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Collaborating with the Public Workforce System in California: A Guide for Community-Based Organizations

About This Guide

Local workforce development boards (LWDBs) are organizations responsible for overseeing American Job Centers (AJCs) and coordinating workforce initiatives in a specific region or community. They are often viewed as leaders for local workforce systems, offering a variety of services through diverse funding streams and a network of partners. For community-based organizations (CBOs), forging a partnership with your LWDB can be a powerful way to amplify your impact by aligning resources that can expand access to quality jobs. This JFF guide provides answers to common questions about LWDBs, highlights the benefits and potential challenges of collaboration, and offers practical, actionable recommendations for initiating and sustaining a fruitful partnership that advances your shared vision and goals.

While the guide offers general descriptions and guidance, it's important to know that LWDBs vary greatly from region to region in terms of operations, governance, and funding structures. Similarly, each organization offers a unique mix of supportive services, training programs, and employment resources to support learners and workers. Therefore, while this guide provides foundational information for better understanding of how LWDBs operate overall, remember that each local area may have unique policies, programs, and procedures that should be considered when developing an outreach and partnerships strategy.

The main section of this guide provides actionable tips and resources to initiate a discussion with your LWDB and was developed within the context of California's public workforce system. To learn more about the public workforce system nationally, please see Appendix B and Appendix C.

Getting Started: Assess Your Local Workforce Landscape

Get to Know Your Local Board

California has forty-five LWDBs, each with their own locally driven priorities and processes to navigate. To find your LWDB, visit the [California Workforce Development Board website](#), which directly links to all of the state's LWDB websites and contact information. You can also find contact information for a LWDB and their AJCs by visiting [CareerOneStop's "Find Local Help" page](#).

Once you find your LWDB, take time to thoroughly review available information on their website to understand their work and help determine what a partnership could look like. Consider reviewing the following:

- Find information about their services and initiatives that support adults, youth, employers, and dislocated workers.
- Familiarize yourself with your LWDB's regional and local plans, these can often be found on the LWDB's website or [here](#), on the California Workforce Development Board's website. Regional and local plans are comprehensive strategies over a four-year period that display how a LWDB will distribute resources to meet the needs of the local labor market.
- See if their website offers information about their policies and procedures, including how they interpret federal and state guidance at the local level and their process for referring participants to partners.
- See if there are any active requests for proposals or requests for quotes for services. If there are not any active procurement opportunities, some boards may have an option on their website to submit a procurement interest form for future events.
- Identify upcoming board meeting dates, which are open to the public unless otherwise specified. Boards may close off certain meetings or agenda items from the public depending on the subject matter (i.e., HR issues, CEO performance reviews, etc.). Additionally, review the minutes from previous meetings, which LWDBs often make publicly available. These documents can offer valuable insights into their services.
- Review the board's current and past investments and partnerships to develop a deeper understanding of their strategic priorities and community connections.
- Find contact information for staff and board members, if available. Once found, learn more about these individuals through their LinkedIn page or other online resources to identify shared connections across your network.

Identify the Shared Value Proposition

Once you've identified specific ways that the LWDB might support the outcomes and impact of *your* work, it's time to consider the resources, tools, and value your organization might provide the LWDB to support *their* mission and goals. This is what's referred to as a **shared value proposition**, and it's a valuable tool for securing buy-in, support, and commitment from potential partners.

Taking Action: Initiate a Discussion with Your LWDB

Tips to Craft a Compelling Outreach Pitch

Do Your Research

While assessing your local workforce landscape, it helps to spend time narrowing in on specific LWDB policies and procedures that may impact or influence your shared value proposition. This includes details such as eligibility criteria for programs, caps or limitations for funding streams, periods of performance for grants or programs administered by the board, and systems, platforms, or modalities used by the board to deliver services. While this information is not always readily available online, exploring these types of questions when meeting with a LWDB representative demonstrates that you're invested in building a foundational understanding of their programs and services in the interest of finding points of collaboration.

Lead with Collaboration

Leveraging your shared value proposition ensures you are elevating the mutual benefits of a collaboration by clearly articulating the ways a partnership will enhance both of your missions and goals. But it's also important to consider ways in which your organization might support LWDB programs or initiatives that aren't necessarily linked to your immediate needs. This can help lay the foundation for a long-term partnership wherein your organizations collaboratively explore ways to support each other's ongoing priorities and customers.

Prioritize Co-Creation and Design

Ownership can be a powerful motivator in promoting engagement, accountability, and quality. Engaging LWDBs early in the design and development process when launching new programs or initiatives helps create shared ownership and ensures all partners are invested in the outcomes. If implementation has already begun, be intentional about creating space for your workforce partners to provide ongoing feedback or suggestions on areas for improvement and continually consider ways in which processes might be adapted to ensure mutual benefit for all parties.

Include Helpful Links or Resources

If you are reaching out to your LWDB via email, be sure to include links to additional information or resources that provide important details or help lend context to your outreach. For example, if you are sharing information about a specific program or approach that you feel may be interesting to the LWDB, be sure to include links to a webpage or video, attach a one-pager, or direct them to an impact report that provides more detail and makes your communication more tangible and compelling.

Leave the Past in the Past

Occasionally, partnerships between LWDBs and CBOs are strained or contentious due to competitive dynamics or politics dating back to past leaders or circumstances. You may not be fully aware of the source of this tension. Regardless, ensure your outreach is rooted in the desire for progress, collaboration, and shared value moving forward. Leading with honesty, humility, and empathy when initiating conversations among organizations with a tumultuous history creates an opportunity to wipe the slate clean. In addition, it’s important to focus your efforts on building meaningful connections that strengthen your collective impact and model cooperative leadership.

Ways to Connect with Your LWDB



Attend a board meeting. Board meetings are open to the public, and all meeting dates and locations should be available on the board’s website well in advance.



Call your LWDB and make an appointment to speak with a person of interest. For LWDBs with only a few people on staff, you might request to speak directly with the executive director/CEO. Otherwise, it may make more sense to seek someone who manages a specific program of interest to you.



Visit a local AJC and request to speak to an administrator. They should be able to provide information about how to contact the LWDB office, based on your questions or areas of interest.



Network at a local event. Representatives of LWDBs often attend workforce, economic development, or community events that feature programs or initiatives supporting regional planning and development. Make it a point to connect with a person of interest and set up a time to dive deeper at a later date.



Ask for an introduction through a mutual connection. Not surprisingly, outreach is often more successful when done through trusted colleagues and partners. Leveraging a trusted community partner for a warm introduction to a LWDB representative facilitates a connection and signals confidence in both your organization and personal credibility.

Key Discussion Topics to Prepare for Before Meeting with Your LWDB

Prior to meeting or talking with someone from the LWDB, here are a few topics and questions that are likely to arise during the conversation based on specific areas of interest. To ensure you’re as prepared as possible, consider these ahead of time and prepare your own set of questions as well. If

you're unable to find information about these items prior to connecting the LWDB, consider exploring some of these topics in your initial conversations.

Areas of Interest:

Becoming a Training Provider Partner

- Familiarize yourself with your LWDB's eligible training provider list (ETPL) requirements and application process. Each board has a designated ETPL coordinator, who can help answer questions about the application process. The ETPL coordinator's contact information can be found on the [EDD ETPL website](#).
- Determine if your training programs are accredited at the state level, which is a requirement for approval on the ETPL.
- Get to know your region's **high priority industries (HPIs) and high priority occupations (HPOs)** to see if your programs appear on those lists. You can find information on this by accessing your LWDB's four-year local plan.
- Be familiar with your regional **labor market information and data (LMI)** so you are informed on supply and demand projections and labor trends for key industries and jobs. You can access information by visiting the California Employment Development Department's [LMI webpage](#).
- Become familiar with CalJOBS, the state's comprehensive system for providing training and employment services to jobseekers and gathering participant and performance data.
- Know the details of training programs such as cost per participant, eligibility criteria, length of program, credentials earned, current funding sources, etc.
- Inquire about options and opportunities for becoming a training partner without being on the ETPL (e.g., customized training, incumbent worker training, etc.).
- To be listed on California's ETPL for an apprenticeship program, the program must either be registered and approved by the California Department of Industrial Relations (DIR) or the Division of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS). Program providers approved by DAS can register for the ETPL by creating an account on CalJOBS and providing the required information. After which, LWDBs will review the registration and verify eligibility.

Becoming a Wraparound/Supportive Service Provider or Referral Partner

- Research core services provided by the LWDB through the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) or other funding streams, including specific populations that are prioritized and targeted for services, eligibility criteria (if available), and existing delivery partners.

- Be familiar with the LWDB's partner/vendor agreement processes and procedures, if publicly available.
- Understand the landscape of providers and resources available to address the unique challenges and needs of learners and jobseekers in your shared service area, such as transportation, affordable childcare, or housing support.
- Inquire about specific referral systems or processes established by the LWDB.
- Inquire about data collection systems or processes established by the LWDB.

Build Capacity as a Design, Implementation, or Subject Matter Partner

- Research the LWDB's key priorities and initiatives, and identify specific areas of need where your expertise and services may fill a gap.
- Have a menu of services ready to share and be prepared to be adaptable and flexible based on the LWDB's needs and available resources.
- Be prepared to share examples of your work including any testimonials, products, and data that support your mission and impacts.
- Inquire about the LWDB's procurement processes for working with contractors or vendors to secure specialized services. Keep in mind that certain types of services, or services exceeding a set funding threshold, may require your organization to respond to a request for proposal (RFP) issued by the board.
- Consider presenting or inquiring about grant funding opportunities pertinent to you and your LWDB's areas of focus. Many LWDBs have diverse funding streams and apply for grants offered by entities at the federal, state, or local level.

Example: Board Outreach Communication Template

This customizable email template provides a starting point for crafting an informative and compelling outreach communication to a LWDB. It makes several assumptions and should, therefore, be adapted and customized to suit your context and specific needs.

Greetings, _____.

I hope you're having a great week so far. I'm reaching out because, after hearing about some of the great work you're doing with learners and jobseekers in the community, I believe there's an opportunity for us to collaborate in support of each other's missions and impact here in [insert county, city, or region]. Specifically, I'm very interested to learn more about [insert a specific program, service, initiative, or question you have].

In taking a deeper look over [insert name of LWDB]'s website, and taking into account [highlight a specific need or desired impact in the community/economy that you're wanting to address], I'd love to talk more about how [insert name of your organization and link to website] might fulfill a need for [insert a specific service/opportunity you'd like to explore with the LWDB].

Our organization is dedicated to [insert mission/vision]. Since [insert year established], we've been working in and around [insert county, city, or region] to achieve this mission in the following ways:

- Insert a concise, but impactful list of key services, programs, or strategies with hyperlinks to anything you'd like them to explore further. Highlight key partners, outcomes, recognition/awards, or other important distinguishing information that conveys your reputation, impact, and influence in the community.

I'd love to connect in the next couple of weeks to learn more about your programs and services and brainstorm a few ways that we may be able to work together in the future in service of [insert long-term goals/vision].

Here's a link to [my calendar] or feel free to send me a few times when you're able to chat. I hope to talk soon.

APPENDIX A: Examples of CBO and LWDB partnerships

Throughout California, and across the nation, CBOs play a key role in supporting the efforts of LWDBs and AJCs. As noted in this [October 2022](#) report from JFF, many CBOs perform workforce development activities daily—they recruit, train, and mentor individuals, often providing or connecting them to the wraparound supports they need to launch successful careers and unlock their full potential. Their deep community connections and historical neighborhood-specific knowledge make them a trusted resource for residents who seek training and career support. For these reasons, they are well positioned to fill some of the gaps of traditional workforce actors, particularly when it comes to preparing workers from populations have had limited access to quality jobs. The following case examples illustrate how organizations within the state are actively creating value and expanding the capabilities of their LWDBs.

Hospitality Training Academy

[Hospitality Training Academy \(HTA\)](#) is a 501(c)(3) organization and Taft-Hartley labor-management partnership between UNITE HERE Local 11, representing over 32,500 union members, and 200+ hospitality and food service employers in Los Angeles and Orange Counties and the state of Arizona. HTA was formed in 2006 as a task force of labor, business, and community leaders, and is governed by a board of trustees equally representing partner-employers and employees represented Collaborating with the Public Workforce System in California

by UNITE HERE Local 11. Based in Los Angeles, California, and Phoenix, Arizona, HTA is dedicated to improving the skills and employability of hospitality, food service, and tourism workers. As a partner to their local workforce organizations, HTA has developed an impressive track record and offers a broad variety of **apprenticeship training and placements in High Road Employment with competitive wages and benefits**, coupled with **wraparound support services** provided by HTA and numerous community partners. Since 2013, HTA has partnered with the Los Angeles County Workforce Development Board to offer training programs through ETPL, along with cohort-based training programs.

Proteus, Inc.

[Proteus, Inc.](#) is an experienced nonprofit based in California's San Joaquin Valley. As a **one-stop operator** and workforce partner with LWDBs across Fresno, Kern, and Tulare Counties, Proteus provides adults, youth, and dislocated workers living in agricultural communities with education, training, and job placement services as well as access to a range of other programs. As an **education and training partner**, Proteus is an [eligible training provider](#) for truck driving and energy weatherization programs. They also provide a range of **supportive services** that help learners overcome everyday barriers that might otherwise prohibit success. They credit their long-standing partnership with LWDBs across three counties in the San Joaquin Valley to their deep roots within the local communities they serve.

CivicMakers

[CivicMakers](#) is a community-based LLC that collaborates with workforce and economic development organizations in communities across the Bay Area and beyond. They specialize in collaborative problem-solving and have grown to be one of California's leading firms in [human-centered design](#). CivicMakers consults with workforce development boards to design and facilitate efforts that **center worker voice and public engagement in decision-making**. Their unique concepts and approaches challenge organizations to disrupt the status quo and explore bold and innovative ways to solve complex issues that limit opportunities for economic mobility.

APPENDIX B: Overview of LWDBs and AJCs

Roles and Functions

What is a LWDB and what role do they play in workforce and economic development in my community?

Workforce boards play a vital role in the public workforce system throughout the country. As stewards of AJCs, they offer a comprehensive suite of training services tailored for both individuals and employers that supports regional economic growth. Additionally, they forge strategic partnerships with local education and training providers, industry, economic development organizations, and CBOs to ensure their services are finely tuned to local labor market demands,

thereby maximizing impact. Typically, LWDBs are publicly funded, but may also receive a percentage of private or philanthropic funding to support specific programs or initiatives. Throughout California, most are established at the regional or county level and operate in alignment with federal and state workforce development policies and statutes.

Workforce development boards, in partnership with AJCs, support workforce and economic development in a variety of ways:

- Provide low or no-cost job training and education services to eligible residents throughout their services region.
- Build connections to local and regional employers and industry representatives to facilitate job placement for those in need of employment.
- Boost jobseekers' employment capabilities by providing a wide range of supportive services such as job search and interviewing guidance, vouchers for childcare, transportation, or housing, and access to uniforms or equipment needed for employment.
- Keep a pulse on market fluctuations, labor trends, and state or local mandates or policies that may impact job and skill demand throughout a region. In some areas, this may be done through sector or industry partnerships, wherein the LWDB serves as a convener or intermediary for the region's high-priority industry sectors.
- Design and administer workforce development programs and services supported through state or local discretionary funding, such as opportunities provided by the [California Workforce Development Board](#) and [Employment Development Department](#).
- Maintain a database (CalJOBS) of all individuals receiving services through state or federal funding that typically includes data specific to a person's demographics, employment and education history, life circumstances, and socioeconomic status.

What is the difference between a state-level board and a LWDB?

State and LWDBs operate at different levels of government. At the state level, they oversee workforce development activities across an entire state by allocating federal WIOA funds to local areas and developing broader policies and a statewide strategic workforce development plan. At the local level, they implement workforce development strategies to support regional needs by managing WIOA-funded programs and services. Ideally, localized policies and workforce development efforts should align with and support the state workforce board's strategic priorities, but this may vary based on localized needs and context. They also provide Rapid Response services to assist workers impacted by layoffs with job search assistance, retraining, and other transition support when layoffs are unavoidable. Importantly, some states may only have LWDBs and no state-level board while others, particularly smaller states like Delaware and Rhode Island, have only a statewide workforce board.

Funding Sources and Governance Structures

What entity funds LWDBs?

Most federal funding for LWDBs is provided through two legislative acts. The costs of operations and programs related to education and training services, and employment services are primarily funded through WIOA. Many workforce boards are also supported, to a lesser degree, by discretionary state workforce dollars, localized workforce and training grant programs overseen and allocated by state labor agencies, local government funding, or philanthropic funding.

How are LWDBs organized and operated within the context of local governance structures?

Workforce development boards are governed and structured in a variety of ways depending on their organizational status, the size of the region they serve, and their mission and vision. In most cases, local elected officials appoint members to the LWDB based on membership requirements outlined in WIOA. Some boards may have designated 501(c)(3) status which enhances their ability to solicit for and receive flexible funds outside of state and federal dollars to support their mission and activities. Others may operate as quasi-government entities, housed within the office of a local elected official. The best way to determine this is to [search for your LWDB](#) online to learn more.

Differentiating LWDBs and AJCs

How are LWDBs and one-stop career centers, or AJCs, connected? What does the relationship between these two entities look like from a governance perspective?

LWDBs oversee and administer funding to one-stop career centers, commonly referred to as American Job Centers (AJCs). LWDBs are responsible for strategic planning, oversight, and evaluation of all AJCs operating within their local workforce development area (LWDA). While there's typically only one workforce development board in a LWDA, there are often several AJCs.

Direct service delivery to jobseekers is typically the role of the AJCs, although LWDBs may administer programs outside of WIOA funding that enable them to deliver direct services as well. The AJCs provide employment and training services directly to workforce system customers through a set of legislative programs outlined in WIOA. These programs include, but are not limited to, adult education, unemployment insurance, vocational rehabilitation, Reentry Employment Opportunities (REO), Job Corps, and veteran services. Other well-known programs include YouthBuild and the National Farmworker Jobs Program.

LWDBs often contract with service providers to manage and deliver specific programs, such as Title I services, at the AJCs.

What are one-stop career centers/American Job Centers called in my local area?

The names of AJCs throughout different counties and regions of California vary. However, typically, they are identified by their location within the county. For example, in Imperial County, the Imperial

County Workforce Development Board oversees three comprehensive AJCs and three affiliate or satellite locations. Affiliate or satellite locations may operate for limited hours or deliver only specific programs and services. Imperial County AJCs of California (AJCCs) include:

- El Centro AJCC (comprehensive site)
- Calexico AJCC (comprehensive site)
- Brawley AJCC (comprehensive site)
- El Centro East (satellite office)
- Winterhaven (satellite office)
- Calipatria-Niland (family resource center)

[CareerOneStop](#) is an excellent resource to find both your LWDB and all comprehensive and affiliate AJCs operating in your local area. Simply click “Find Local Help” along the top menu bar, click either “Find American Job Centers” or “Workforce Development Board Finder” and search by city, state, and zip code.

What does the staffing structure of LWDBs look like?

Leadership and staffing at workforce development boards varies greatly depending on size and governance structure. Larger boards that serve major metropolitan areas are typically led by an executive director or president/CEO. They are often supported by individuals that oversee financial, operational, technical, programmatic, and administrative activities as well as a variety of roles that are responsible for program design and implementation, risk management, partnership development, and business/employer services. Additional staff roles may include those dedicated to data and evaluation, monitoring and compliance, fundraising and development, technology adoption and integration, and other administrative activities. In rural regions or smaller service areas, the board staff may consist of just a few people that are trained in a variety of roles and functions.

For CBOs looking to explore potential partnership opportunities with their LWDB, it's best to target your initial outreach to managers or directors of programs that you are specifically interested in learning more about. For example, if you are interested in the board's youth-focused programs, you may want to connect with a manager of youth programming or director of youth initiatives. The titles of these individuals may vary from site to site, so some online research is suggested prior to outreach.

Appendix C: Programs and services provided by LWDBs and AJCs

In addition to the services mentioned above, LWDBs and AJCs provide a wide range of services specific to jobseekers, learners, employers, training providers, community organizations, business and economic development entities, and industry representatives such as associations or trade groups.

| | Workforce Development Boards | American Job Centers |
|---|--|--|
| Employment Services | Administer funding to operate and staff job centers. Gather and analyze labor market data to inform job demand and market fluctuation. | Coordinate and deliver employment services such as resume building, job search support, career readiness assessments and training, interview prep, etc. |
| Access to Education and Training | Submit training providers and programs for ETPL approval. Initiates partnerships to offer in-demand training and credentials. Evaluates effectiveness of programs. | Administer assessments. Guide customers in identifying programs that meet their circumstances and needs. Facilitate enrollment in education programs. |
| Access to Supportive Services | Administer funding to support delivery of support services. Establish community partnerships with services providers. Evaluate effectiveness of services. | Coordinate and deliver social and academic supportive services. Make referrals to community partners to meet the unique needs of customers. |
| Meeting Employers' HR Needs | Coordinate sector/industry partnerships to identify shared job and skill needs. Administer incumbent worker training funds. Disseminate labor market data across region. | Fulfill job orders for local and regional businesses. Identify candidates for jobs based on hiring criteria. Coordinate job-retention services. Host regional job fairs. |
| Workforce Strategy and Policy | Ensure workforce strategy and policies adhere to state and federal regulations. Coordinates and develops localized strategic plans with program partners. Drafts local policies based on customer needs (ideally). | Deliver programs and services in accordance with local area's strategy and policies. Inform strategic planning efforts based on customer and community needs. Gather data to inform performance and process improvement. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Funding and Resources to Support Systems | Identify opportunities to leverage non-WIOA funds and resources to support regional workforce or economic development efforts. Administer and align multiple funding sources to maximize efficiency and impact. | Maximize resources and funding through resource sharing agreements, co-location of services, or referral networks. Adopt and/or adapt services and operations to support non-WIOA funded workforce development efforts. |
| Job Quality and Access | Participate in local, regional, or national conversations driving creation of quality jobs. Lead localized conversations with employers, industry reps, worker voice orgs, and workers to identify viable strategies. | Identify industries and employers that create in-demand, quality jobs. Guide jobseekers in exploring quality jobs as part of career exploration activities. Connect jobseekers to training that leads to high-quality jobs. |

How can my LWDB help connect me to workers and learners in my region?

Your LWDB serves as an intermediary to connect you with jobseekers and/or learners seeking in-demand skills and credentials. The AJCs coordinate career exploration, job placement, and occupational skill training tailored to adults, young people, and dislocated workers. Most workforce boards also have funding and programs dedicated specifically to priority populations such as veterans, people with disabilities, those earning incomes below the regional poverty threshold, and those that have been unemployed for more than six months.

How can my LWDB help connect me to employers in my region?

Your LWDB and AJCs have well-established connections to regional businesses and industry representatives. Your state's AJCs focus primarily on fulfilling the immediate hiring needs of companies and have keen awareness of skill and credential demand across industries, whereas the business services teams housed within the LWDBs focus on more comprehensive industry-based strategic engagements such as sector partnerships, market disruptions such as layoffs or business closures, new business development, and legislative impacts to the workforce.

How can my LWDB help connect me to training providers in my region?

One way training providers partner with LWDBs is through the ETPL. Training providers must apply to be added to the ETPL through the LWDB. If accepted, the provider is eligible to receive reimbursements from the LWDB for expenses such as tuition, books, materials, and other training-related costs. Providers on the ETPL must comply with eligibility requirements and quality standards

to remain active on the ETPL and provide outcomes data to the LWDB in compliance with established policies and processes. Many LWDBs also partner with training providers to design and deliver customized skills training for employers or in partnership with organizations such as the Center for Employment Training.

Can LWDBs help pay the training costs for the population(s) we serve?

Potentially. Much of the training offered and paid for by AJCs is delivered through individual training accounts (ITAs). These individual accounts help pay for things like tuition and costs related to training such as books, materials, and equipment. An ITA is made available to eligible workforce customers based on income thresholds, employment status, and other basic criteria. Training providers seeking reimbursement through ITAs must be on either the state or local [ETPL](#). In California, a CBO should contact their LWDB directly to understand their local eligibility requirements and process for becoming an eligible training provider.

What kinds of supportive services can the workforce board and career centers provide to learners and workers?

Typically, LWDBs typically offer a comprehensive set of wraparound supportive services to help individuals through their career development journeys. Some of these services are available through WIOA funds. However, in many cases, LWDBs must tap into alternative funds or build partnerships with service providers such as CBOs or social service agencies. Common services include vouchers for public transportation, childcare costs, financial aid, housing assistance, nutritional needs, and various others. Braiding together community resources and funding streams allows LWDBs to provide holistic support to address both immediate and longer-term needs that impact participant outcomes.