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Op-ed: Satellite learning systems can revolutionize training and tech employment in the city

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More than 82,000 tech roles were available in the New York metropolitan area during the first quarter of this year. With nearly half of these job postings not specifying a minimum level of education and 45% not requiring prior tech experience, high-quality tech careers might be [one of the most promising economic mobility strategies](#) for many New Yorkers. Yet we're leaving talent and opportunity on the table.

Extensive technology education can be hard to get outside of costly higher education and formal technical study programs. Who gets that training is another issue. Research shows that

inclusive teams make better decisions up to 87% of the time, and [diverse teams](#) produce a minimum of 19% more revenue. Yet a recent analysis of the city's tech sector shows underrepresentation of Hispanic and Black populations and women.

While we can blame Covid-19, which continues to exacerbate unemployment—especially among working-age Blacks—and low wages for the problem in the city, the continued burden of [student debt](#), tired curriculums and lack of access to quality tech training all play a role. So where can we step in and channel this untapped passion, talent and curiosity into transformative careers—while building a more diverse workforce and stimulating the U.S. economy?

Let's use satellite learning and job-training programs that help communities access tuition-free tech education from a locally accessible community center. It's a proposal I've begun implementing to serve all five boroughs from our two [Per Scholas](#) campuses, in the Bronx and Brooklyn. The results are encouraging and can serve as a blueprint to expand nationally.

Through a satellite model, students can overcome socioeconomic limitations and commuting challenges. The opening of a satellite on Staten Island this year eliminated a two-hour commute to one of the organization's main campuses in the Bronx while it also fulfilled the needs of local organizations and businesses seeking diverse and well-trained tech talent.

Tool for policymakers

The new model, which launched in earnest in mid-2021 with four satellite facilities, can serve as an important tool for policymakers, funders, workforce program leaders and others nationally to leverage one another's skills across tech sectors and increase their impact and growth. The case to focus those efforts on tech training is strong: The industry has been one of the bright spots in workforce development, given the relative accessibility to thriving wage jobs and career pathways for individuals who do not possess a college degree. Skills training, however, is absolutely necessary.

Tuition-free training that equips prospects with in-demand technical and professional skills, such as information technology support programs, software engineering, cybersecurity and Amazon Web Services courses, can move the dial. These skills will provide individuals with long-term careers.

Looking beyond the "usual suspects" of major colleges and institutions for diverse tech employees is a rising trend. Companies need to rethink where they are looking for diverse talent and expand their searches to nontraditional learning and training environments. Diverse teams create more diverse products, leading to a stronger return on investment.

It's the right thing to do for the welfare of our communities, our companies and our country.

Plinio Ayala is CEO of *Per Scholas*, a nonprofit that provides tuition-free professional and technology training.