

Data Centers Align to Deliver a Data Center Operations Certificate Program

QTS leads a collaborative effort between an alliance of data centers and Maricopa Community Colleges to bring high-paying career jobs to the Phoenix area

A Growing Need for Data Center Technicians

QTS Data Centers is leading a united effort between Phoenix-area data center operators to address an industry-wide issue: a widespread shortage of skilled technical labor. Brought about by a retiring skilled workforce and a lack of new technical talent, the workforce shortage is intensified by the exponential growth of the data center industry. Data centers provide the space, power and connectivity that enable every digital incident—from online shopping and social media to credit card transactions and artificial intelligence (AI). As more data is created, more data centers—and more data center employees—are needed.

With a shrinking pool of technical workers—and mounting competition from the semiconductor industry—data center operators need to attract new, skilled talent.

Bringing Value to Operational Communities

QTS is committed to being a valued community member and responsible neighbor. By engaging with its communities as soon as it procures land, the company allows time to build relationships, understand community priorities and devise programs that deliver the most impact to address those needs. While every community's needs are different, job training and employment are consistent requests.

As QTS expanded its presence in the burgeoning Phoenix market, Bryan Darby, Vice President, Strategic Technology Initiatives at QTS, saw an opportunity to address the workforce deficit and bring living wage employment opportunities to the community.

Empowered by QTS's "Powered by People" culture, which grants employees the autonomy to solve problems and generate value for the organization, its customers and its

communities, Darby set out to build a sustainable workforce development program for the data center industry. Recognizing the magnitude of the task, Darby connected with other Phoenix-area data center operators and data center-adjacent businesses through the Infrastructure Masons (iMasons) trade organization, an organization that provides an independent forum for infrastructure executives and technical professionals to connect.



Putting competition aside for the good of the industry, more than 10 organizations joined forces, establishing a network of local companies focused on preparing the future workforce for careers in the data center industry.

"This is not a QTS problem alone. It's an industry issue that is too big to be solved by one company," said Darby. "As a collective whole, we can help develop skilled workers and offer a career path in a high-growth industry. What data center they choose to work at is less important than attracting talent to our industry."

Collaborating to Prepare the Workforce for Data Center Careers

The data center alliance brought their need to Maricopa Community Colleges (MCC), a Phoenix-area education system comprised of 10 individual colleges. Noting Phoenix as a top five market for data center development and armed with

labor market analysis that identified entry-level data center technicians as the most immediate employment need, the data center team partnered with MCC to build a data center-specific classroom curriculum.

Utilizing MCC's existing six-course Automated Industrial Technology (AIT) program as the foundation of the program, the team added two data center-centric classes—Introduction to Data Center Operations and Power Distribution Systems—to prepare students for entry-level employment as mechanical, electrical and controls technicians in data center or data center-related companies. The industry-led curriculum design process leveraged data center professionals' deep industry



knowledge to create competency-based courses. For added value, data center professionals teach these classes to provide students with greater industry insight.

The MCC [Data Center Operations certificate program](#) is the second of its kind in the nation and provides a path to the next generation of high-paying career jobs with tremendous potential for growth and advancement, compared to other industries.

"Employees can follow their passions and progress their careers along any professional path—whether within a specific discipline, across multiple disciplines, or with different data center operators and hyperscalers like Google, Microsoft or Meta," said Darby. *"We've seen people come in as technicians and pivot into sales, project management or management roles. There is so much opportunity if you have the attitude and aptitude."*

The accredited certificate program is currently offered at two MCC schools: Estrella Mountain Community College in the West Valley and Mesa Community College in the East Valley, with select courses also available at Glendale Community College. These regionalized offerings align with high growth areas for data center development and provide convenient

local access for students, creating sustainable, lasting and impactful outcomes for data centers and the Phoenix community.

Educating and Building Interest in Data Center Careers

In addition to providing industry-aligned courses, the program integrates a series of events designed to enhance awareness of the data center industry and related careers, particularly for underrepresented groups such as women and veterans.

Speaker Series. A monthly, interactive speaker series is delivered at both the college and high school levels. At the college level, speakers discuss data center-related topics, including what is a data center, data center operations, converged security, and specific data center careers, such as IT, cybersecurity, help desk, and racking and stacking. Discussions are live streamed, providing access to students on other campuses as well as the wider community audience.

A separate speaker series is delivered at a local high school to provide an early introduction to STEM-based career fields, such as electrical, mechanical and civil engineering; robotics; and switching and routing.

Data Center Tours. Data center tours offer students a firsthand look at a data center, including security protocols, critical equipment and the work environment. This real-world experience helps students better understand what a data center is and how it enables digital capabilities.

Data Center Day. At the inaugural Data Center Day, Microsoft representatives spoke with students and provided tours of its Microsoft Data Center Academy lab at Estrella Mountain Community College. The involvement of hyperscale companies like Microsoft lends important brand recognition that attracts students and helps build interest in the program and in data center-related career fields. During the event, Microsoft highlighted its scholarship program for students entering the technology space. Future Data Center Days will also include a job fair to connect data center providers and students.

Internship Program. To give students direct, hands-on industry experience, the data center alliance is developing a summer internship program with AFCOM, a professional association proven to advance careers of IT and data center professionals.

Nurturing the Whole Student for Career Growth

To support students' journeys from education to employment, the certificate program also incorporates professional readiness skills into class time. Students work with Career Services and industry partners on resume writing, interview preparation and

LinkedIn workshops, and are exposed to business tools such as Microsoft Word and Excel. The program also includes an online, self-paced Workforce Professional Skills course that addresses communication and empathy, professionalism and collaboration, initiative, critical thinking and problem solving, and self-directed learning and resilience.

"We want students to come away with more than just technical skills," said Julie Stiak, District Director of Workforce Education at MCC. "Building and polishing these soft skills helps students cultivate the skills necessary to gain employment and thrive in a professional work environment."



Developing a Pipeline of Skilled Workers

After years of collaboration to build the program, the first cohort of students is expected to complete the program in Fall 2025, ushering in the first wave of skilled data center technicians. Students can parlay this coursework into an Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degree in Automated Industrial Technology to advance their educations and careers.

For his efforts in spearheading this cross-organization collaboration, Bryan Darby has been named the 2024 Education Champion by the Infrastructure Masons. The award celebrates leaders who drive talent into the digital infrastructure industry to build a stronger future for all.

The program is poised to continue to foster life-changing career opportunities for area residents while meeting a critical employment need for the data center industry. The hard work and commitment of the collective group also offers a blueprint for future programs that can be adapted and implemented in other fast-growing markets to continue to give back to data center communities.

About QTS Data Centers

QTS is a global data center leader with unrivaled access to scalable infrastructure across North America and Europe. Powered by people and driven by purpose, QTS provides state-of-the-art data center solutions, robust connectivity and premium customer service to leading hyperscale technology companies, enterprises and government entities. QTS is a Blackstone portfolio company.

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