

GOAL PROFILE:

# Horizon Education Alliance

**An Indiana educational nonprofit puts Spanish-speaking workers on track to manufacturing jobs with Certified Production Technician training.**

In 2009, just a few weeks into his first term as president, Barack Obama visited Elkhart County, Indiana, to promote his proposed economic stimulus. Times were tough for the entire country, but this northern Indiana county, with a huge manufacturing sector, was particularly hard-hit: Unemployment was at nearly 20 percent.

It was clear that education was one of the keys to improving the local economy, so in 2012, Elkhart County education and business leaders created the Horizon Education Alliance. A nonprofit, HEA facilitates collaboration among business, education, community, and political leaders; promotes educational programs and policies that will help the county attract and retain talent; and runs adult education programs.

Today, HEA is one of the key players in Growing Opportunities in America for Latinos (GOAL), an educational program that is working to revitalize the Indiana economy.



Launched in March 2018, GOAL addresses two challenges—a skills gap in manufacturing and underemployment among Latinos and Hispanics, who make up about [16 percent](#) of Elkhart County’s population. Through GOAL, people with limited English fluency can gain skills that are in demand in manufacturing by taking a Spanish-language version of the coursework for the Manufacturing Skills Standards Council’s Certified Production Technician (CPT) credential. The program also includes language classes for English learners.

GOAL is funded by a TechHire Grant that the U.S. Department of Labor awarded to the Labor Institute for Training (LIFT), an Indiana-based nonprofit that assists in the development and delivery of educational programs to increase and improve employment opportunities for unemployed, underemployed, and incumbent workers. HEA, alongside LIFT, administers the educational part of GOAL, while national nonprofit JFF provides LIFT with executive support and services.



*GOAL! (Growing Opportunities in America for Latinos) is a bilingual English/Spanish manufacturing bridge program for Limited English Proficient adults.*



**“The underlying idea of GOAL is that language should not be a barrier to folks obtaining gainful employment and succeeding in their work,” said Barbara Stith, HEA’s director of adult pathways. “It opens up doors for people who want education, who want a better life. A lot of our Hispanic population is striving for these things.”**

## Training and Education

Nearly 150 people from a dozen or so Spanish-speaking countries completed (or are in the process of completing) the program in GOAL’s first two years. Women and men enroll in about equal numbers, and most students are in their 30s and 40s. About three-quarters of them are employed when they enroll.

Classes are held at Goshen College, a four-year liberal arts school located in the county seat of Goshen. HEA’s first GOAL instructor, Misael Cortez, is a Spanish-speaking HEA employee who previously worked in manufacturing for more than a decade. He was joined in 2019 by a second instructor, Jose Romero, who was a GOAL student himself. Luna Campos, GOAL’s success coach, and Rocio Diaz, director of community outreach and adult outreach, round out the staff.

Goshen College is uniquely suited to host GOAL, because it has worked hard in recent years to recruit and retain Latinx students.

College administrators say that in the next couple of years, Goshen [expects to receive](#) the U.S. Department of Education’s Hispanic-Serving Institution designation, which is conferred on schools where Hispanic students account for the equivalent of at least 25 percent of the full-time undergraduate enrollment.

GOAL classes, which typically have between 15 and 18 students, meet once a week for three hours over 30 weeks, and students are required to do six hours of weekly online study as well. The CPT curriculum is divided into four modules, and each prepares learners for a separate credential. Passing all four yields the CPT certification.

Participants all receive Chromebooks to ensure that they are able to access the online curriculum, and they can keep the computers after they complete the program. Students who don’t have internet connections at home use public Wi-Fi in places like restaurants, cafes, and local libraries, said Stith. The sessions overlap—a new cohort starts every six weeks—so students who have trouble with one module or don’t pass the assessment can repeat the subject content with the following cohort.

## Recruitment

Campos is the primary person responsible for recruiting students, and her extensive connections in the Latinx community are key to the program’s success, according to Stith. “The Hispanic community is very tight-knit, and Luna is very involved in this community—



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in a health coalition, the churches, and civic organizations,” she said. “They trust her, and the program has a good reputation.”

The fact that HEA’s GOAL program is based at Goshen College, which has an excellent reputation within the Latinx community, is “huge,” Stith added—especially in an era when some immigrants are wary of American institutions. GOAL has also done some advertising—including on a Latinx radio station—but word of mouth has proved to be the most effective recruitment tool.

## Job Placement

HEA has good relationships with local manufacturers (some of its board members are manufacturing executives), and it has leveraged those connections in its GOAL job placement efforts. The organization has spent a lot of time educating employers about GOAL, and about a dozen advanced manufacturing companies have pledged to interview any student who completes the program.

**“Most of these companies are larger manufacturers in the transportation industry,” Stith said. “We’re still working on educating the smaller and mid-sized companies about GOAL.”**

She says it’s too early to draw definitive conclusions about the impact of the GOAL program on graduates’ careers, but anecdotal evidence indicates that participation benefits people in the job market.

## The CPT Credential Leads to Essential Skills

Workers who study for the Certified Production Technician credential learn to use a variety of technologies to set up, test, and maintain advanced manufacturing equipment. It’s an entry-level role that can lead to other opportunities, and demand for people with those skills is expected to grow rapidly in coming years: The Manufacturing Institute’s 2015 Skills Gap Report found that 54 percent of manufacturers had encountered a shortage of skilled production workers and 63 percent expected one by this year.

The CPT certification curriculum teaches students foundational manufacturing concepts and skills in the areas of safety, quality practices and measurement, manufacturing processes, and maintenance awareness. The coursework also covers soft skills including communication, teamwork, customer awareness, and workplace conduct.



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For example, after a line worker named Javier completed the GOAL program, his employer, a manufacturer of high-quality furniture and transportation-related interiors, chose him to be part of its bilingual apprenticeship program.

**“They’re going to expose him to many aspects of the business — marketing, accounting, the whole nine yards,” said Stith. “They have a path set up for him that’s really exciting.”**

Javier’s experience with GOAL was so positive that he also plans to take some college courses. Unfortunately, about 30 percent of HEA GOAL participants do not complete the program for reasons that range from working too much overtime to moving out of the area.

However, in addition to the possibility of improved job prospects, those who successfully complete the program will also have an opportunity to continue their education at Ivy Tech Community College in Elkhart, which plans to open a new, \$3.8 million facility for advanced automation and robotics in 2021.

Ivy Tech will award six hours’ worth of credits to students who have the CPT certification.

According to Stith, GOAL has been a game-changer for the northern Indiana business community and beyond. “It’s opened everyone’s eyes to an untapped resource —

our Hispanic population,” she said. “The program has also been important to Hispanics, showing them that they’re valued and that the community is committed to helping them improve their economic situation.”

And the impact could extend beyond manufacturing into other sectors of the economy. HEA is looking at the possibility of incorporating bilingual instruction into more of its training programs, including its certified nursing assistant courses.

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