

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You're listening to Work in Progress. I'm Ramona Schindelheim, Editor-in-Chief of WorkingNation. Work in Progress explores the rapidly changing workplace through conversations with innovators, educators, and decision-makers; people with solutions to today's workforce challenges.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Joining me today is Peter Callstrom, President and CEO ... Chief Employment Officer, as he calls himself ... for the San Diego Workforce Partnership.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Peter, thank you so much for joining me on the podcast.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

Thank you, Ramona. Great to be with you.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I'd like to start out these podcasts talking about the work you're doing, and letting the guests explain themselves, because I think it's important to kind of get your framework and your perspective on it. So, what are you doing in the Workforce Partnership?

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

Well, we do workforce development, talent development, skills development, for all the residents and employers in the San Diego County region. That's 3.4 million people. So quite a mega region. And many different sectors, a lot of different needs. People from all walks of life and places in their career journey. So we're there to serve everybody, from youth all the way through seniors, in a wide variety of ways, by deploying the public investment through Department of Labor, as well as the private sector, and philanthropy. So with all of that, in the neighborhood of \$35 million that we're able to deploy and invest in our workforce every single year in a wide variety of programs.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

You said words that are always music to my ears, there's a collaboration going on there in that community between the government nonprofits and other philanthropic groups.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

Yes. It has to do by multi-faceted because the federal dollar can only go so far, and that's the foundation of the system. But we have really grown from that. And so, with other investors, they can target where they want to see impact. And we're here to be able to do that, either directly or through many, many different partners in our region, that we are able to get the public dollars to, or, again, deliver it ourselves.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

One of the things that caught my attention the last couple of weeks, is that you just received a cybersecurity grant.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

Yes.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Tell me who you're targeting with that and how you're going to make it work?

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

Yes. A big thanks to the James Irvine Foundation out of the Bay Area, they have now funded us, over the past five years, over \$4 million in different endeavors. The first was for youth employment and opportunity youth diversion, and to get the youth into different pathways. And so, that was a great success. And then they invested in our income share agreements two, three years ago now, as we launched that ... and we can talk about that a little later ... and then now cyber security careers.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

So with the \$1.5 million, we're going to be able to reach at least 185 people throughout the region over a two year run. And both people wanting to enter the cyber security space, or people who are perhaps at the entry-level and they need to be skilled up in order to get to the next step in their career. So we're targeting underserved, underrepresented individuals, so that we can have people who otherwise wouldn't have access to these great careers to get the support necessary to flourish in this really high in demand and growing sector.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Are you going to be working with local employers to develop the curriculum? How are you putting that into place?

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

Yes, we already are. That was part of our proposal, is we worked with a number of partners in a region from NAVWAR that has been around. It does many different security projects on a big scale for the government, as well as private sector companies like Microsoft who have a great need and an expertise in that area. Also educational partners in the San Diego Continuing Education, as well as San Diego City College; which is located close to downtown and serves many underserved, underrepresented populations around the region. So we've got all the right partners to reach who we want to so that we can really lift them up and get them into these great careers.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And you say you're targeting underserved populations that might not have access to the training needed, is the training that you're going to do ... is it basic? Is it multi-leveled?

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

It's entry-level, if you will. But those are really high-level skills in order to acquire the skills necessary to even enter the space. And so it's a very rigorous curriculum. So it's for people entering the space to really be able to develop the core skills necessary to become employed and get their foot in the door, as well as people who are already within that space and they need to upskill in order to move to the next level within their companies. Because cybersecurity is a very deep and broad category of expertise, and you need, again, the core skills in order to be able to access those positions.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

Because it's not a skills gap out there, as you know, Ramona, it's this opportunity gap, awareness gap. And when we can overcome that, through targeted intentional work like this, then we can get past this myth of a skills gap. Because people are skilled, they just don't have the opportunity to be able to access the skills necessary to get these jobs. And so, thanks to the James Irvine Foundation really leaning in on this, we can now reach a lot of people who otherwise would not have the opportunity to access these careers.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Say you're working with employers in an area where there is a demand, will there be enough jobs for everyone who goes through the program?

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

Yeah, great question. More than enough jobs. We have at least, somewhere in the neighborhood of 9,000 openings right now, in our region alone. And you extrapolate that across the country, there are thousands of thousands of jobs. And really, what it comes down to, cybersecurity is needed in every business to be able to protect your data assets, your incoming and outgoing, in a wide variety of ways. And then a whole lot of careers within defense and the federal government. But every business is more and more at risk of cyber risk if they don't have proper security in place.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

Again, there's many ways to get ahead of that and manage it, but without the proper expertise the IT team cannot do all of that as well as all the other pieces they are doing. It's a very specialized and important skill.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Cybersecurity is a knowledge base skill. It's a thinking skill, so to speak. Are most of the programs that you're doing have to do with digital work, or are you doing any trade skills as well?

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

It's both. And it's an important point there that the risk we all face ... I mean, we see these security breaches that are going on that hit the news. But then there's the other security breaches that don't, where businesses are exposed to malware, to spam, to the other invasions of privacy that can really affect a business's ability to function. Like in our case, if we don't have enough guardrails in place in order to stop somebody who is malicious, that can disrupt our business every single day. So we need cyber security expertise in the team, and you can't just hire somebody with a broader IT expertise to come in and know all of that right off the bat. That's where having that skillset, the knowledge, the talent to be able to address it and know where to look, how to get ahead of it, and then to stay current with it, because cybersecurity challenges change every day and you need to be abreast of all that's out there and to be ahead of it. And it's an ever-changing field.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

But, again, that's where there's such promise in this space, because it is with a very cyber-based economy that we have now. And to have that expertise, our graduates are going to be in such demand for great positions in their future.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

And you work very closely with the business community in San Diego. What other types of industry jobs are you helping prepare people for so there's talent ready to go? As you said before, I think it's important. People have the skills, it's the opportunities that they may not have. So where are you helping bridge that gap?

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

Yeah. We have a number of priority sectors, as we call them, in our region. These are the sectors that have these in demand, high paying positions that have a great outlook and great need, from healthcare, to advanced manufacturing, IT for sure. And we have a lot of innovative companies in our mega region. And life sciences, public administration. I mean, you name it, there are so many in demand sectors.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

And so, in our work, again, with all of the investors that we work with who are trying to build the talent necessary to meet their needs, we are able to target training in all of our different sectors. So within our team, we have sector leaders within each of those spaces so that we can work with the funds that we acquire to be able to do targeted training programs for every single sector that we work within.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

So we reach tens of thousands of people every single year. People who, again, may be entering their career ... so get youth into the workforce and get them the skills necessary to advance in their career and to understand what they want to do. ... and then folks who are in mid-career, where they may want to go from one line of work to another. And COVID has really exacerbated this need, where somebody may be working in hospitality, and they may have enjoyed it or not and want to look to the next step in their career. You then need to retrain so that you have enough skills and enough experience to be able to go to an employer and offer value on day one.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

So that's where we come in. And we can offer targeted training to be able to really provide people with the skills necessary. Then they're going to be in demand. Then they can make the switch and move on in their career. So every sector in our region is where we're trying to support workers and to be able to help them re-skill, up-skill, so that they meet the demands of what employers need.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

One of the barriers for someone, either young or old ... it doesn't matter if they've got a low wage job right now ... is cost. And is there a cost to those people who are learning new skills through your programs?

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

Through the federal investment, those services are generally free. Through the career centers that we get the funds to ... we don't operate them but we fund them and then we have operators who do the day-to-day work ... those, largely, are free. And those are great for many, but it doesn't meet the need for everyone as well. And that's why we've created other avenues to be able to provide training.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

And one innovation we've created in the past few years now, is the workforce system's only Income Share Agreement project in the entire country. And what that is, in a nutshell, is that we've raised a philanthropic pool. And with those funds, we pay the way for the student to go through UCSD Extension in 9 to 12 month certificate programs. So very rigorous, and they acquire really important skills that are needed, again, to be able to go to the employer and say, "This is what I know and what I can do, and how I can add value on day one."

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

And so, in that model, we're paying their way through. Once they get a job that pays at least \$40,000 a year, then the agreement is that they pay back a portion of future income for a limited period of time back to the fund. So it's a pay it forward model. So it's an evergreen fund where the dollars go back, which then provides opportunity for other participants to go through.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

And we're really bullish on this project. It's working, we're getting people into great careers. We're seeing the average wage already at about \$55,000 a year for graduates who are now employed. So, imagine going from making in the teens per hour, or maybe being out of work, and to be able to acquire that skill in a rapid period of time to get into a career that they want to get into and then have a livable wage and a great future.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

That's what the ISA offers. And so, we plan on growing that more and more over the years with other educational partners, other pathways. Because the first couple of cohorts have been all in IT-related fields of expertise. And now we're going to be expanding into healthcare soon, in the next cohort, as we continue to grow this model.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

So that's another way to go for workers, because the federal programs may not be what they want. And through a different approach like this, it's another avenue for people to look at: how do I want to go about my career progression? And would this be a better fit? Would it lead to the kind of outcome that I want and the wage that I need? And that's what the ISA can offer.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Yeah. I'm a very big fan of your program. And I love that. I wish other workforce development groups were doing it as well, but-

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

We do too. It can be done. And we've supported others who are looking at trying to get into the model. The difficult part about it is you need to raise the funds in order to be able to do it. So we raised \$4 million in philanthropy, James Irvine Foundation, Strada Education Network, Google.org, and a private philanthropist who really believed in the model. And so, that's relationship building and that's really getting out there and saying, "This is what we want to do and how," and then proving it with outcomes.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

That's what our other workforce boards are looking at. And I hope more and more get into it. Because the federal dollar cannot do it all, it's helpful, it's the foundation, but we really need to lean into other partners. And that, again, is the private sector and philanthropy. I think they really want to get into this and invest, but they need to see the results.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

We have some of our graduates making six figures already. So it works. You get the skills necessary, [crosstalk 00:14:28]-

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

That's impressive.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

It is. I think it's over six people making six figures plus. And that's after going through a 9 to 12 month course to get a very specific skill set, like business intelligence, or Java programming, digital marketing, and front-end web design. Those were our first four cohorts. And those jobs are in great demand. And with UCSD Extension being a high caliber institution with a rigorous set of curriculum, and you then go to employer with those skills, you are going to have great opportunity out there.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Before we started recording, you and I were talking about the importance of helping guide young people in school to, maybe, a career path. Who are you working with? How are you working on that? I'd love you to tell that story, because I think it's really interesting getting to young people's brains early and say, "Hey, you've got an aptitude for this. We can help you have a career at this."

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

Yes. This is something we're very passionate about in recent years, and that's about going beyond the traditional workforce development boundaries of 18+. Now we're really leaning into K-12 as a critical partner, because workforce development doesn't just start as an adult. If we can embed career pathway thinking, and awareness of careers, and helping youth understand their strengths, interests, and values, it helps them know who they are and where the careers are, and that can make them very passionate about pursuing different career options very early on.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

So we work with Cajon Valley School District, here, locally, and they are a wonderful, very innovative school district led by Superintendent David Miyashiro and the Chief Innovation Officer, Ed Hidalgo ... who actually also serves on our board of directors. So we're very closely linked. And together, we worked on taking our research, our labor market information research that all Workforce boards do, we translated it first into poster boards that we shared with schools. But then we kept going further, and we built an online experience on our website, workforce.org, that we call My Next Move, which is a way to digitize this experience to really help everybody look at all the different pathways.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

My friend, Ed, who I just mentioned, he has a great quote, "How can a kid aspire to a career they don't know exists?" And that's the core challenge here, because kids are not able to have a way to explore a

very complicated world when they're just trying to get through school. But we have that information, and the educators want to share it. So we're working closely together to put, in real clear terms, these are the careers that are out there. That's what we can do. And then what the school does, through Cajon Valley, is they use this RIASEC framework, the Holland Codes they're called.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

So RIASEC is a self-assessment tool ... Realistic, Investigative, and so forth ... where youth go through, they identify their strengths, interests and values, that narrows it down to a few of these codes which then map to what careers may be really exciting and fitting for them. And so we work very closely together by embedding this information with Cajon Valley, and other school districts. But they then share this day-to-day in the classroom, in grade school, middle school and beyond, where career thinking is part of the curriculum. It makes the academic experience very relevant and very exciting.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

Another thing that we put together late last year, in COVID, is we had been working on building an in-person experience at Cajon Valley. And we call it the Launch Pad. So they dedicated old library space, that wasn't used to its maximum capability, to make this immersive experience where the materials are up there, the boards, and a lot of other materials that Cajon Valley has built so that the kids can go through this experience to understand: here's the careers that are out there for me. And now I can access them through the support of Cajon Valley and the materials we have.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

And, on top of that, it's also a career center site for their parents. So this is a full service community centered based way of being able to activate workforce development for community, for the youth. And so, we're so excited about it because this is how you build future talent. This is how you enable anybody to fulfill their potential and not be defined by the zip code in which you were born; which is what we're needing to break out of. It should not be the limiting factor, that you were born into a certain socioeconomic class or zip code that may limit your ability to access these great careers. Because talent is all around, it just needs to be cultivated through the work that we can do together with K-12.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Providing opportunities seems to be a big theme for you and for a lot of workforce development. But I see that popping up in a lot of stuff you're talking about. One of your initiatives is TechHire, connecting people with opportunities, whether it's employment or internships. How does that work?

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

Yeah. TechHire was an Obama administration initiative that was great, and then it became necessary for regional areas to take it on after that administration. And so we embrace that and believe in it, because this is a way to be able to level the playing field for access to IT careers. And so, we're able to provide people with subsidized training and support in order to get the experience necessary with an employer to acquire at least entry-level tech career opportunities.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

And we've served over 500 people in recent years, and this has led to ongoing careers that people flourish in. Because, again, it's getting that foot in the door. That's the opportunity gap and the

awareness gap we're overcoming, because we're providing the access to these opportunities. And then you don't have a skills gap, because people now have acquired the skills, the social capital, and they have the opportunity to really pursue the careers of their dreams.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

And so TechHire is another great avenue to be able to get into great careers. And this program does not cost anyone, it is supported through the City of San Diego, the City of Chula Vista, also a local foundation, the San Diego Foundation. So there's a lot of believers in this model.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

And, again, this is how you build talent. It doesn't just show up at your door one day, or you shouldn't have to go and get it from another region. That's not the world we should be living in. We should be cultivating the talent, day in and day out, with all of our communities. And it means rolling up our sleeves and doing workforce development differently, not just deploying the federal resources that come our way.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Peter, as we come out of the pandemic, what is the San Diego Workforce Partnership doing to make sure that opportunity youth take part in the recovery?

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

It's a very important question, Ramona, because before the pandemic there were around 5 million opportunity youth, or disconnected youth ... also known ... around the country. And those are 16 to 24 year olds not working and not in school. They haven't found their way for a variety of reasons. This is not kids sitting on the couch, this is a number of societal issues from just disconnection in any number of ways. But a lot of talent and a lot of opportunity within this group of young adults. That's almost 1 in 10 youth in that age range. And that was pre-pandemic. Now we know it's only grown through COVID.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

So what we have to do, as we come out of the pandemic and get back to whatever normal will be, we have to be sure we invest across the country in opportunities for all youth to get into the workforce in any number of ways, to get your start, to experience what it means to work with an employer and coworkers, and develop the soft skills, and to understand money management, and to be able to look at a career, look at different options.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

We all start in those entry-level jobs. I flipped burgers and delivered pizza, and did my share of that work. And it's part of the path. But if you don't even get onto that path, your future possibilities for the career you want are really, really impacted, and oftentimes in a very negative way. So we can get ahead of it. If we invest early and we have a number of youth internship and placement programs going on, that's where the private sector has to come in, on top of the public sector and philanthropy, to really invest in our youth so that we can get them on a very positive and productive path. And then we all win.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

If we don't, the negative outcomes are unacceptable. And we're seeing a lot of that around every single day. And we can change that. But it really takes extra investment and really getting all youth into different pathways, there are different passions that they want to pursue. But if they don't have that opportunity, the alternate outcomes are just unacceptable.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

Peter, thank you so much for joining me today. I really appreciate it.

Peter Callstrom, San Diego Workforce Partnership president & CEO:

My pleasure, Ramona. Thank you.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I've been speaking with Peter Callstrom, President and CEO of the San Diego Workforce Partnership.

Ramona Schindelheim, WorkingNation editor-in-chief:

I'm Ramona Schindelheim, Editor-in-Chief of WorkingNation. Thank you for listening.