

From the Denver Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/denver/news/2020/06/15/techtonic-black-hispanic-apprentices.html>

Boulder tech company pledges to hire 100 people of color as apprentices — and eyes partnerships to ensure success

Jun 15, 2020, 4:19pm MDT

As demands for social justice keep American city streets filled with protests, and companies big and small take to social media to express solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, one Boulder tech company is working toward tangible change through its existing apprenticeship program.

Software developer [Tectonic Group](#) is looking to add 100 black and Hispanic apprentices to its [Tectonic Academy program](#) — a paid, college-accredited, 14-week course that was the first of its kind sanctioned by the U.S. Department of Labor.

"We had some internal discussions here around the Black Lives Matter movement and the protests, and we talked internally about what we should do — should we say something on social media?" Tectonic co-founder and CEO [Heather Terenzio](#) told Denver Business Journal. "We came to the conclusion that everybody's putting up platitudes on social media and that doesn't really do anything for anybody. So we started talking about our apprenticeship program and what we could do to help."

And when it comes to diversity in tech, the industry could use some help. A [2018 study by the Brookings Institution](#) found that "the presence of blacks and Hispanics in computer and math jobs remains starkly inadequate at the national level." Black Americans, who are 11.9% of the U.S. workforce, only make up 7.9% of computer and math jobs, while Hispanics represent 16.7% of all workers and just 6.8% of those high-tech jobs.

Companies like Amazon and [Google](#), which have taken strong stances in recent weeks on issues of racial inequities, are struggling to make their own workforces representative. Amazon's [own 2019 data](#) shows that while blacks make up 26.5% of its staff, they are only 8.3% of managers (for whites, it's 34.7% and 59.3%, respectively). At Google, only 3.7% of its American workforce is black, according to the company's [2020 annual report on diversity](#). Though that doesn't mean there isn't improvement — that Google number reflects a 54% increase in black employees from just six years ago.

Tectonic's program has always focused on underrepresented tech workers, and has trained and helped nearly 200 of its apprentices gain work in the tech field, Terenzio said.

"We actually initially started looking for minorities and women, but it quickly expanded because we found everybody has a story," Terenzio said. "Does a white guy who came up through the foster system deserve a spot? Our definition of 'diversity' kept changing."

But this next class, which will start in late summer or early fall, will be hyperfocused on black and Hispanic workers, she said. And the company's going to need help recruiting, funding and then ultimately employing those apprentices.

Terenzio is already in early conversations with Colorado Springs-based minority-focused cybersecurity training company Spark Mindset and is looking at other collaborations.

"We're looking to partner with local nonprofits and other organizations who cater to minority communities and software developers," Terenzio said.

A company could, for example, sponsor one of the Tectonic apprentices and then they'd have "first dibs" on interviewing and hiring that apprentice.



KATHLEEN LAVINE, DENVER BUSINESS JOURNAL

Heather Terenzio is CEO and founder of Tectonic Academy.

"We do stand for the highest standards of social responsibility," Terenzio said. "We feel like we can make the biggest difference in people's lives by giving them the best career in software development."

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