

# Miami Herald

BUSINESS

## They went from the fast-food counter to the tech world. How Miami program leads to jobs

By Vinod Sreeharsha

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Students have been hired by Amazon and Meta.

And former fast-food workers have enrolled in cybersecurity and AI courses.

Two years after Miami Dade College helped launch a major tech training initiative, the program is seeing results. One more year remains.

Miami Tech Works sprouted from a \$10 million grant awarded to the college in August 2022 from the U.S. Economic Development Administration's Good Jobs Challenge. The funding, overseen by the U.S. Department of Commerce, intends to help prepare thousands of Miami-Dade County residents to work in the growing technology sector.

Local leaders, particularly those at Miami Dade College, saw that effort as key to growing South Florida's tech hub while making sure people born and raised in the region didn't feel left out, or get squeezed out by the resulting higher cost of living.

That's important because between 2020 and 2023, more than 66,000 new tech jobs were created in Florida, nearly a 30% annual growth rate. During that time, the annual mean wage for those jobs rose from \$82,810 to \$100,180, according to the college.

As several hundreds gathered at Miami Dade College on Wednesday to discuss the program, Miami Tech Works' leader provided the Miami Herald with a status report.

**How's the program doing so far?**



Laura Merino, center, and Daphne Essiet discuss their project during class at BrainStation on Wednesday, March 8, 2023, in Wynwood. BrainStation teaches coding, software engineering, and digital skills training. Alie Skowronski [askowronski@miamiherald.com](mailto:askowronski@miamiherald.com)

Year One was spent developing the program, Terri-Ann Brown, director of Miami Tech Works, said in an interview with the Herald.

That included incorporating other participants: educational institutions Florida International University and Florida Memorial University, and bootcamp institutes Ironhack, Brainstation, 4Geeks, OIC of South Florida and Creative Hub.

It also involved investing in creating flexible curriculum and then determining which certifications and accreditations would be most useful for employers.

Emblematic of that was Miami Dade College's push with artificial intelligence. It created a four-month certificate program, a two-year associate in science degree and four-year bachelor of science degree in AI.

Miami Tech Works program-wide initial goals were to train 1,000 people through those universities and organizations, then place 500 of them in full-time jobs.

**Hitting objectives?**



Lea Rabaron, center, and Grace Penza, right, work together to solve a problem during a Miami Dade College class working to use artificial intelligence to spot literary devices in Harry Potter novels. The class convened March 6, at the college's North campus. Alie Skowronski [askowronski@miamiherald.com](mailto:askowronski@miamiherald.com)

Here's what has been accomplished so far:

- 675 students were trained at universities or boot camps, including those who completed programs by December 2024.
- Of those, 315 have found jobs with salaries \$66,000 or more; career services at their university or boot camp places them.
- More than 50 employers have hired from this group including Netflix and American Express.
- Lennar has hired the most with 11.
- Not only tech companies participate — cruise company Royal Caribbean has also hired students

There's about a three-month lag between finishing training and getting placed, Brown said, although that can vary with position.

The initiative has about one more year to hit its goals. While the new Trump administration seeks to make major cuts in government funds, it's unclear if Miami Tech Works will be affected. For now, organizers are assuming it won't be.

Miami-Dade College was one of 32 awardees across the U.S. when the grant was announced in August 2022.

Over the past two years, Miami Tech Works also did what it calls a “Gap Analysis” where it looked at what’s missing between employers’ needs and the talent pool. Brown said that even with the coursework, employers are telling her that the technical interview during the hiring process is currently the biggest hurdle keeping students from getting job offers. She also said there’s still a big need for workers trained in cybersecurity.

She said the other most-in-demand tech occupations in South Florida between 2023-24 are:

- Software developers
- Computer user support specialists
- Data scientists

The top skills in demand are:

- Computer Science
- SQL
- Project Management
- Python
- AWS
- Data Analysis
- Automation
- Microsoft Azure

Miami Dade College has other initiatives. Blackstone, a partner in Miami Tech Works but not a top hiring company, is backing a summer internship program with the college. The investment firm will provide half the cost and the employer puts in the other half. The idea is 200 students will earn \$20 per hour working for an array of employers. Companies interested in participating can apply until Feb. 21.

The jobs offered don’t all have to be in tech. Ideas Center and Tech Equity Miami are partners. Miami Dade College also is open to other initiatives, Brown said.

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