

Arizona's Emerging Workforce Transformation

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September 7, 2026

Canadian Companies in Arizona need workers now and into the future. Arizona is entering a significant economic and workforce transition. The state is attracting some of the largest investments in semiconductors, advanced manufacturing, aerospace and defense, mining, energy, construction and infrastructure in its history. Canadian Companies are investing billions of dollars in Arizona because they expect the state to become an increasingly important center of American production. The question is whether Arizona can develop the workforce needed to support that growth like it is doing with water and energy issues.

For decades, the traditional message to Arizona students has been that a four year university education is the preferred path to a successful career. Arizona's universities remain essential and will continue to produce engineers, scientists, healthcare professionals, educators, researchers, business leaders and other highly skilled professionals as this transition occurs. However, the changing Arizona economy is creating an equally important demand for people who can build, operate, maintain and repair the physical economy in Arizona.

Arizona needs to scale faster to respond by creating more pathways between high school and employment that do not require a traditional four year degree. The state's Career and Technical Education system, Joint Technical Education Districts, community colleges, registered apprenticeships and employer partnerships are increasingly connecting students with occupations that can provide meaningful careers without requiring several years of college and substantial student debt faster but we need more workers faster to keep up with the growth specifically in manufacturing.

The Joint Technical Education District system is particularly important because it allows Arizona high-school students to begin technical and career training while they are still in high school. Programs through organizations such as EVIT, West-MEC and Pima JTED give students an opportunity to see a career path before they graduate high school rather than waiting until they are 18 or 19 to decide what they want to do as well private sector companies will support this model financially to fill their immediate needs.

Arizona's community colleges continue to be an important part of this transition. Programs are increasingly being designed around shorter, industry-recognized credentials that can move a person into the workforce quickly. Some programs can be completed in months rather than years. The concept is particularly important for students who do not want to spend four years in a university and cannot afford it but still want education that leads directly to employment. A student can obtain a set of credentials, begin earning money, return for additional training and eventually earn an

associate or bachelor's degree if that becomes desirable, some companies may even help make that happen.

Registered apprenticeships provide another important model because they combine education and employment. Instead of borrowing money to spend several years preparing for a career, a student can learn while working, receive a paycheck and progressively increase skills and wages. This creates a fundamentally different relationship between education and employment the student is not paying for an education but is building a career while being educated in high school and then move directly into the workforce with some on the job training after that.

The development of short-cycle certificates may become particularly important to Arizona's future workforce. A four to six-month program in a specific occupation plus High school training can provide a young person with an entry point into the workforce much faster than a traditional degree. The first credential does not have to be the end of the education process. It can be the beginning of a career ladder in which a worker earns a paycheck, develops additional skills, receives employer training, obtains higher-level certifications and eventually moves into senior technical, supervisory or management positions, Canadian companies operating in Arizona are looking for this as well as university degree students, it is not either or.

This approach could be particularly valuable for the large number of Arizona high-school graduates who do not immediately enter a four-year university. Rather than viewing these students as people who have failed to follow the traditional educational path, Arizona can view them as a major workforce opportunity. They can be given a clear alternative community college, technical education, trade school, apprenticeship, short-term certification or structured employer training or even entrepreneurial opportunities.

CABC believes Arizona could reasonably experience a five-percentage-point shift over the next five years in the share of young people choosing the traditional four-year university pathway. This should not be interpreted as a decline in the importance of Arizona's universities. Instead, it would represent a rebalancing of the state's education and workforce system. A portion of students who might previously have been expected to pursue a four-year degree could instead enter technical education, apprenticeships, community colleges, short-cycle credential programs or employer-based training.

The objective should be to make sure that every Arizona high-school student can see a credible path from high school graduation to a productive career. For one student, that path may be Arizona State University, the University of Arizona or Northern Arizona University. For another, it may be a JTED program followed by an apprenticeship. For another, it may be a six-month industry certificate followed by employment and additional training at a community college. The important issue is not that every student follows the same path, but that every student has a path.

Arizona should also make these pathways flexible. A student who begins as a semiconductor technician should not be locked into that occupation. The system should

allow that worker to become a senior technician, obtain additional certifications, move into supervision or management, or eventually pursue an engineering degree in a university. Education should become a continuing process connected to employment rather than something that must be completed before a person can begin a career.

This is particularly important because Arizona is not simply trying to create jobs, it is trying to create the workforce required for a new industrial economy. The expansion of semiconductor manufacturing, aerospace and defense, mining, advanced manufacturing, energy, water infrastructure and construction will require people with practical technical skills as well as people with advanced university degrees.

Arizona therefore has an opportunity to develop a new workforce model in which university education, community colleges, JTEDs, trade schools, apprenticeships, short-term certificates and employer training work together. The goal should not be to send fewer Arizona students to school. The goal should be to ensure that more Arizona students leave high school with a useful skill, a recognized credential, a job opportunity or a clear educational pathway at scale to equal the manufacturing growth in Arizona.

The ultimate measure of success should be simple: more Arizona young people graduating from high school, fewer entering adulthood without a clear career direction, more entering skilled occupations without significant student debt, more workers continuing to develop skills while earning a paycheck, and more Arizona businesses finding the skilled workforce necessary to expand.

Arizona is already attracting the Canadian capital and companies needed to support Arizona becoming a major center of American production. The next challenge is scaling the human infrastructure to support it. If Arizona can successfully connect its high schools, JTEDs, community colleges, universities, trade schools, apprenticeship programs and employers into one flexible workforce system, the state could become a national model for how education can support a new generation of American manufacturing and skilled work. This is what Canadian Companies in Arizona are looking for to support the existing 48,000 employees they currently employ in Arizona in the 500 companies that they operate in Arizona.