



# Newsletter

Second Edition, October 2023

## Dear Techforce Community,

Welcome to the **second edition of the 21st Century Techforce Newsletter**, which our team creates to share the latest updates of our impactful project with our community.

Since our last newsletter, we've **launched and advanced our three initiatives**: K-12 Career Lighthouses, Short-form Credentials, and Stackable Credentials. 23 organizations have received funding and support from DEDC and are working toward our ultimate goal of **transforming Puerto Rico into one of the top 10 states/territories in tech talent**.

In the last month alone, we've had **1,700 K-12 students** taking part in our innovative computer science pilots, and our short-form grantees have received over **1,000 applications** to their tech training programs. And we know this is just the beginning.

Thank you for all you've done to support the 21st Century Techforce. We look forward to continuing to grow our impact each day with the help of leaders like you.

Sincerely,



**Manuel Cidre**  
Secretary of PR DEDC

## 21st Century Update

### What is happening in K-12?

Our **Lighthouse schools have begun classes** and are implementing their innovative STEM curricula across Puerto Rico. Their focuses range from robotics to app development to AI. Each school has begun the process of ordering **cutting-edge materials to install a 21st Century Techforce lab** later this fall.

We've surveyed students at each school to understand where they are today. While 92% of students see computer science and technology as important, only 22% are very interested in a career in technology. These numbers highlight the importance of this initiative. We hope to see a change in these results by the end of the school year.

### What about the short-form credential space?

We congratulate our **nine short-form grant recipients**, who gathered in mid-July to kick-off their participation in the 21st Century Techforce. Since being selected, grantees have been hard at work designing new programs, recruiting faculty, and brainstorming ways to further support aspiring Puerto Rican tech talent. **Four of the programs are already accepting new students and have already received over 1,000 applications.**

**Our Short-form Credential Grantees:**



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## And what's the latest news on stackable credentials?

In the past months, universities worked on the design of their stackable curricula guided by a set of design principles. They engaged in multiple 1:1 curriculum feedback sessions with prominent Puerto Rican employers, including Banco Popular, Honeywell, and Abarca Health. They all finalized their curricula design in September and are now working on the accreditation process that will allow them to launch next school year.

### Our Stackable Credential Grantees:



**SAGRADO**  
Universidad del Sagrado Corazón

## 21st Century in the News

### DEDC Announces Second Short-Form Credential Program

21st Century Techforce program gave ~\$5M to 9 short-form credential providers that will train students in high-demand tech skills, ranging from cybersecurity to artificial intelligence.



### Growing Digital Skills in K-12 and Beyond - FOMB

Arnaldo Cruz, FOMB's Director of the Research and Policy Dept., speaks to Humberto Mercader, Deputy Secretary for Strategy at DEDC, about the 21st Century Techforce initiative.



### DEDC Presents Workforce Development at Economic Thought Leadership Conference

Humberto Mercader presented the 21st Century Techforce program at the Holon IQ Summit in New York, a gathering of the foremost thought leaders in economic development and education.



## Latest Events



### Employer Convening - August 23

We're grateful that leaders from Banco Popular, CGI, Abarca Health, Wovenware, Honeywell, and Red Ventures shared their insights with our grantees. After starting off with a panel, employers and Stackable grantees met 1:1 to discuss their curricula.



### Techforce Partnerships: Mayaguez Cluster Visit - September 14

To explore regional partnerships between employers and educational institutions, we inaugurated our Techforce Partnerships model at Mayaguez, bringing together Juan Cancio K-12 school, UPR Mayaguez, and BASF. We're excited to implement this model across the island, with a similar event in Bayamon next month.

## Thought Leadership

### [Code.org Graduation Requirements](#)

Code.org shares why computer science courses should become a compulsory graduation requirement in high school and advocates for states to adopt this as a policy.

### [Stackable Credentials Build Ladders to Success](#)

Jobs For the Future explains how providing stackable programs can advance economic mobility for all students.

### [Role of STEM Ed in America's Innovation Edge](#)

New advances in automation will lead to STEM education and workforce development being more important than ever.

## Talent Spotlight





### Gabriel of Holberton Coding Academy

Gabriel completed his BA in psychology but realized that it would take years of study and experience to practice, and as he received the news his family would be growing, he decided to get a short-form credential in programming. He picked Holberton Coding School because of its high-quality curriculum and because he wouldn't need to pay his tuition while studying. **Ten months later, Gabriel is now working as a Software Developer at Evertec.** And just in time too, because his family is growing again!



### Marcia and Carlos of Sotero Figueroa

At the Sotero Figueroa school, Director Marcia and teacher Carlos have **shaped more than 300 students into role models** when it comes to science and math. Thanks to their vision, students are learning about technology in specialized courses like robotics. Under their leadership, the **school's robotics team has won four awards**, including the "Rising Star Award." Both infuse their energy into computer science and have supported students in developing a passion for this subject.

## Follow us



We encourage you to actively engage with us and share your thoughts by emailing us at: [21stcentury@ddec.pr.gov](mailto:21stcentury@ddec.pr.gov)

## Our Story

In April of this year, the Department of Economic Development and Commerce (DEDC), jointly with the Department of Education (PRDE) and the private sector in Puerto Rico introduced the visionary "**21st Century Techforce**" program. With a firm commitment to generating over **50,000 skilled workers** and propelling Puerto Rico

into the **top 10 territories for 21st century talent**, this initiative is revolutionizing education on the island.

Bolstered by a substantial **grant fund of \$50 million**, the “21st Century Techforce” is committed to three main initiatives that will transform education for young and adult learners. The first one is **K-12 Lighthouse**, focused on innovative curriculum development and teacher training programs at schools; the second one is **Short Form Credentials**, developed to provide short, targeted courses that provide practical and industry-relevant knowledge; and the third one is **Stackable Credentials**, designed to allow individuals to customize their learning journeys and obtain specialized certifications.

The “21st Century Techforce” program is dedicated to improving educational access to all residents, empowering them to pursue their aspirations and shape their own futures.



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