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**Job-training program Texas' best**

By Vic Kolenc / El Paso Times

Project ARRIBA, a 7-year-old El Paso job-training initiative for low-income people, has received another award.

The Texas Economic Development Council last week recognized the program as the state's top work-force development program for 2005 in Texas cities with more than 100,000 population.

"Besides being an outstanding program, it (also) could be transferred to other areas," said Ramiro Garza, chairman of the council's work-force committee and executive director of the Edinburg Economic Development Corp.

The project's "transferability," its ability to leverage resources from other organizations and places and the number of El Paso partners involved in it led the committee to pick the El Paso program over two programs from Dallas and one from Lubbock, Garza said.

Kathy Cox, Project ARRIBA CEO, said the project's broad list of community partners, including employers, is one of its keys to success.

Project ARRIBA, or Advanced Retraining and Redevelopment Initiative in Border Areas, is designed to get unemployed and underemployed El Pasoans through El Paso Community College or UTEP and into jobs in health care, teaching or information technology at wages of at least \$11 per hour.

The program has more than 500 participants annually with 100 to 200 graduates a year, Cox said. The average annual income of an incoming participant is below \$7,100 and that increases to an average of \$30,000 a year with benefits and a career path after graduation, she said. The project has a 91 percent retention rate, Cox said.

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The state award and several national awards garnered by the project help bolster proposals the project submits to foundations and others for funding, Cox said.

Bob Cook, president of the El Paso Regional Economic Development Corp., said he's familiar with work-force development programs across the country and few have been able to deliver the results of Project ARRIBA. It's also unique among work-force development programs because of its focus on "technology-oriented" jobs, Cook said. The economic organization nominated the project for the state award.

"El Paso definitely would benefit from additional output (participants) from ARRIBA or other programs like it," Cook said.

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**Learn more**

- Project ARRIBA continually takes applications from low-income El Pasoans to become participants in the 7-year-old job-training program.
- Information: [www.projectarriba.org](http://www.projectarriba.org) or 843-4055.

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