

TECH

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THE TALENT ISSUE

INSIDE STORY | PAGE 04

A workforce that works: Council helps make the connections for talent and business



BEST IN CLASS

How Arizona's community colleges are cultivating talent

Sunshine isn't all that's plentiful in Arizona. The state's unmatched and robust talent pool has attracted companies from around the world.

With a workforce exceeding 3.6 million and a population of more than 7 million, Arizona promises to continue setting the national standard for workforce excellence.

Key to developing Arizona's deep talent pool are the state's high-quality community colleges. Gov. Doug Ducey has called them the "secret sauce" that helps drive Arizona's economic momentum.

For the school year ending in spring 2021, community colleges statewide served more than 245,000 students, according to a new report published by the Arizona Community College Coordinating Council.

The community college differentiator

Arizona's innovative workforce development programs have gained national recognition.

One example is the [Arizona Advanced Technology Network](#), a partnership among Maricopa County Community College District, Central Arizona College and Pima Community College, which has produced a unified, industry-recognized curriculum designed to teach the skills needed for high-tech advanced manufacturing jobs.

In addition, Pima Community College is close to completing its [Aviation Technology Center](#) (ATC) expansion, doubling the amount of students who can train at the facility. Once complete,

the center will train hundreds of new students for jobs in Southern Arizona's aerospace industry.

"The \$15 million appropriation from the state of Arizona for the expansion of our Aviation Technology Center allows Pima Community College to further meet workforce demands of the aerospace and defense sector," says Ian Roark, the college's vice chancellor of Workforce Development and Innovation. "Because of this appropriation, we are doubling the capacity of our Airframe & Powerplant enrollment, increasing high school CTE enrollment, and adding new programs. In partnership with our employers, government and economic development, we are positioning the ATC as a strategic asset for the community."

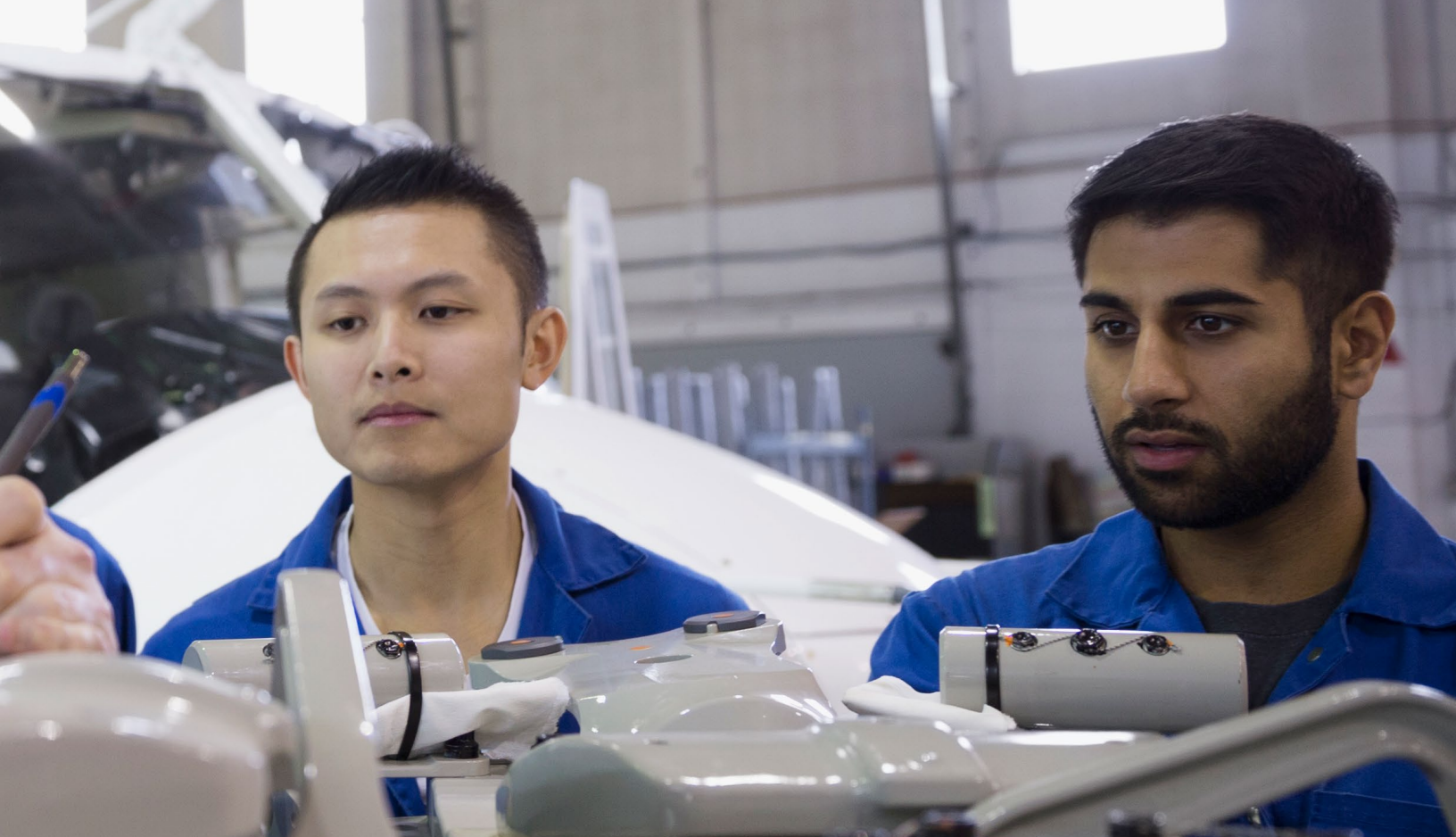
Powerful partnerships

A strong talent pipeline is a result of strategic collaboration between education and industry to create comprehensive training programs.

[Drive48](#), an automotive assembly training facility in Coolidge, is one such example. A collaboration among the Arizona Commerce Authority (ACA), local government, Central Arizona College and industry, the facility has trained more than 2,000 automotive manufacturing technicians since its launch in early 2021, according to Jackie Elliot, the college's president.

"Central Arizona College's partnership with Lucid Motors has been successful in preparing a highly skilled workforce for the 21st century," says Elliott. "This partnership has enabled the college to remain current on emerging trends in the industry. These types of partnerships are the key to growing Arizona's talent pipeline."

The success of the Drive48 model has fueled future expansion plans. Arizona has allocated \$30 million to build six additional



advanced manufacturing training centers around the state that will focus on industry partnerships in semiconductors, electric vehicles, batteries and more.

Industry-academia collaboration has fueled workforce programs for growing industries such as semiconductors. In July, the first all-female class of students graduated from the [Semiconductor Technician Quick Start program](#) at Mesa Community College. Funded by Intel and supported by Maricopa Community Colleges, the program teaches semiconductor basics and prepares students for Intel tech roles.

“As semiconductor manufacturing continues to grow, it’s our responsibility as a system to help strengthen industry while providing clear pathways for our students,” says Darcy Renfro, vice chancellor of Community, Government Relations and Economic Development for the Maricopa County Community College District. “The program’s recent state and national attention is a clear indicator of the need for this program, as well as the desire of our students to enter this workforce.”

The semiconductor program is just one example of successful community college partnerships.

Others include Gulfstream Aerospace Corporation, which is [partnering](#) with Arizona State University and Chandler-Gilbert Community College to train and hire maintenance specialists for the company’s fleet of luxury jets.

In Prescott, CP Technologies has [joined forces](#) with Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and Yavapai College to train and hire upwards of 200 employees.

Battery manufacturer KORE Power is working with Rio Salado College and West-MEC to facilitate training to hire advanced manufacturing workers at the company’s Buckeye facility.

And Boeing has partnered with Mesa Community College to create a boot camp for electrical wiring technician roles. Since 2019, more than 350 students have graduated from the boot camp and more than 200 were hired at Boeing.

Increasing certifications

Expanding certification attainment is also a critical factor in workforce development. Recently, the ACA collaborated with MCCCCD on the Advanced Manufacturing Bootcamp program, equipping 418 people with certified skills to succeed in manufacturing disciplines.

The governor held a roundtable earlier this year with community college leaders to discuss, among other topics, community colleges’ new [ability](#) to offer students four-year degrees.

“What the four-year degree means to Yavapai County and Yavapai College is the opportunity to provide equal access and opportunity to advanced education for a rural community,” says Lisa Rhine, the college’s president.

At the roundtable, potential four-year degree programs discussed included health care, nursing, aircraft testing, data science and hospitality.

“We have to think of everyday Arizonans and how we can serve everyone across the state,” says Ducey. “Far too many people outside of Arizona only think of the Valley of the Sun and the Grand Canyon, but I’d really like to expose the rest of our state because it provides so many options and a good quality of life.”

Arizona’s community colleges continue to shine as beacons of higher education and skills-training excellence. As the state continues to grow and see further industry expansions, expect Arizona’s colleges to continue to play a central role in meeting workforce demands. ■