

Economic Reporter

CITY OF MESA | OFFICE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

September 2023

WORKFORCE
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT
ATTRACTION & RETENTION

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Workforce Development Plays a Crucial Role in Business Attraction and Retention

In the world of economic development, attracting and retaining businesses is paramount for communities seeking growth, stability, and prosperity. While factors such as infrastructure, taxation, and regulatory environment play pivotal roles, an often-underestimated linchpin in this process is workforce. Availability of a skilled and adaptable workforce helps drive local economic success.

Workforce as a Key Determinant: When businesses contemplate relocating or expanding operations, the availability of a quality workforce is a primary consideration. A community's ability to provide a well-trained talent pool directly influences a business's decision-making process. Workforce development initiatives that focus on honing relevant skills and competencies can significantly enhance a community's appeal to potential investors.

Matching Skills to Industry Needs: A workforce aligned with the demands of local industries is an asset that cannot be overstated. By strategically tailoring workforce development programs to match the skill sets required by existing and prospective businesses, a community can ensure a steady pipeline of qualified candidates. This alignment not only fosters business growth but also enhances the region's reputation as an industry hub.

Enhancing Business Competitiveness: Workforce development contributes to the overall competitiveness of businesses operating within a community. A highly skilled workforce improves productivity, efficiency, and innovation, enabling businesses to stay ahead in a dynamic market. Moreover, businesses in communities with strong workforce development initiatives are better equipped to adapt to technological changes and industry shifts.

Retaining Homegrown Talent: Effective workforce development programs can stem the outmigration of local talent, fostering a sense of loyalty to the community. When individuals have access to quality education, training, and career advancement opportunities, they are more likely to remain in their hometowns, contributing to the long-term growth and stability of the local economy.

Collaborative Ecosystems: Successful workforce development often involves collaboration between educational institutions, businesses and local governments. This collaborative approach fosters an ecosystem where stakeholders work together to identify skill gaps, design relevant curricula, and provide training that aligns with industry needs. Such partnerships enhance a community's attractiveness to businesses seeking a supportive environment for growth.

Workforce Development Programs in the Phoenix-Mesa Metro: Here are just a few examples of workforce development programs being implemented in the metro area to meet the immediate needs of industry.

- **Cable Harness Wiring Boot Camp** is a partnership between Mesa Community College and the Boeing Company to teach skills needed at Boeing's large aerospace manufacturing facility in Mesa.ⁱ
- **Cleanroom Technician Certification**, conducted by the Arizona Advanced Manufacturing Institute, is a 10-day boot camp to develop the skills needed to fill semiconductor fab talent requirements. The program is a partnership between Maricopa Community Colleges and semiconductor companies in the Phoenix-Mesa metro area.ⁱⁱ
- **The Arizona State University AZNext Program** is designed to create a workforce development ecosystem that addresses the need for more skilled workers in IT, cybersecurity, and advanced manufacturing roles. This program is a collaboration between the W.P. Carey School of Business, Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering, and New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences. AZNext brings together employers, workforce development networks, economic development organizations, and industry partnerships, while creating a model for replication across the Southwest and greater U.S.ⁱⁱⁱ
- **Arizona's Reskilling and Recovery Network (RRN)** addresses the near-term challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated economic downturn, as well as needed structural alignment between economic development and workforce development from a policy and programmatic perspective. This is a coordinated effort between Arizona Community College Coordinating Council and Arizona@Work.^{iv}
- **The Caregiver Career Pathway (CCP)** is a technology that uses an interactive "map" to illustrate the various paths that, starting as a Direct Caregiver, an individual can take to gain the required experience, skills, and credentials needed for a life-long career in Arizona's healthcare system. The program is implemented by the Arizona Long-Term Care System Workforce Development Alliance (ALTCS WFDA) in coordination with Arizona Department of Economic Security.^v
- **The Construction Careers Program** provides a pathway that will connect high school graduates and those with a GED to careers in the construction industry and other in-demand careers where skilled labor is in high demand but short supply. This program is a public/private partnership between Maricopa County and Chicanos Por La Causa and Grand Canyon University.^{vi}
- **Pipeline AZ** is a collaborative network for Arizona job seekers and employers that provides access to jobs, education, and career support services.^{vii}
- **Job Connect Mesa** is a comprehensive, one-stop online portal for employers seeking employees and training for employees, as well as for individuals seeking jobs, career guidance, educational resources, or basic needs assistance. The portal features more than 30 organizations, non-profits, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, job boards, and local and federal governmental entities

providing much needed services to the community. Job Connect Mesa was created by the City of Mesa Office of Economic Development (Mesa OED).^{viii}

In 2022, Mesa OED in collaboration with multiple city departments and after much research, surveys, focus groups, and analysis, developed the City of Mesa Workforce Strategy: Respond, Support, Adapt. This strategy was created in response to changes in the labor market during and immediately following the COVID-19 pandemic that affected businesses negatively. Today, with the newly developed strategy in place, Mesa has an opportunity to help overcome these challenges and create solutions to gain competitive ground on economic peer cities and regions. Efforts are aligned to achieve the following three goals:

1. Providing equitable access to resources and support for Mesa Jobseekers and employers.
2. Identifying and mitigating the skills gap in hiring.
3. Expanding job opportunities for workers and retention of employees for businesses.

To learn more about the City of Mesa's workforce development strategy, [visit the comprehensive report](#).

In today's competitive landscape, workforce development has never been more important. The interconnectedness of workforce development and business success underscores the need for collaborative efforts that leverage education, training, and partnerships to create a thriving ecosystem.

References

ⁱ <https://www.mesacc.edu/workforce-development/azami/cable-harness-wiring-boot-camp>, 2023

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ⁱⁱⁱ <https://wpcarey.asu.edu/aznext>, 2023

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^{vi} <https://www.maricopa.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2509>, 2022

^{vii} <https://pipelineaz.com/>, 2023

^{viii} <https://www.selectmesa.com/business-environment/workforce/mesa-job-connect>, 2023