

2026 Business

Retention & Expansion (BRE) Report

Purpose for BRE Visits & Reporting

- Foster relationships & forecast needs
- Identify expansion opportunities
- Identify at-risk businesses
- Forecast economic investment & job creation

Key Themes

1. Growth outlook is strong, but uneven

Roughly two-thirds of businesses visited (17 of 26) reported active growth or expansion- new facilities, expanded headcount, or record production/revenue years.

65% of businesses visited are actively growing or expanding.

2. Workforce shortage remains top concern

Continuing theme: consistent with 2024 (workforce shortage a top concern) and 2025 (85% cited lack of skilled workforce as their top concern).

Many companies are using incentives, bonuses & flexible hours to hire and keep qualified employees.

3. Automation and AI adoption accelerating

Almost all businesses described active automation investment (including a multi-million-dollar automation investment at one employer) or growing interest in AI adoption/training.

4. Latino/Hispanic workforce continues to grow

Directly consistent with 2024 (73% reported an increase in Latino workers) and 2025 (22% indicated need for language & cultural integration support); this year's visits suggest the trend has deepened at some of the largest employers.

Key Themes Continued...

5. Succession planning & ownership transitions

Several businesses are actively navigating leadership succession, an employee ownership (ESOP) transition, or an outright change of ownership.

Part of succession planning is also due to aging workforce and need to make sure roles and responsibilities were defined and understood

6. Wastewater treatment capacity

New theme for 2026: this didn't appear as a named concern in the 2024 or 2025 snapshots. Worth flagging to stakeholders as an emerging infrastructure issue that could limit expansion across several of the county's core industries if not addressed.

7. Housing & transportation still a barrier

Employers again cited a need for rental/housing assistance and transportation solutions for commuting workers

Continuing theme from 2024 & 2025 that 76% said affordable housing affects talent recruitment.

8. Youth training programs in high demand

Almost all businesses expressed interest in school partnerships for youth workforce programs, apprenticeships, mentoring, or welcome home or boomerang-talent style efforts to attract former residents back to the workforce.

65%

Reporting
Growth &
Expansion

2 of the largest
employers say

70-80%
of their workers
are Spanish
speaking

3 Businesses
across 3 different
sectors mention

**Wastewater
Capacity**
as a concern

80%

want youth
workforce
partnerships

Conclusions

Still true: workforce shortage (esp. skilled trades and healthcare), automation, upskilling, affordable housing and transportation barriers, and a growing Hispanic/Latino workforce needing language and cultural-integration support.

New this year: wastewater treatment / infrastructure capacity emerging as a cross-sector growth constraint; several businesses now mid-transition on ownership/succession rather than just anticipating it.