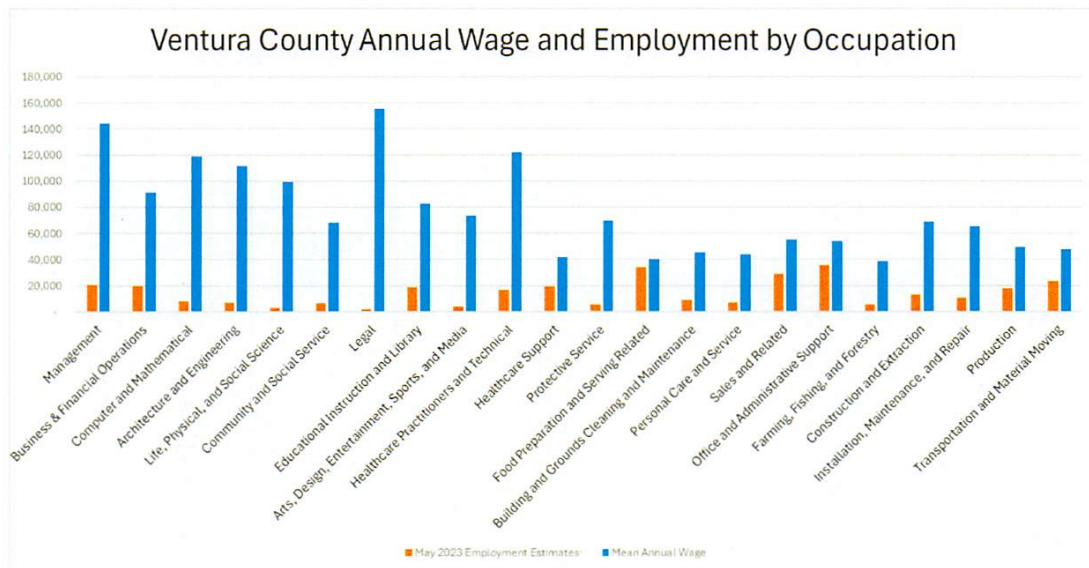
Strategic Plan:

The Uplift Central Coast Catalyst Partnership Opportunity Grant for the Ventura County Area805: Innovation Center in Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) supports the *Fiscal Responsibility and Economic Vitality* Strategic Priority of your Board's Strategic Plan by *making responsible and efficient use of public funds and promote economic stability and growth during a changing economy*. Specifically, the Ventura County Innovation Hub will *foster a thriving business ecosystem to create jobs, increase wages, and strengthen the local economy*.

Background:

The County of Ventura gross domestic product (GDP) is \$62 billion (current dollars), which ranks 13th out of 58 counties in California. GDP has seen a modest growth of 4% since 2018, with a slight contraction (-0.04%) last year. Unemployment in Ventura County was at 4.5% in June 2024. This compares to California at 5.3% and the United States at 4.3% during the same period. The median household income in Ventura County is approximately \$102,569. The Per Capita Income is \$45,846. The living wage for a single adult in Ventura County is estimated to be \$58,143 annually ([according to the Living Wage Institute](#)).

The following table illustrates the Mean Annual Wages (blue) and the estimated employment numbers as of May 2023 (orange). Concentrating on higher-paying occupations within rapidly expanding and productive industries (such as technology and innovation and manufacturing) is crucial for boosting GDP and enhancing overall quality of life. By targeting occupations, that support advanced air mobility, in computer and mathematics as well as engineering we can stimulate employment growth and elevate incomes.



The Office of Economic Development in the County Executive Office is updating the Economic Vitality Strategic Plan. Updating the plan has included connecting deeply with the Economic Vitality community across the County to better understand where to focus. In alignment with the data, and economic vitality community input, we have defined the following priorities for economic vitality as we build the Economic Vitality Strategic Plan:

1. Foster Business Growth and Enhance Quality Job Creation
2. Cultivate Creativity, Innovation, Entrepreneurship
3. Strengthen Economic Resilience and Diversification
4. Develop Infrastructure and Support Housing

The Economic Vitality team conducted a series of comprehensive listening sessions with more than thirteen diverse stakeholders throughout the County of Ventura. During these sessions, particularly in the Innovation and Technology segment, we gained insights into significant activities at our local airports. These activities not only currently enhance our economic vitality but also present substantial opportunities for further economic development.

The Department of Airports in partnership with the University of Alaska Fairbanks is establishing a 500-square-mile Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) aircraft testing site with a streamlined "standing Certificate of Authorization" (COA) for rapid deployment of testing

activities. This streamline flight testing process reduces the time the FAA requires to approve flight testing. The typical FAA approval process typically requires 12-18 months. However, this streamlined process will require less than 30 days, which will be very effective in attracting AAM companies to Ventura County. This aircraft test range would include Camarillo Airport, Oxnard Airport and California State University Channel Islands former airport properties.

Ventura County is home to the Naval Base Ventura County Tech Bridge. The Ventura County Tech Bridge evaluates developing technology against operational needs in the port and maritime domains and suggests pathways for engagement, funding, collaboration, and implementation. Housed within the commercial Port of Hueneme, the Tech Bridge facilitates startups, scaleups, and small businesses who have never worked with the Department of the Navy to deliver disruptive technology — all within 2-5 years. Connecting the commercial sector with the defense sector serves as a competitive advantage for the County.

Discussion:

Uplift Central Coast is a collaboration between the Economic Development Collaborative (EDC), Monterey Bay Economic Partnership (MBEP) and REACH to deliver the planning component of California Jobs First. Uplift serves the six-county region of San Benito, Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura. On October 1, 2024, Uplift issued a Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Catalyst Program discussed more below. The Funding Announcement is attached as Exhibit 3. On December 10, 2024, your Board authorized the County Executive Office to submit a grant application in an amount not to exceed \$1,000,000. The County was recently notified that we were awarded \$550,000 for the Ventura County Area805: Innovation Center in AAM.

The Ventura County Area805: Innovation Center in AAM project will establish California's largest public (non-military) advanced air mobility testing site integrated with a comprehensive AAM innovation facility operation at Camarillo and Oxnard Airports. This transformative initiative combines unique AAM testing capabilities with business development and workforce training services to create a complete ecosystem supporting advanced aviation technology development in the Central Coast region. The Innovation Center will be focused on reducing barriers for businesses to succeed in Ventura County. This will include providing a proving ground to build, test and develop the next generation of autonomous aviation. The Innovation Center will work to create workforce and education pathways in advanced air mobility as well as develop a direct employment pipeline through internships and apprenticeships.

The project leverages two County departments' complementary strengths: The Department of Airports will establish and operate a 500-square-mile Advanced Air Mobility testing site with a streamlined "standing Certificate of Authorization" (COA) for rapid deployment of testing activities. The Office of Economic Development will develop an Innovation Center facility with operations at Camarillo and Oxnard Airports that connect private sector companies with military technology transfer, workforce development, and business support services.

By combining testing infrastructure, military partnerships, and workforce development, we will create a comprehensive ecosystem that attracts and retains high-tech aerospace companies while ensuring our community benefits from this growth. The predevelopment grant funds will be used to establish the foundational infrastructure which will include modifying the existing airport space for business incubation and networking, establishing workforce and education programming for AAM sector, and developing a government engagement framework for business support (Exhibit 2). Specifically, the \$550K will be budgeted to support infrastructure, business outreach and networking as well as the development workforce and education training (Exhibit 1).

In addition to the predevelopment grant funds, the County is seeking additional funding through California Jobs First Economic Blueprint which includes \$125 million in funding intended to allow a range of activities related to economic growth, job training and access, business development, and research and development, all with the primary goal of supporting the creation, attraction, and access to good-paying jobs for Californians.

While this one-time grant funding supports foundational development, ongoing support will be required to expand the Center's initial impact. This includes funding for a dedicated staff person focused on leading innovation and technology efforts, and the continued delivery of workforce and education programming, business outreach, and stakeholder engagement. Operational costs are estimated to range between \$200,000 and \$350,000 annually, depending on the scope of services and level of activity. The County is pursuing additional funding through the California Jobs First Economic Blueprint and other regional, state, and federal funding opportunities to support these ongoing needs to avoid impacts on the General Fund.

The Community Economic Resilience Fund (CERF) is a catalytic investment from the State of California for California's 13 regions, designed to spur systemic change to build a more equitable, resilient economy. The Catalyst Program reserves up to \$14 million for each CERF region to bridge the gap between planning regional economic development strategies and implementing projects designed to achieve outcomes that align with those strategies. The objective of Catalyst Predevelopment Funding is to support sector-specific

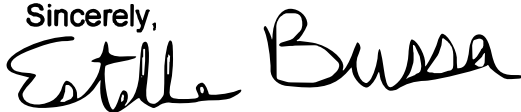
predevelopment activities that align with regional strategies developed under the California Jobs First initiative. Uplift Central Coast (one of 13 regions) was awarded \$9 million for sector-specific predevelopment activities that support strategic community projects and initiatives in the Central Coast region. The Economic Development Collaborative (EDC), a regional asset for economic vitality in Ventura County, played a crucial role in driving this effort by ensuring that regional priorities were well-represented in the planning process and by providing expertise in aligning economic development strategies with funding opportunities. Through its leadership and collaboration, the EDC has helped position Ventura County and the broader Central Coast region to maximize the impact of CERF funding and advance long-term economic resilience.

Catalyst Program funds will be made available by March 31, 2025. Funds must be fully expensed by September 30, 2026.

It is recommended that your Board Authorize the County Executive Officer or her designee to accept, receive and execute a grant award, and any necessary agreements for the grant, from Uplift Central Coast for the Uplift Catalyst Grant to be used for the Ventura County Area805: Innovation Center in Advanced Air Mobility in the amount of \$550,000.

This item has been reviewed by the County Executive Office, County Counsel, and Auditor-Controller's Office. Should you have any questions please contact Estelle Bussa (805) 654-2650.

Sincerely,



Estelle Bussa

Deputy Executive Officer



Sevet Johnson, Psy.D.

County Executive Officer

County of Ventura Board of Supervisors
Date April 8, 2025
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Attachments:

- Exhibit 1: Catalyst Grant Budget**
- Exhibit 2: Catalyst Grant Work Plan**
- Exhibit 3: Uplift Catalyst Funding Announcement**
- Exhibit 4: Uplift Catalyst Grant Award Notification**