

CASE STUDY

Education at the Speed of Industry

Sundt Construction and Central Arizona College
Build Stronger Career Pathways



The Problem: A Disconnect on Training

The talent shortage in construction is more than just a problem of scarcity. It's also a problem of strategy.

Many contractors approach workforce development reactively. When they need workers, they hire. When they can't find them, they overpay. However, they rarely ask the harder question: *How can we build a pipeline that provides consistent access to the talent we need?*

On the education side, similar misalignments occur. Many training programs and community colleges provide training that does not always match what local employers actually need.

This divide deepens the construction industry's persistent talent shortage. Sundt Construction, in partnership with Central Arizona College (CAC), has created a workforce development model that successfully addresses this problem.

The Solution: A Purposeful Partnership

To develop the partnership, boards from both organizations initially collaborated to identify the most in-demand competencies on the jobsite and then worked backward to design training programs around those skills. As seen in Figure 1, the creation of the Sundt and CAC talent pipeline model can be summarized in three main steps. What resulted was a partnership where both parties benefitted from, and contributed to, shared success, as seen in Table 1.

Figure 1: How Sundt and CAC Built a Talent Pipeline



1. IDENTIFY

Sundt and CAC agreed that the skills required to deliver finished projects had to drive everything else. Curricula, course sequencing, and timelines were all designed to serve those priorities rather than the other way around.



2. BUILD

Because NCCER's curricula are modular in nature, Sundt and CAC were able to quickly and easily build a program tailored to the specific competencies needed on the jobsite. At the same time, students who participate in the program earn nationally recognized credentials.

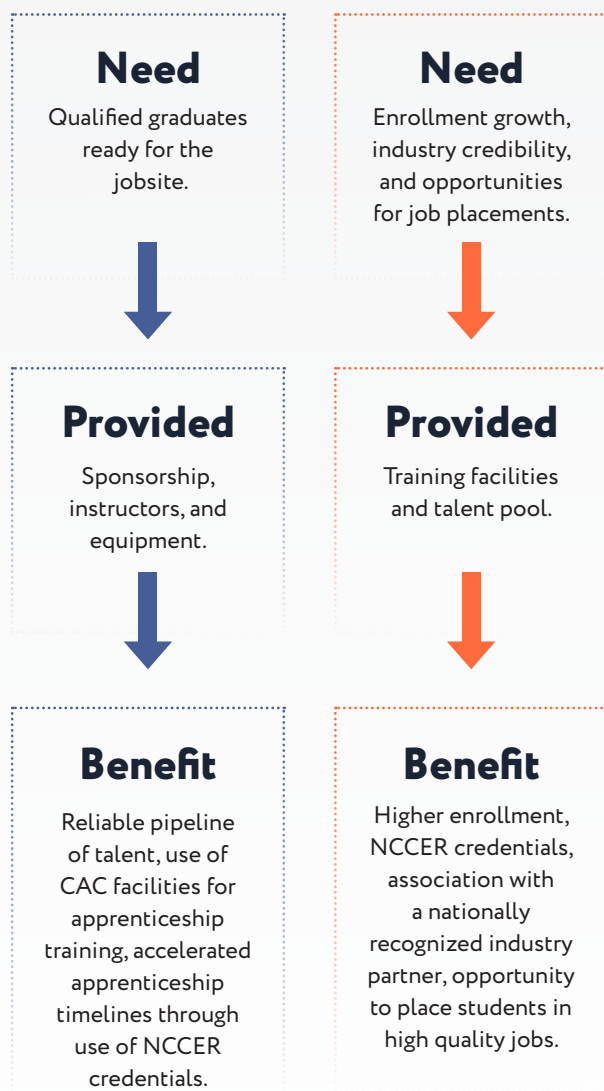


3. PLACE

It was essential to Sundt and CAC that the training program led to real jobs for the students. The design of the program ensures that Sundt will be able to hire CAC students into real jobs. Those who aren't hired by Sundt are often placed in roles at neighboring contractors.

Table 1: An Effective Industry and Education Partnership

The structure of the Sundt and CAC partnership ensures both parties provide support and receive benefits.



What sets this partnership apart is the depth of collaboration and shared investment between Central Arizona College and Sundt. Both organizations bring unique strengths to the relationship: Sundt contributes experienced instructors from its employee base, equipment, industry expertise, and insight that helps ensure CAC's programs reflect the evolving needs of the construction industry. In turn, CAC provides educational foundations, training facilities, equipment, instruction, and workforce development that equip students with the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the field. By combining industry experience with accessible, hands-on education, CAC and Sundt have created a partnership that strengthens both organizations while helping develop the skilled workforce needed across the construction industry. James Busch, Sundt's Craft Pipeline Manager, describes this by stating:

"We place quite a few graduates from CAC here at Sundt, but we also place them with other contractors, other subcontractors of ours, and competing firms."

Busch goes on, discussing the broader benefits of the program:

"The truth is, even though the graduates might not come work for us right away, you never know what's going to happen down the road. They might come work for us later. And they'll always remember that Sundt had a hand in launching their career."

Louis Teel Division Chair of the Skilled Trades Division and Heavy Equipment Operating Instructor at CAC, further emphasizes this idea:

"CAC graduates may not go to work for SUNDT right away, and that's okay. What matters is that Central Arizona College has given them the skills, knowledge, and hands-on experience to pursue a career in the industry. Whether they eventually work for Sundt, another contractor, or somewhere else, they carry the foundation they built at CAC with them. That investment in their education and career can continue to pay off for years to come."

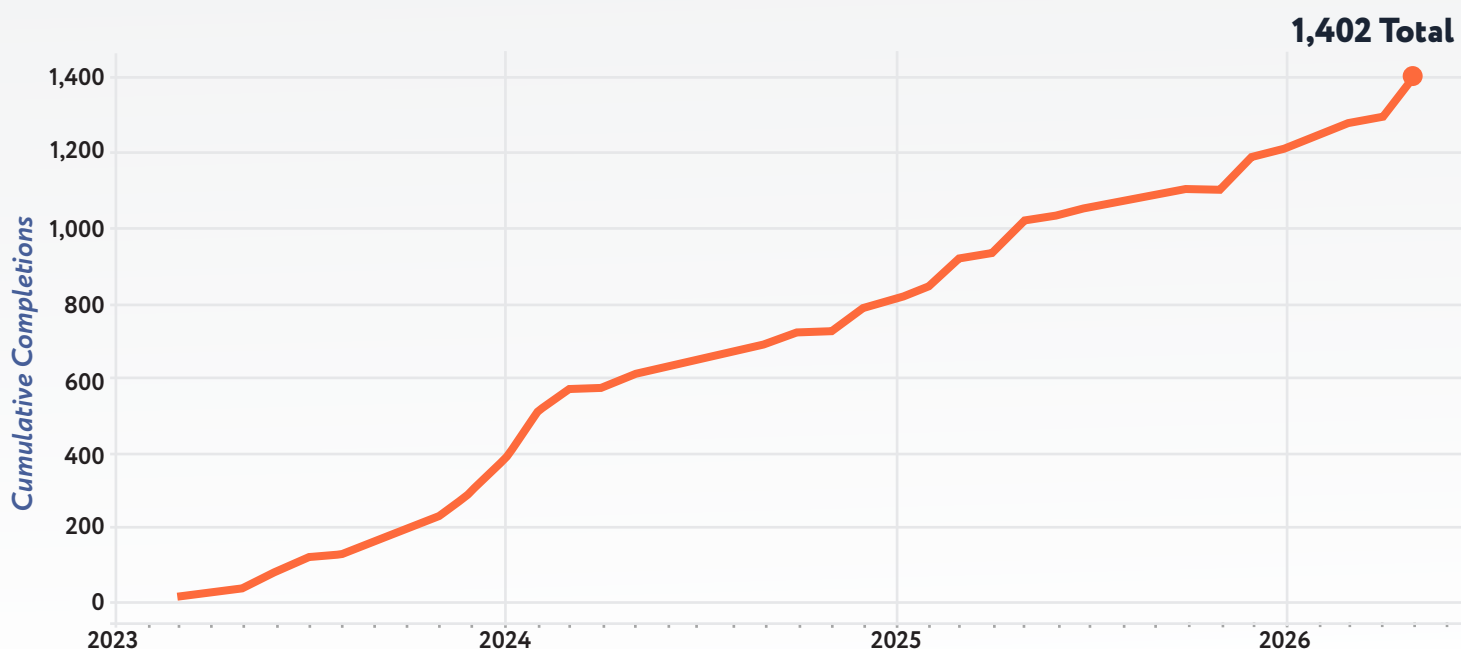
In an industry facing a continued shortage of skilled workers, Sundt and CAC have developed a talent pipeline that benefits both themselves and the broader industry. The pipeline doesn't grow by holding talent close; it grows by putting qualified people in the field, building the reputation that draws more talent in, and trusting that the original investment will compound over time.

A decade has passed since the start of this partnership, and the success of CAC and Sundt cannot be overstated.

The Results: Continued Growth

Since the partnership began, every graduate from Sundt-sponsored NCCER programs at CAC has earned employment in the construction industry. Since 2023, credential completions at CAC have surpassed 1,400, and as Figure 2 shows, that growth has been extremely consistent. A consistent completion rate signals that students are enrolling, finishing, earning credentials at a sustained pace, and entering the industry with the skills needed to succeed.

Figure 2: CAC – Cumulative Credential Completions



100%
Job Placement

*From Sundt-sponsored
NCCER programs at CAC*

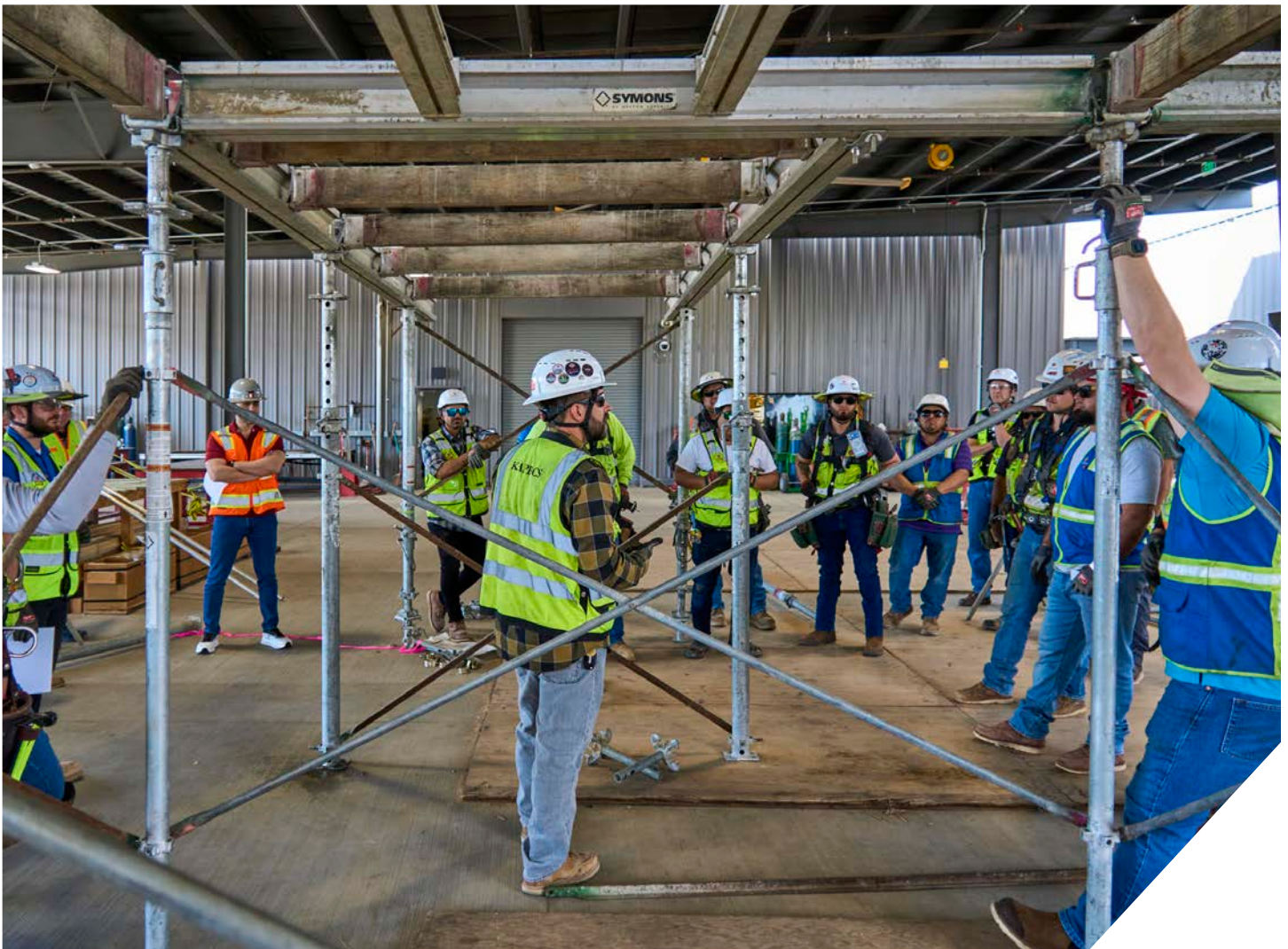
Conclusion

These results confirm a simple but important idea. If the organizations that are producing talent work closely with the organizations seeking talent, then the workforce shortage shifts from an existential threat to a solvable equation.

Not only have Sundt and CAC created an effective talent pipeline, they have also proven a model that others can put into practice. For instance, Sundt has expanded this partnership model to additional community colleges, and the impact has been immediate. Busch describes one such partnership:

“When we started, this particular college was struggling to get 10 people in their electrical program. After one year of partnering with us, they now have six cohorts of electrical students. They hired two new instructors and have a waiting list of about 50 students.”

That kind of turnaround is not an outlier; instead, it is an indicator of what can happen when an industry partner shows up with resources, standards, and a long-term commitment. There has never been a more pivotal moment for workforce development in the construction industry. The time to bridge the gap between education and industry is now.





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