How NYC is building cloud career pathways

Introduction

New York City is big. The size and complexity of the city's labor market makes it difficult for a company or college to scale up pathways to meet workforce needs while creating opportunities for people to move into careers that pay living wages.

"There's an increasing recognition that industry, educational institutions, and the public sector need to work much more closely and intentionally together," says Abby Jo Sigal, executive director for the NYC Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce Development.

To that end, in April 2023, the city, higher education institutions, a coalition of Fortune 500 companies, and Amazon Web Services (AWS) announced a groundbreaking collaboration. The City University of New York (CUNY), the nation's largest urban university system, is now working with AWS and corporate partners to develop cloud technology courses and programs to make sure they align with high-demand careers.

"A better understanding of the cloud will position people for success in the jobs of today — and very much so in the jobs of tomorrow," Sigal says.

Creating talent pipelines

The collaboration represents New York's latest effort to strengthen education-to-workforce pipelines. In 2022, Mayor Eric Adams signed Executive Order 22, which states that "young city residents should launch successfully into fulfilling, economically secure careers by the time they are 25 years old."

In particular, the administration wanted to address significant disparities in unemployment rates among minorities and people with disabilities, according to Sigal.

The order galvanized ongoing efforts by other stakeholders. The New York Jobs CEO Council, founded in 2020 (with AWS as a founding member), had committed to hiring 100,000 low-income and diverse New Yorkers into in-demand careers, including 25,000 CUNY graduates.

And CUNY, which serves one of the nation's most diverse student populations at its 25 colleges, was increasingly focused on workforce outcomes and making sure "students can launch and advance in rewarding careers," Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez said in a statement.[1]

Cloud-driven careers

Eighty percent of CUNY graduates stay in the city, providing a pipeline of potential workers to fill in-demand careers. "In order to make this a reality, we must partner with industry leaders to ensure that students have access to all they need to be successful," Rodríguez said.

Executive Order 22 expanded the city's Office of Talent and Workforce Development, which has focused on identifying key occupational clusters and bringing together stakeholders to support them.

Working with the New York Jobs CEO Council and other employers, the office identified opportunities to support what has become the second-largest concentration of technology companies in the nation. Along with cloud computing, many of the targeted career clusters — software engineering, data analytics, artificial intelligence/machine learning and cybersecurity — rely heavily on cloud technology.

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The collaboration will bring AWS resources to bear on updating and creating new career-focused programs at CUNY institutions. "New York is rapidly becoming one of the nation's fastest-growing tech hubs, where organizations of all sizes and sectors are using technology to power business growth," AWS Vice President of Global Education and U.S. State and Local Government Kim Majerus said in a statement.[2]

Queensborough Community College's Office of Continuing Education and Workforce Development has already launched a no-cost 180-hour AWS cloud practitioner program. Participating companies, including Accenture, BNY Mellon, Bank of America, Citi, Deloitte, EY, KPMG, and PwC, are working with AWS and CUNY to design and deliver new curricula throughout the system.

"We need industry and employers at the table who are going to hire and understand their needs," Sigal says. "We connect the dots: If we see opportunities for folks to partner, we make those intentional connections."

Getting started

Although municipal and state governments can help facilitate public-private pipelines, they should also focus on their own talent needs, says Morgan Reed, executive advisory leader for state and local government and former chief information officer (CIO) of Arizona. Here's how you can get started.

■ **Revamp outdated hiring procedures.** As CIO of Arizona, Reed rewrote job descriptions and recruited aggressively. For example, the data center director was renamed director of cloud operations to more accurately reflect the needs of the role. Reed also worked with staffing companies and created contract-to-hire positions. "Posting your jobs on your government site alone isn't going to attract the best and brightest," he says. "If you cast a lot of lines, you'll catch more fish."

■ **Train existing staff.** Upskilling represents another important part of creating a talent pipeline. "Many want to come along on the journey, but you have to give them the opportunity and the tools to develop themselves," Reed says.

In Arizona, Reed brought in trainers to conduct rapid training bootcamps, created internal apprenticeship programs, and required developmental plans for all employees to build new skills.

■ **Look for resources and partners.** Resources can be found, even in an era of tight budgets.

AWS has set a goal to train 29 million people worldwide by 2025 with free, self-paced cloud computing education, Reed says. Many vendors also include training credits in contracts.

Partners can also help hone internal talent by sharing extensive real-world experience. "In government, I worked with passionate people who loved the mission, but they didn't always know what was working in other industries," Reed says.

Building shared prosperity

One key to the New York City collaboration is that its stakeholders have focused on creating durable pipelines that can evolve with technology.

"As much as this is about cloud computing, it's also about establishing the sustained long-term partnership with industry and CUNY and making sure people get what they need to know today — not yesterday," Sigal says. "We don't just talk about shared prosperity or an inclusive economy. We actually put it into action."

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This piece was written and produced by the Government Technology Content Studio, with information and input from AWS.

Endnotes

1. https://nyjobsceocouncil.org/press/new-york-jobs-ceo-council-joins-amazon-web-services-to-deliver-tech-skills-training-program-aligned-to-in-demand-jobs/
2. Ibid.

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