

Texas Workforce Partnership Initiative

The EY-Alamo Colleges District Hiring Pilot

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At a Glance

Ernst & Young (EY) partners with the Alamo Colleges District (Alamo) to meet the company's early-career hiring needs with graduates from the community college's two-year degree program. Based in San Antonio, Texas, the EY-Alamo Colleges District Hiring Pilot requires both partners to: rethink traditional business-higher education partnerships; build relationships; educate students about the unique value of an EY career opportunity; engage Alamo faculty as champions of the program; and create an inclusive hiring process.

Early outcomes of the partnership are promising:

- **Expanded opportunity:** The initiative resulted in the successful hiring of 91 Alamo graduates, providing opportunity for qualified and motivated community college graduates at a global company.
- **Scalable strategies:** Leaders involved in the pilot describe how the program has helped them develop new systems and strategies that can be used for future partnerships between business and community colleges.

The EY-Alamo Colleges District Hiring Pilot is an initiative of the Business Roundtable Workforce Partnership Initiative (WPI). Launched in 2018 as part of the Business Roundtable Corporate Initiatives Group, the WPI connects EY and Alamo to a network of industry-higher education partnerships in regions across the United States that are tackling skills development challenges and driving economic growth, with a focus on increasing workforce diversity. In the first five years of the program, WPI has operated in nine U.S. regions, strategically targeting high-demand job roles. The initiative has engaged over 360 large and small employers and 130 higher education institutions to create employment opportunities for 5,400 students and 14,000 apprentices.

Recognizing the Need for a New Staffing Model

In 2019, EY opened its third internal service delivery center (SDC) in San Antonio, Texas, to provide a range of accounting services to customer-facing EY teams.¹ While EY would typically staff the center with graduates from four-year accounting programs, the company faced strong headwinds. The number of degrees conferred in accounting has been declining for years, creating heightened competition for graduates with this credential.²

EY also faced a tight supply of bachelor's degree holders *in any field* in the San Antonio area. The region has one of the country's smallest shares of young workers with an associate, bachelor's, master's or professional degree, and those who do possess a post-secondary credential are more likely to have an associate degree with no additional education than in most other metro areas.³

EY leadership recognized that while the SDC needed workers with a basic knowledge of accounting, those individuals did not necessarily need a four-year degree. EY was ready to try hiring from a new pool of candidates: community college graduates.

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We realized that many of the tasks required by our service delivery center could be performed by someone with an associate degree. The pilot became a strategy to meet our staffing needs and realize cost efficiencies. It was also an opportunity to give individuals meaningful work based on their skills and training.”

— **Ellen Glazerman, Executive Director, EY Foundation, and Americas Director, EY University Relations**

Partnering With Alamo to Create a Talent Pipeline

Prior to the Alamo partnership in Texas, EY participated in the WPI in North Carolina, teaming up with peer employers in 2018 to offer a digital technology credential. EY's positive experience prompted company leaders to look to the Texas WPI for support with hiring needs in that region.

Determining which community college system to engage was straightforward, as Alamo is the primary producer of associate degrees in the San Antonio region. In 2022, Alamo's five colleges — San Antonio, Northwest Vista, Palo Alto, St. Philip's and Northeast Lakeview — awarded 90% of associate degrees, totaling nearly 9,000, in the San Antonio metro area and more than one-third of all post-secondary degrees in the region. The majority of these community college graduates enter the local job market, many with the skills to build a successful career with employers like EY.⁴

In 2022, EY and Alamo formalized their WPI partnership, committing to work together to connect Alamo graduates with opportunities in the EY SDC. Leaders set an initial goal of recruiting 230 Alamo students into entry-level roles at the SDC within the first three years of the program. To achieve these goals, the partners developed a tailored approach to recruitment that is responsive both to the hiring needs of EY and the community college.

1. Making time to plan and build relationships

EY is accustomed to working with four-year institutions with well-resourced career service centers, often with counselors who specialize in certain industries. These centers serve as important partners to EY for the company's early-career hiring, both through passive and direct recruitment. By contrast, the career services center at Alamo, like that of many community college systems across the country, had far fewer resources and a high student-to-staff ratio that limited the amount of time individual staff could spend planning and executing a high-engagement employer recruitment strategy.⁵

With support from the Business Roundtable WPI implementation partner, the Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF), EY and Alamo worked together to set expectations around the scope and timeline for recruitment activities. The partners noted how the technical assistance BHEF provided was particularly helpful in this phase of the process by: keeping both organizations informed about plans and next steps; translating each organization's goals and perspectives into a common vision; and maintaining momentum. They also described how early level-setting helped establish trust and signaled that both entities were committed to a long-term partnership.

“

We allowed time for planning, working together to develop a timeline, figuring out the best approach for reaching students and creating an on-campus culture that embraced EY. This partnership elevated the discussion — from 'let's just promote' to how to integrate EY into career centers and classrooms, meeting students where they were to learn about the opportunity and create a culture of embracing EY.”

— **Cassandra Segura, Director of District-wide Career Resources & Services,
Alamo Colleges District**

2. Educating students about the unique value of the opportunity

EY had enjoyed decades of successful partnerships with four-year institutions with strong alumni networks and students who already knew the EY name. Even when partnering with a new four-year institution, EY rarely needed to *educate* anyone about the company; instead, recruitment focused on marketing the company as a superior option over its competitors. But when EY began recruitment at Alamo, leaders soon found that students were largely unaware of the company and were also less likely to have had a friend or family member pursue a career in accounting than their four-year counterparts.



This was a very different population than we were used to recruiting. We thought we had this wonderful brand and that people would be lining up to work for EY... but instead, they needed to learn about us first.”

— **Meaghan Sansbury, National Assurance Early Careers Recruiting Leader, EY**

Limited on-campus knowledge of EY and the accounting field generally meant a new focus on education was needed. To help students learn about the opportunities available at the EY SDC, the company and Alamo worked together to develop a marketing campaign to appeal specifically to community college students. They held focus groups to learn how students viewed job postings and modified language to educate students and faculty about the opportunity and its value. Specifically, the partners learned through focus groups that many Alamo students were already employed and not especially interested in finding a new job. They also were not interested in the wages being offered; in 2022, the average Texas associate degree holder earned \$37,000 in their first year after graduation, slightly more than the \$35,000 paid by EY.⁶ They were interested, however, in other benefits, such as location, the corporate working environment and health insurance.

3. Engaging faculty to serve as natural champions

Faculty can be important champions for on-campus hiring, leveraging their expertise in the field to evaluate and share opportunities with students. At Alamo, limited brand awareness — along with concerns that pursuing immediate employment would prevent students from going on to obtain a bachelor’s degree — made faculty reluctant to promote the

opportunity, particularly to accounting students who require additional years of education to sit for the Certified Public Accountant (CPA) exam.

In response to faculty hesitation around promoting employment over transferring to a four-year institution, BHEF helped EY and Alamo career services identify a faculty member who understood the uniqueness of the opportunity and was eager to pass information along to students. This champion brought EY recruiters into the classroom, timing the presentations with site visits so that students were given multiple chances to learn about the job opportunities. Gradually, other faculty embraced the program, and the roster of champions grew.

EY and Alamo career services also worked together to clarify the value proposition to faculty. The partners highlighted career pathway options for participating graduates. They also reiterated EY's commitment to flexibility and accommodation of workers' education pursuits, such as obtaining a bachelor's degree while employed at the SDC. Additionally, EY recruiters invited current employees who were continuing their education to share their stories with students and invited faculty to present at Alamo faculty/staff meetings to build awareness about the opportunity and assuage any lingering concerns.

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I wanted to participate in the pilot because I recognized EY's status as a global accounting firm... This was the first time one of these firms had reached out and wanted to hire directly from a community college.”

— **Joy Moczygemba-Kuder, Instructor of Accounting and EY Faculty Liaison,
Northeast Lakeview College, Alamo Colleges District**

4. Creating an inclusive hiring process

Compared to students at four-year institutions, community college students tend to spend less time on campus, make fewer connections and are less likely to participate in on-campus hiring.^{7,8} EY leaders observed these recruitment challenges at Alamo, along with the practical complication of finding students with the skills required by the SDC.⁹ Initially, Alamo was not on Handshake — one of the primary platforms EY uses to connect with students — further limiting EY's ability to pursue a traditional recruitment strategy.

EY leaders observed that many early program applicants from Alamo had learned about the opportunity *outside* of Alamo (e.g., through Indeed) and did not possess the technical skills needed for the role. They also noted that Alamo students' lack of experience and confidence made it difficult for qualified students to move through the application process; while many students had held jobs before, their previous roles were typically not in professional services and rarely required a formal application process.

Partners had to identify more effective ways to recruit qualified students, including by having faculty champions host EY for classroom presentations and engaging career services and college advisors to promote the opportunity to students who came to them for other reasons. Alamo also purchased access to Handshake, which greatly increased successful program matches. The partners found ways to streamline the application process and support students who either lacked job-searching skills or were not confident in the application process. For example, EY created "office hours" to prepare students for interviews (e.g., resume writing, how to talk about skills, expectations during an interview). They also used recruitment events to hire individuals directly to the SDC, allowing students to bypass the interview stage altogether.

Early Successes and Next Steps

In the first three years of the pilot, EY hired 91 recent Alamo graduates. Despite final recruitment numbers falling short of the initial target, EY leaders felt that the process succeeded in attracting qualified and talented individuals to the company. Moving forward, EY will continue to focus on targeted hiring from the Alamo accounting department, engaging and educating faculty about the broader WPI initiative and identifying pilot alumni who can speak about their career progression.

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Alamo graduates have a reputation at our service delivery centers as 'go-getters.' They invest time and effort into their work; they are eager to learn and to start their careers. And many were at a crossroads: they may have gone in a completely different direction. This program has the ability to change lives.”

— **Adriana Gutierrez, Early Careers Recruiter, EY**

As the initiative continues to grow, Alamo career services staff hope the pilot will inform their broader strategies for working with employers. For example, as part of the Texas WPI, Alamo career services also will be working with Dell Technologies to meet the company's need for skilled technical workers.

For Alamo team members, the pilot also helped them communicate the value of an associate degree in the San Antonio labor market, reflecting a shift among Texas community colleges toward post-degree employment outcomes for their students. In 2023, Texas enacted House Bill (HB) 8, which creates an outcome-based funding system for community colleges that demonstrate they have awarded credentials of value (e.g., badges, certificates, degrees) in high-demand fields, along with more traditional markers of success such as four-year transfers and dual enrollment.¹⁰

“

We are thrilled that EY has invested time and talent to facilitate a pathway for our graduates to enter a globally competitive company like EY. This partnership will grow and serve as a model for other industry partners who are interested in engaging with community colleges in their region.”

— **Dr. Mike Flores, Chancellor, Alamo Colleges District**

Recommendations for Businesses

- **Think outside the box to pursue new talent pools.** While many EY employees need a certain credential (e.g., CPA license) to perform their job, other roles can be filled by those with less post-secondary education but the technical knowledge and soft skills to succeed. EY was able to craft a new role for community college graduates by analyzing their positions, thinking critically about the credentials needed, identifying the opportunities that exist for students from two-year programs, and learning how to support workers who want to get more education and change paths.
- **Make time to find common ground.** Leaders at EY noted that while there are startup costs for companies when establishing a new partnership with a community college, these relationships create a tremendous opportunity to build new connections and

develop an on-campus brand. Being part of the national WPI and having the support of an intermediary like BHEF to facilitate conversations, identify areas of similarity and difference, and set expectations has been key to building and maintaining momentum.

- **Engage faculty as champions.** Even at four-year institutions, career counselors must often be generalists who serve a range of students. Limited bandwidths can hamper counselors' abilities to fully understand and promote job opportunities in specific fields. Faculty, by contrast, are subject-matter experts who can help students evaluate the benefits of an opportunity. Expanding the number of faculty who know about and can promote a job opportunity is important for ongoing recruitment success.
- **Create a corporate culture that embraces community colleges.** EY leaders recognized the importance of highlighting community college alumni in their workforce; although, this can be a challenge, as some employees may be uncomfortable sharing this aspect of their background. EY leaders observed that the Alamo pilot helped to break that stigma and create a culture that embraces all educational backgrounds while surfacing advocates for community college partnerships.

Recommendations for Educators

- **Utilize labor market data to match students with emerging opportunities.** As Alamo continues to partner with other large corporate employers, career counselors are increasingly using labor market analyses to better match program offerings with employer needs. These analyses will be an important component of skills matching as Texas begins its HB 8 rollout.
- **Prepare students to transition into professional work environments.** Alamo staff recognized the importance of preparing students to successfully transition from college to career. Such preparation includes both helping students build core job-searching skills (e.g., developing a professional resume, practicing with mock interviews, setting expectations about working in an office environment) and bolstering students' confidence in their ability to thrive in professional roles.
- **Make conversation a part of the process.** The pilot prompted Alamo career services to rethink its process of employer intake and engagement. They recognized that this

process must include more robust conversation and understanding of the employer's hiring needs. Making time for open discussions about recruitment goals and strategies is crucial for developing trust and alignment, as is involving staff at all levels to understand the context behind strategies and initiatives.

- **Educate recruiters about the community college system.** Alamo leaders benefited from working with corporate recruiters who were willing to learn about the community college ecosystem and how students' experiences, priorities and employment needs might differ from those who attend a four-year institution. For Alamo, these recruiters become student champions, still working toward the company's specific hiring goals but also aware of the potential impact of this unique opportunity both for Alamo students and EY.

Employee Profile: Gerardo Gauna

Gerardo Gauna, now a senior/lead assurance associate at the EY SDC, was successfully recruited through the EY-Alamo Colleges District Hiring Pilot. The Dallas-Fort Worth native was preparing to graduate from Alamo with an associate degree in fall 2021 and had been working as a part-time peer advisor while in school. As his time at Alamo was coming to an end, so too was his on-campus employment. He either needed to continue his education at a four-year institution or find a job.

Gauna found the role at the EY SDC while on the Alamo online career portal but was initially reluctant to submit an application, expecting he would not qualify. A family member who recognized EY and its international reputation encouraged him to apply. An EY recruiter soon contacted him, walked him through the remaining steps of the process and answered his questions. The EY SDC hired Gauna in January 2022, and he was promoted to a senior/lead role in February 2024.

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As a peer advisor at Alamo, I helped students and their families plan out their future, figuring out the steps needed to grow a career. And at EY, I have found that growth for myself. It doesn't make a difference if you have a four-year degree. If you are here and contributing, you will grow.”

- **Gerardo Gauna, Alamo Graduate and SDC Lead, EY**

Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

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