

job training albuquerque

By Sarah Wheeler with contributions from Monica Mitchell and Justin D. Hilliard

Joseph Wojcik is the owner-operator of Powerhouse Electric in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and has successfully grown his expertise as an electrician for over 20 years. But he felt he was missing skills that could take his client base, safety practices, and the services Powerhouse offered to the next level. Wojcik, searching for educational opportunities, discovered the Electric Lineworker Pre-Apprentice Program through CNM Ingenuity, the workforce training division of Central New Mexico Community College (CNM).

There was just one problem – the tuition for the program was a barrier for Wojcik, so he decided to wait until the right moment came for him as a business owner to commit the resources and additional workload it would take to complete the program. That was when Wojcik heard about Job Training Albuquerque (JTA), a workforce training and job creation program that offers upskilling, professional certifications, and even college credits for small business owners and their employees at zero cost to the employer or employee.

FILLING THE GAP

Job Training Albuquerque developed as the result of recognizing this need and subsequent brainstorming sessions between the City of Albuquerque's Economic Development Department (EDD) and city leadership including Mayor Timothy M. Keller. Mayor Keller launched an "Increment of One" vision for economic development within the city, which focuses on investing in local entrepreneurship and supporting established small businesses by creating one job at a time.

A VISION FOR EQUITABLE, ACCESSIBLE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Since early 2020, Job Training Albuquerque (JTA) has helped create opportunities and better career outcomes for Albuquerque's workforce, surpassing 1,176 employee participants in 2024. JTA-participating businesses have reported adding over 797 jobs, as well as a 23.9% increase in wages, positively affecting the city's businesses, workforce, and families. The wildly successful program offers in-demand, transferable skills that meet the needs of local small businesses, and is a partnership between the City of Albuquerque and Central New Mexico Community College (CNM). For its work supporting job skills and bolstering small business growth, JTA received two gold "Excellence in Economic Development" awards from the International Economic Development Council (IEDC) in the "Partnerships with Educational Institutions" and "Talent Development & Retention" categories.



Electrician and business owner, Joseph Wojcik, was able to increase the services his business offers, and its customer base, by utilizing JTA to build his skills.

Courtesy CNM.

This team analyzed the gaps in job training programs available in New Mexico at the time and ventured to build a program that would be available to small businesses in Albuquerque that did not qualify otherwise for existing programs, such as New Mexico's Job Training Incentive Program (JTIP) or TechHire. The idea was to remove financial and industry-based barriers that excluded many businesses, while at the same time focusing solely on Albuquerque and its unique workforce and training needs. The program has enrolled businesses from typical economic base industries such as technology and aerospace but

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“From those early meetings, several areas began to trend among those surveyed,” said Monica Mitchell, deputy director of the EDD for the City of Albuquerque, and one of JTA’s developers. “We saw that training was needed in different web-based paths, like digital marketing and cyber security, as well as programs with broader applications, such as project management, leadership skills, and accounting.”

has also actively recruited and enrolled organizations in the arts, childcare, and retail.

As a well-established educational and training institution focused on economic development and job creation, CNM Ingenuity and CNM were approached to serve as the Albuquerque-based educational partner and the city’s core partner for the burgeoning endeavor in 2019. The EDD would provide the funding, marketing, and strategy for the program, and CNM would provide the administration and training courses through CNM Ingenuity, the college’s workforce training arm. Upon entering an Intergovernmental Agreement with the City of Albuquerque, CNM Ingenuity commenced initial research, conducting focus groups, and surveying small business support organizations such as the Small Business Development Center and New Mexico Workforce Solutions, as well as local businesses, to determine the most in-demand skills the program should be most focused on.

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To track the success of the program and ensure its benefit to the workforce and the economic ecosystem in Albuquerque, requirements were set for participation in the program. Potential qualifying participants must be:

- A for- or non-profit entity within the State of New Mexico;
- Headquartered within Albuquerque’s city limits;
- A small business with 500 or fewer employees;
- Willing to send employees to training at scheduled class times; and
- Full time (32 hours per week).

The program’s requirements also took into consideration Mayor Keller’s initiatives, like “Increment of One” when establishing requirements. JTA achieves the job creation goal by requiring participants to be

willing and able to add at least one job no more than two years after completing a training program. Mayor Keller and the city are dedicated to supporting local businesses through Buy Local initiatives, and as such, JTA-participating businesses are required to have been located in Albuquerque for at least one year. For start-ups, the owner must have been a resident of Albuquerque for one year.

PREPARING TO LAUNCH

JTA’s funding was encumbered through the Albuquerque City Council’s approval of the city’s 2020 fiscal year budget. To date, the city has provided almost \$2.4 million to JTA and as of the publication of this article, the program will be funded through at least June 30, 2024, with options to fund for the 2025 fiscal year.

Program metrics are central to funding for JTA, and CNM Ingenuity submits detailed reports to the EDD monthly. Reporting includes the number of businesses and employees who participated, various demographics, as well as incremental benchmarks for participants, like jobs added and wage increases attributed to JTA training. The primary metric the program tracks, however, is job creation, and to date JTA has added almost 800 jobs to Albuquerque’s workforce.

JTA launched in January of 2020, mere months before the COVID-19 pandemic changed how people worked, and how they completed course content at every level of education. The JTA team viewed this as both a challenge and an opportunity, as many people were exploring alternative career paths due to layoffs, or furloughs that afforded extra time to upskill in their fields. CNM seamlessly pivoted to offer courses online without pausing the program, which allowed the JTA team to continue to build momentum and awareness of the program’s offerings.

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In January 2024, JTA was awarded the Workforce Champion of the Year Award from AGC NM for advancing Albuquerque's construction industry workforce.

SUCSESSES AND GROWTH

In JTA's first two years, it experienced exponential growth, showing a 567% increase in participation. The value of the program remains evident, and the latest metrics show that since 2020, nearly 1,200 workers have participated in trainings, and across respondents a 23.9% wage increase was reported, building better career outcomes for Albuquerque residents. Continuing to focus on an "Increment of One," 216 JTA-participating businesses have reported adding 797 jobs to the local workforce, and the numbers continue to grow as more participants reach their two-year measure reports.

In addition to participation growth, JTA has also expanded its educational partners and course offerings to meet trending workforce needs in the city. As with many growing mid-sized cities across the country, Albuquerque has experienced a housing shortage. As more housing development projects sprung up around the city, JTA has adapted to mayoral initiatives such as Housing Forward ABQ. It has also proactively sought out construction-focused educational partners, adding the Associated Contractors of New Mexico (ACNM) and Associated General Contractors of New Mexico (AGC NM) to its provider list. ACNM and AGC NM now offer courses including Construction Supervision Fundamentals, Construction Quality Management for Contractors, Supervisory Training Program, and others.

"We believe it's crucial to remain flexible and receptive to the ever-changing needs of our local workforce," said EDD Director Max Gruner. "This program has seen incredible successes in job and wage growth because we are continually evaluating and stepping up to meet employers and their teams with the skills that are in the highest demand."

JTA has added courses through The University of New Mexico's (UNM) Continuing Education Program, as well as the UNM Anderson School of Management, which is one of the six percent of business schools worldwide to be certified by the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (AACSB).

Additional partners cover early childhood education training and certifications through the New Mexico Child Care & Education Association (NMCCEA), which offers the 45-Hour Course, a certification program that provides opportunities for students to build knowledge about children, families, communities, and support systems through discussion, reflection, and skill practice. Businesses like Cuidando Los Niños, which provides supportive housing, education, and advocacy for families experiencing homelessness, have utilized JTA to offer different training opportunities that support their business missions and staff goals.

"Job Training Albuquerque has been an invaluable resource to our staff at Cuidando Los Niños. From Women in Leadership to the 45-Hour Course, our employees have greatly benefited from the course offerings," said senior director of program operations at Cuidando Los Niños, Natasha Gacinski. "They have honed new skill sets and found new passions. We are so grateful for the opportunity to participate in the program."

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Over the first four years of offering JTA, several challenges were met and overcome through innovative problem solving and a solid dedication to the program's mission and outcomes. CNM Ingenuity and the EDD met on a regular basis to discuss the progression of the program, including course demand related to available funding, trending workforce needs, program marketing, and ensuring trainings are available and equitable to everyone in Albuquerque.

During the planning for JTA, one of the greatest challenges was ensuring it accurately and adequately bridged training gaps and complemented similar existing programs, as opposed to duplicating efforts. This was achieved through detailed research surrounding current state and federal offerings, and continually as-

ACRONYMS:

AACSB: Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs

ACNM: Associated Contractors of New Mexico

AGC NM: Associated General Contractors of New Mexico

CNM: Central New Mexico Community College

CNMI: CNM Ingenuity

EDD: City of Albuquerque's Economic Development Department

JTA: Job Training Albuquerque

JTIP: Job Training Incentive Program

NMCCEA: New Mexico Child Care & Education Association

NM MBDA: New Mexico Minority Business Development Agency Business Center

UNM: The University of New Mexico

WESST: Women's Self-Sufficiency Team



The City of Albuquerque Economic Development team increases awareness about JTA and other services they offer by engaging in community outreach events.

sessing local employer training needs. Additionally, the EDD structured the Intergovernmental Agreement to empower CNM to easily partner with different training providers that would enhance JTA's course catalog. The EDD and CNM regularly assess course offerings and pursue new training partnerships to strategically add new industry credentials.

At the time the EDD launched JTA, the department lacked a full-time workforce development program manager to oversee the program. Over the course of 2020, EDD was able to leverage grant funding to onboard a full-time Workforce Development Liaison in October to focus on JTA. Given its success, the role is now a permanent city-funded position within the EDD and also covers a variety of workforce development initiatives. Having a full-time position has proven invaluable in the growth and evolution of JTA.

One limitation the EDD and CNM recognized within the partnership and courses offered was that CNM only provided trainings in English at the time. As a majority-minority city, Albuquerque has a significant Spanish-speaking population, which limited JTA's reach. JTA addressed this by partnering with organizations that had previously established small business training in Spanish, including the Women's Self-Sufficiency Team (WESST) and the NMCCEA. Additionally, JTA has collaborated with existing partners, like AGC NM, to begin offering popular trainings in both Spanish and English. Taking this step made JTA accessible and available to new audiences and brought essential free job training to indispensable workforce sectors.

Other challenges faced frequently are balancing program demand with budgetary guidelines and ensuring that JTA is being used by as many businesses and employees as possible, instead of a small population of businesses and individuals. The EDD has placed a \$15,000 limit per small business per fiscal year to allow residents fair access to trainings and certifications. The courses offered by JTA range in price from \$79 for an Adobe Illustrator course, to \$9,995 for deep dive coding. Due to the broad range of course prices, predicting monthly course spending can also vary widely

from month to month. Therefore, the EDD and CNM teams remain vigilant in monitoring projections and making adjustments when necessary.

JTA IN YOUR COMMUNITY

The JTA program model can be adapted to other communities that face similar gaps in workforce training opportunities for small businesses. At its core, the JTA model is a partnership between a municipality and workforce training organizations that seeks to lower barriers for small businesses and their employees so they are more readily able to access training resources. Proximity to a community college with workforce training experience and industry groups that can provide industry-recognized credentials are important factors to consider in order for the JTA model to be most successful. Having a collaborative educational and training partner that can assist in problem solving and creative thinking is essential.

"Job Training Albuquerque has already been a remarkable success for Albuquerque businesses and their employees, while adding momentum to the city's overall workforce and economic development efforts," said CNM President Tracy Hartzler. "We're proud to be continuing our partnership with the City of Albuquerque to expand this well-established tool that empowers both small businesses and employees with education and training resources. We're looking forward to JTA creating even more prosperity for businesses, employees, and our community in the years ahead."

THE FUTURE OF JTA

JTA will continue its mission to provide Albuquerque small businesses with opportunities to skill up their employees by offering free training courses in high-demand skills. By showing the positive effects of the program through extensive reporting and metrics, the EDD remains optimistic that the program will continue to receive funding annually. JTA has shown that community partners can work together to elevate small businesses and help residents achieve upward career trajectories, while simultaneously creating new jobs in the city. Workforce development is an essential component of the City of Albuquerque's comprehensive economic development strategy, understanding that an investment in the success of working families and local businesses is an investment in the economic success of the city as a whole for generations to come.

As the city's first business-focused workforce development initiative, JTA has enabled the EDD to build new relationships and spin-off initiatives with the industry groups providing JTA trainings. For example, The NMCCEA provides industry credentials for the essential early childhood sector. Through a W.K. Kellogg Foundation workforce grant, the EDD connected and funded partnerships between the NMCCEA and local community groups such as Catholic Charities to provide free workforce training to low-income job seekers.

The partnership between the EDD and CNM opened a key economic incentive to small businesses and workers that have been traditionally left behind by economic development organizations. JTA's track record of success over the past four years has demonstrated it can be a model for how municipalities can partner with community colleges to provide workforce development services to small businesses.

JTA has also strengthened the relationship between CNM and the EDD. In 2022, CNM, the EDD, and three other partners were awarded \$500,000 from the U.S. Department of Commerce's Build Back Better Regional Challenge and formed the New Mexico Space Valley Coalition, a regional convener for the nation's commercial space industry. One of Space Valley's goals is to provide workforce training for individuals entering the aerospace sector, and JTA will be able to support the growing space workforce in Albuquerque.

The EDD also operates the New Mexico Minority Business Development Agency Business Center (NM MBDA), which is a division of the U.S. Department of Commerce, and is strategically focused on filling equity gaps within the state's small business community, with an emphasis on taking minority business enterprises to the next level of success. The NM MBDA serves the entire state of New Mexico and is currently in the process of securing office space in the northern and southern regions of the state to better serve minority-owned and Spanish-speaking businesses in those geographic areas. The EDD is exploring the opportunity to expand the JTA model to other communities in New Mexico through the NM MBDA, thereby increasing reach, job creation, and upward career mobility for residents across the state.

The EDD plans to seek additional funding for JTA so it may continue to grow the number of workers it reaches in Albuquerque and will continue the practice of monitoring the local workforce, employer needs, and citywide initiatives and goals that JTA can complement through offering different trainings. The partnership between the EDD and CNM opened a key economic incentive to small businesses and workers that have been traditionally left behind by economic development organizations. JTA's track record of success over the past four years has demonstrated it can be a model for how municipalities can partner with community colleges to provide workforce development services to small businesses.

Ultimately this program is about the people it can positively impact through education and opportunity. By targeting one business and one worker at a time, giving them the option to better themselves without the burden of cost, individuals like Joseph Wojcik are taking their skills, careers, and businesses to the next level.

"This is such an awesome program. You have to do the hard work, but it's all worth it," Wojcik said. "I know the skills I gained will help me make my business better, and I'm really looking forward to providing my customers with the best and safest services possible."



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