

A growing number of community colleges are making strategic investments in workforce-aligned innovation hubs focused on emerging industries and regional economic development, says [Erika Liodice](#), executive director of the [Alliance for Innovation & Transformation](#), a membership group for higher ed CEOs, many of whom lead two-year colleges.

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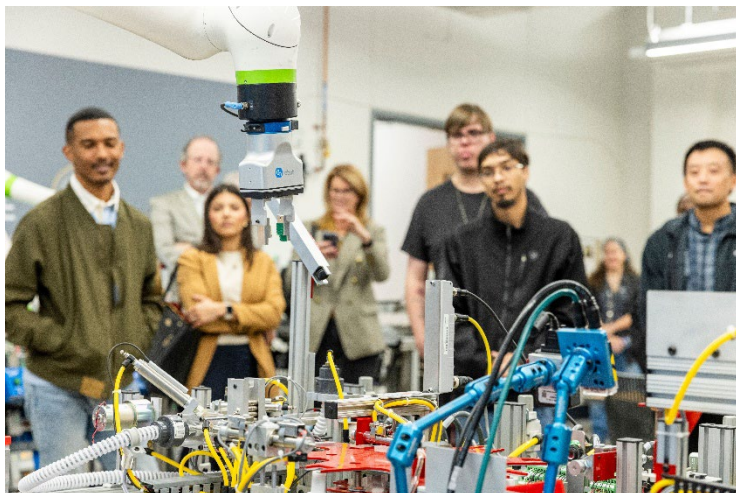


Workforce Hub

Austin Community College goes big with a new home for its Infrastructure Academy.



Paul Fain



A campus for skilled trades in Travis County seeks to meet evolving needs of employers and help more residents benefit from a booming local economy. Also, a new healthcare apprenticeship initiative puts employers in the driver's seat, a big change for Brookings Metro, and an essay on why career "readiness" isn't enough but apprenticeships could be.

Opening Doors in Central Texas

Austin is still booming. An estimated \$25B in infrastructure projects in the region are creating thousands of good jobs that don't require four-year degrees. And voters overwhelmingly [support paying](#) to expand training programs from Austin Community College, the region's only two-year college.

But Austin also faces plenty of challenges, including expensive housing and a severe wealth gap, as well as horrible traffic and lackluster public transportation. Low-income residents won't be able to train for job opportunities if they can't get to an ACC campus or find affordable childcare.

That's why the community college just made a \$130M bet on a [new location](#) in southeast Travis County. The 560K-square-foot complex will be home to its [Infrastructure Academy](#), preparing students for careers in advanced manufacturing, construction, automotive, HVAC, and other high-growth industries across the skilled trades and applied technology. **The workforce hub will be ACC's second-largest campus.**

Austin needs to train 10-15K workers a year for infrastructure jobs, up from the current level of about 6K. That will require tight partnerships between the community college and unions, employers, and the workforce board, says [Russell Lowery-Hart](#), ACC's chancellor.

"We're trying to activate with urgency, gluing all these pieces together," he says.

The project could be a national model for connecting educational pathways with workforce needs, says [Lisa Larson](#), CEO of the Education Design Lab: "By repurposing space to create a hub, the college is effectively linking high-demand skills training to regional infrastructure projects."

ACC expects to start offering classes at the campus this summer. It can move faster by renovating the existing complex rather than building a new one, saving \$100M in the process. The first phase will serve up to 3K students at the campus, which is next to Austin-Bergstrom International Airport, with room to expand.

Voters [passed a \\$770M bond](#) four years ago that funded the purchase. That money also can be tapped to help provide childcare, transportation, and other supports for students. A new "unified system" for wraparound supports is an improvement on the bureaucratic past, Lowery-Hart says, where services were spread around the city and available from various providers.