



# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOT:

## Pascua Yaqui Tribe

Confronting an unemployment rate five times higher than the State of Arizona's rate, tribal jobs heavily concentrated in tribal government and its two casinos, and a tribally-owned construction company with more work than it had qualified workers, PYT took action.<sup>1</sup> Enacting its operational mission to "envision, invest, and employ"<sup>2</sup>, the Tribe's Pascua Yaqui Development Corporation (PYDC) merged funding from the U.S. Economic Development Administration and several other federal sources to establish and outfit its state-of-the-art Career Pivot Centers.<sup>3</sup> The Centers are designed to serve as a "Field of Dreams"<sup>4</sup> for construction training where previously "nobody local was offering it."<sup>5</sup> Currently featuring four pieces of heavy equipment and eventually training simulators found nowhere else in the rapidly growing Tucson area, the Centers provide industry certificate trainings in heavy equipment operation and construction, and will soon add property management certification, property and cyber security, facilities maintenance, and real estate certification (PYT and PYDC also plan to add a solar tech training program at the Centers in the future to prepare PYT members for careers in that high-demand field).<sup>6</sup> PYT members who complete Center trainings are then channeled into jobs with the Tribe's construction company, its Housing and Facilities Management departments, and PYDC's partner employers, where they earn annual salaries more than twice the median household income on the PYT reservation.<sup>7</sup> PYDC also rents out the Centers to other training providers to use their skid steer, backhoe, loader, forklift, excavator, and other equipment at affordable rates, reinvesting the income these rentals generate back into the Centers' training programs.<sup>8</sup> PYDC has also partnered with Central Arizona College and the nearby Tohono O'odham Nation's college to have them provide college credit to the Centers' heavy equipment operation trainees, making them more marketable and capable of career advancement over the long run.<sup>9</sup> Recognizing "there will always be a demand for these workers"<sup>10</sup>, PYDC is positioning the Centers as a "hub for construction in Tucson" that will "help our community for seven generations."<sup>11</sup>

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[Pascua Yaqui Development Corporation: Training](#)

[Local First Arizona: Pascua Yaqui corporation builds construction training center with federal grant](#)

[Tribal Business News: \\$4M grant helps Pascua Yaqui Tribe build pathways to construction careers](#)

[Tucson.com: Pascua Yaqui Tribe to build new job-training center with \\$4M grant](#)



<sup>1</sup> Pascua Yaqui Tribe (PYT), “Workforce Development” webpage (<https://www.pascuayaqui-nsn.gov/development-services/workforce-development/>, accessed June 24, 2025). According to PYT, “Currently the Yaqui community experiences high rates of unemployment: five times the rate of Arizona...The business climate on the Reservation is limited, with the majority of local employment opportunities within the government or two casinos that the Tribe currently operates” (Ibid.). As Daune Cardenas, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Pascua Yaqui Development Corporation (PYDC), explains, PYT’s Sonoran Pueblo Contracting, an 8(a) certified construction company that does work in the commercial, residential, and federal contracting sectors, “was being offered tribal and other local contracts that it couldn’t take because it didn’t have an adequate number of trained staff or proper equipment to do those jobs” (Conversation with NCAI, May 15, 2025).

<sup>2</sup> PYDC, “PYDC Workforce Development: Envision, Invest, Employ – Training” webpage (<https://pydccorporation.com/training/>, accessed June 24, 2025). PYDC defines this operational mission as follows: “Envision: The Pascua Yaqui people are known for being innovative, hard-working, and courageous. At PYDC, we shape our future by researching, planning, and discovering pathways to strengthen our corporation; Invest: We invest in business opportunities that provide economic diversification for the Tribe; Employ: PYDC and its subsidiaries provide employment, career paths, and training opportunities” (PYDC, “Pascua Yaqui Development Corporation” webpage (<https://pydccorporation.com/>, accessed June 24, 2025).

<sup>3</sup> The Tribe merged EDA, Cares Act, American Rescue Plan Act, and USDA Rural Development Block Grant funding to support the centers’ development (Cardenas, Conversation with NCAI, May 15, 2025).

<sup>4</sup> Daune Cardenas, PYDC CEO, quoted in Local First Arizona, “Pascua Yaqui corporation builds construction training center with federal grant,” undated (<https://localfirstaz.com/news-blog/pascua-yaqui-tribe-construction-training-federal-grant>, accessed June 23, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> Cardenas, Conversation with NCAI, May 15, 2025.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Leshner, Pima County Administrator, Letter to Jeffrey A. Hays, Economic Development Representative – Arizona, U.S Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration, April 25, 2023, p. 2; PYDC, “PYDC Workforce Development: Envision, Invest, Employ – Training” webpage; Herminia Frias, Council Member, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Conversation with NCAI, April 29, 2025. At the Centers, trainees can get National Center for Construction Education & Research (NCCER) certified in construction and heavy equipment operation in seven weeks, with training covering “a wide range of equipment, including skid steer, backhoe, loader, forklift, and excavator, with pathways to multiple credentials” (Workforce Training Academy, *Heavy Equipment Operator Training (flyer)*, In partnership with PYDC, 2025).

<sup>7</sup> Local First Arizona, “Pascua Yaqui corporation builds construction training center with federal grant,” undated. According to PYDC, “The median household income on the Pascua Yaqui reservation is about \$25,000,” while “jobs as heavy equipment operators start at around \$56,000. Project management commands six figures” (Ibid.). The Centers’ goal is “to provide a wage increase of at least 60% after completing the training and provide a job to the trainee” (PYDC, “PYDC Workforce Development: Envision, Invest, Employ – Training” webpage). As Cardenas explains, “The jobs that are available in construction, Cardenas said, not only pay well, but they allow individuals to work ‘normal’ hours and support a family” (quoted in Local First Arizona, “Pascua Yaqui corporation builds construction training center with federal grant,” undated).

<sup>8</sup> Cardenas, Conversation with NCAI, May 15, 2025.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Frias, Conversation with NCAI, April 29, 2025.

<sup>11</sup> Cardenas, quoted in Local First Arizona, “Pascua Yaqui corporation builds construction training center with federal grant,” undated.