

# California firm plans El Paso, Las Cruces tech hubs to get 'underestimated' people jobs

Bitwise Industries, a 9-year-old California company, plans to put technology training and employment hubs in El Paso and Las Cruces as part of a five-city expansion, company officials announced Wednesday.

The Fresno, California, company plans to buy and renovate a building in both cities' downtown areas to serve as technology hubs largely aimed at getting people with low incomes and no college degrees into the tech industry, a company official said.

The tech hubs will be modeled after Bitwise facilities in Fresno and three other California cities: Bakersfield, Merced and Oakland.

Bitwise will lease temporary spaces in El Paso and Las Cruces before opening permanent hubs.

"We are drawn to places that others are not. The sort of gritty cities that get overlooked," Jake Soberal, co-founder and co-chief executive officer, said during a Wednesday online announcement of the expansion.

Bitwise offers six-week classes, at a cost of \$250, in several technology skills coupled with a one-year, paid apprenticeship program that feeds into Bitwise's technology consulting business — all aimed at providing jobs in the tech industry to underserved people in so-called underdog cities.

Bitwise has trained more than 8,000 nontraditional tech students, with 80% of those getting jobs in the technology industry, according to a

company statement.

Besides El Paso and Las Cruces, it's also expanding into Buffalo, New York; Greeley, Colorado; and Cheyenne, Wyoming,

Its first expansion outside of California was in 2021 to Toledo, Ohio, where Bitwise is currently renovating a building for a tech hub.

That means Bitwise tech hubs will be in 10 cities in seven states.

"We're looking at these underestimated places with underestimated people; they will be the future of the technology workforce that will eventually modernize this country's digital infrastructure," said Irma Olguin Jr., the company's other founder and co-CEO.



Olguin and Soberal are descendants of Mexican immigrants and created Bitwise in 2013 as a way for "folks that grew up the way we did" to get into the tech industry, she said.

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Bitwise has raised more than \$100 million from several venture investment firms over several years, and is using some of that money to support its expansion, a company spokesperson said.

Liliana Mireles, who moved to El Paso just over two years ago, was hired in January to run Bitwise's El Paso operation. She previously worked at the National Association of Latino and Elected Officials as deputy director of constituency services and membership.

Bitwise has not yet hired its Las Cruces director.

"In our business model we go to marginalized communities," Mireles said. "We reach out to folks that otherwise didn't see themselves in a tech ecosystem. We go to people who just have a GED, or need a second, third or maybe fourth chance at life."

Bitwise's system has three pillars, Mireles said: workforce training through classes in high-demand tech skills and apprenticeships; its technology consulting firm, which hires many of the apprenticeship graduates; and real estate, in which it buys and renovates buildings for tech hubs, usually in a city's downtown area, Mireles said. The hubs also house tech companies and other organizations that can help its students, she noted.



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The COVID-19 pandemic forced classes to go virtual, but Bitwise expects to move back to in-person classes at its tech hubs, Mireles said.

Leila Melendez, CEO of Workforce Solutions Borderplex, the El Paso area's public employment agency, in a statement said that Bitwise has "a great model for an education-to-workforce pipeline."

The company now employs about 400 people in the five cities where it currently has tech hubs.

El Paso and Las Cruces are expected to each have about 100 Bitwise employees within two years, said Santiago Villegas, a Bitwise spokesperson.

Bitwise is a privately held company that does not divulge annual revenues or income.

El Paso and Las Cruces residents can sign up for online classes even before Bitwise has physical locations in each city, Mireles said.

For more information, visit [bitwiseindustries.com](https://bitwiseindustries.com).

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