



# Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

Unified State Plan

01/11/2016

DRAFT

Subject to Revision

For Informational Purposes Only

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## **I. WIOA State Plan Type**

North Carolina has elected to submit a Unified State Plan.

This plan includes the Adult Program, Dislocated Worker Program, Youth Program, Wagner-Peyser Act Program, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program, and the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

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## II. Strategic Elements

### Economic, Workforce, and Workforce Development Activities Analysis

#### (1) Economic and Workforce Analysis

##### Statewide Conditions

North Carolina, like the Nation as a whole, has seen a steady increase in employment and a lowering of the state's unemployment rate over the past five years. Although some challenges remain, our economy is strengthening, six years removed from the end of the Great Recession. Between January 2010 and January 2015, North Carolina's seasonally adjusted state unemployment rate fell by 6.0 percentage points – the second largest drop of any state in that time. The number of employed residents increased by 318,500 (7.8%) during that time; while the number of unemployed was reduced by more than half (dropping 271,000).

Since the end of the great recession in NC, jobs are up 417,800 to 4,259,000. This is over 84,000 jobs higher than the pre-recession peak of 4,174,400. All industry sectors except Government (down 1,400) increased over that time period. The top three sectors were Professional and Business Services, Trade, Transportation and Utilities and Leisure and Hospitality Services. Manufacturing added 30,100 and Construction 13,200.

Over the last year (July 2014 to July 2015), employment is up 110,200 to 4,259,000. All sectors with the exceptions of Government posting increases. Trade, Transportation, and Utilities added the most, followed by Professional and Business Services, Leisure and Hospitality Services, Manufacturing, Construction, Other Services, Financial Activities, and Information. (See Chart Below)

Not all regions of the State share equally in North Carolina's economic prosperity. The unadjusted July 2015 unemployment rate ranged from 5.7% in the Western Prosperity Zone to 8.2% in the Sandhills. Each region grew in its population of employed people between July 2014 and July 2015, with the Sandhills Prosperity Zone growing 0.5% and the Southwest growing 3.9%. See Table 1 for a regional breakdown.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 2013 3-year estimates there were over 1.1 million noninstitutionalized individuals in North Carolina aged 16 and over with a disability. Of these approximately one out of five were employed and a significant number were reported (74.5%) as not being in the Labor Force.

Of the almost 6 million noninstitutionalized individuals aged 18 to 64, 11.5% were reported as having a disability.

Of those individuals with a disability aged 25 years and older, 27.9% had less than a high school diploma, 32.8% had a high school diploma, 26.6% had some college or an associate's degree and only 12.8% had a bachelor's degree or higher. As a comparison of those individuals aged 25 years and older without a disability, 11.7% had less than a high school diploma, 25.6% had a high school diploma, 31.4% had some college or associate's degree and 31.2% had a bachelor's degree or higher.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT	Total Civilian Noninstitutionalized Population	With a Disability	No Disability
Population Age 25 and Over	6,339,825	1,121,350	5,218,475
Less than high school graduate	14.6%	27.9%	11.7%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	26.9%	32.8%	25.6%
Some college or associate's degree	30.6%	26.6%	31.4%
Bachelor's degree or higher	27.9%	12.8%	31.2%

Source: ACS 2011-2013 – 3 year estimates – North Carolina

## Labor Market Trends

Another positive sign for North Carolina's economy, job openings are up, and rising (reaching nearly 140,000 as of June 2015 – see Chart on Page 7). In fact not only are the number of openings up, but our analysis shows the percentage of North Carolina job vacancies was higher in June 2015 (3.2%) than in June 2007 (2.5%), prior to the recession<sup>1</sup>.

Two significant reasons for this likely lie within the NC's labor force participation trends. Much of North Carolina, like the U.S., has seen a steady drop in labor force participation – see Chart 2. Between January 2009 and January 2015, North Carolina's labor force participation rate dropped 5.2 percentage points to 60.0%. This was nearly twice the rate drop of the U.S. Two factors appear to be leading causes of this phenomenon.

North Carolina's population is aging – with the greatest current and projected concentrations of older residents primarily in the western and eastern regions (see Table 2). The percentage of NC's population that is of prime working age (35-54) comprised 28.5% of the State's population in 2009 but has steadily declined and is expected to drop further through 2019 – see Chart 3. Meanwhile, the number of people 55 and older is expected to grow significantly – rising from 24.5% in 2009 to 29.2% in 2019. As such, retirements are growing. Labor and Economic Analysis

<sup>1</sup> NC Department of Commerce, LEAD. Calculated using JOLT and The Conference Board's Help Wanted Online. See <http://www.nccommerce.com/lead/research-publications/the-lead-feed/artmid/11056/articleid/29/%E2%80%9Cwhere-are-the-workers%E2%80%9D-assessing-labor-market-mismatch-using-the-beveridge-curve> for methodology.

Division's (LEAD) analysis shows that about half of the labor force participation rate decline since 2000 is due to Baby Boomers aging out of the workforce.<sup>2</sup>

More of North Carolina's youth are choosing school over work. The number of youth between 16 and 19 that were in school but not in the labor force rose by 111,000 between 2001 and 2014. At the same time, those that participated in the labor force declined by 62,000. A growing number of 20-24 year olds also opted school over work during that period – with the number of people electing to attend school increasing 88,000 and those participating in the labor force increasing only 52,000.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the drop in youth labor force participation, the unemployment rate for this group far surpasses that of older workers in NC. The annual average unemployment rate for those between 16 and 21 stood at 22.5% in 2014 vs 6.8% for the rest of the population. Chart 4 illustrates the difference between the unemployment rates of those age 16 to 21 vs those over age 21. The Great Recession seemed to amplify this disparity. Our analysis shows that the disparities in unemployment rates between age groups is not due to their differences in being able to find a job; rather it rests with younger workers' tendency to separate from jobs at higher rate.

The rate at which youth ages 16 to 24 move from unemployed to employed is similar to that of 25 to 54 year olds – see Chart 5. However, the rate at which youth separate from jobs is more than double – 2.6% for those 16 to 24 vs. 1.1% for those 25 to 54 on average in 2014. Chart 6 illustrates this difference and shows that this is not a new phenomenon in North Carolina.

Education and youth employment are obviously important for providing the skills and experience to necessary to run our economy. This is particularly relevant because, like North Carolina's demographic composition, the state's mix of industries is changing – creating current and future employment opportunities and challenges. For generations, Manufacturing has been one of the primary employers for much of the State. In 1990, one out of every four jobs, and in 2000, one out of every five jobs in North Carolina was in the Manufacturing industry. That ratio dropped to one out of nine in 2014 after losing 374,800 jobs in a nearly a two and a half decades.

Construction employment has also declined in North Carolina during the recession. Construction employment grew 63,000 from 1990 to 2000 and 24,700 from 2000 to 2007. However, as the recession hit, this sector lost 83,000 jobs (or one-third) lost between 2007 and 2012. As the NC economy has recovered, Construction employment has begun to rebound over the past two years, 4.1% growth, but remains 75,200 jobs down from the 2007 peak.

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Commerce, LEAD. Using data from BLS's Current Population Survey. <http://www.nccommerce.com/lead/research-publications/the-lead-feed/artmid/11056/articleid/39/how-baby-boomers-are-making-labor-force-participation-rates-go-down-and-up>

<sup>3</sup> Department of Commerce, LEAD. Using data from BLS's Current Population Survey. <http://www.nccommerce.com/lead/research-publications/the-lead-feed/artmid/11056/articleid/25/back-to-school-the-decline-in-ncs-youth-labor-force-participation-rate>

These Manufacturing and Construction industries represent two examples of the structural changes in our State and regional economies. Table 3 shows the change in proportion of the economy employed in each of the selected industries for both North Carolina and each of its eight Prosperity Zones.

Services have replaced the production jobs lost – and then some (see Table 4). The Health Care industry has experienced the greatest growth. With 178,000 net new jobs since 2000, it is now the State's largest employer, moving up from #3. In 2014, nearly 580,000 jobs were in Health Care (14.3% of NC's total employment). Health Care is the number one employer in all Prosperity Zones, except for the Northwest where it is number two behind Manufacturing. Map 1 illustrates the top five largest employer industries in each region in 2014.

Other growing industries in NC include: Accommodations & Food Services; Educational Services; and Professional & Technical Services. This represents a mix of low- and high-paying industries relative to the State average and those in Manufacturing and Construction. Accommodations & Food Services, which added 103,000 net new jobs between 2000 and 2014, is the lowest paying industry in North Carolina, with an average weekly wage of \$300 in 2014 – 65% lower than the State average. Meanwhile, Professional & Technical Services is one of the highest paying industries in NC, paying over \$72,000 per year on average (60% higher than the average of all industries in the State).

Wages are important to consider, not only because there are great disparities between industries, but also because wage growth has been slow overall since 2009 and uneven. Between 2009 and 2014, total wages in NC grew 2.6% after being adjusted for inflation per the Consumer Price Index. Of the top five largest employers, Manufacturing was the only one to experience higher wage growth – but just barely at 2.8%. Some large industries saw little growth in real wages over that time (Accommodations and Food Services grew 0.3%). Others saw real wages decline (Education dropped 4.5% and Retail dropped 1.0%). See Table 5 for details.

Chart 7 shows industry wage and employment growth relative to their employment size and North Carolina's averages. One thing clear from the bubble chart is that those that experienced the greatest wage growth tended to be smaller industries and, with the exception of Real Estate, paid more than the State average wage.

Like with industries, some large disparities in wage growth exist between geographies. Only one zone experienced higher nominal wage growth than North Carolina overall between 2009 and 2014. The Southwest Region, which includes metro Charlotte, experienced a 14.9% in employer wages vs the State's nominal rate of 12.9%. The North Central Region, which was third in wage growth behind the Northeast, was the

only region in addition to the Southwest to have higher overall annual wages than the State. See Table 6.

Four regions – the Sandhills, Southeast, Western, and Northwest – had wage growth below 10%. These regions were already significantly lagging behind in average annual wages in 2009, so the slow growth only set them further behind. Each of these Prosperity Zones, plus the Northeast, had wages in 2014 that were at least 20% less than the State average.

## Employer Job Postings

Online advertised vacancies in North Carolina rose 18,830 to 155,480 in August 2015, up 13.8% from the same period last year<sup>4</sup> and 75,000 more than the lowest point during the recession in April 2009. Since the last quarter of 2009, the number of online job advertisements in the state has grown steadily and reached new heights. The current high level of help wanted ads suggests continued job growth.

In August, job seekers in North Carolina saw increased online job advertisements in most of the major occupational groups. Computer and Mathematical category showed the highest number of job postings, up 12% from prior year. The increase was due in part to rises in demand for Software Application Developers and Computer System Analysts. Healthcare Practitioners and Technical group had the second highest online job ads, which was driven by increasing demand for Registered Nurses. The group included other occupations in demand such as **Licensed Practical Nurses and Licensed Vocational Nurses and Physical Therapists. Employers** posted additional 4,000 online ads for Transportation and Material Moving occupations, experiencing the fastest growth (44.2%) among from August 2014. Trucking companies in dire need of drivers has contributed to high demand of the Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers.

Not all job openings are posted online. Occupational groups such as Construction or Food Preparation and Serving are likely to have fewer postings compared to Computer & Mathematical group. Employers tend to advertise the low-skilled positions offline or have an easy time filling these jobs. On the contrary, online openings requiring higher levels of skill, like Healthcare Practitioners, are likely to have many and repeated ads. This could indicate that employers are having a difficult time filling those positions.

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<sup>4</sup> Analysis of monthly volume of online job ads reported by the Conference Board Help Wanted OnLine (HWOL); not seasonally adjusted.



Occupational Group	Aug 2015	Aug 2014	Change	% Change
Computer & Mathematical	20,359	18,176	2,183	12.0%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	17,325	14,167	3,158	22.3%
Sales & Related	16,214	16,882	(668)	-4.0%
Transportation & Material Moving	13,585	9,426	4,159	44.1%
Management	13,559	11,714	1,845	15.8%
Office & Administrative Support	13,046	12,492	554	4.4%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	7,680	6,448	1,232	19.1%
Food Preparation & Serving Related	7,047	5,548	1,499	27.0%
Construction & Extraction	5,200	4,367	833	19.1%
Architecture & Engineering	4,952	4,175	777	18.6%
Production	4,682	4,222	460	10.9%
Education, Training & Library	4,386	3,800	586	15.4%
Healthcare Support	3,867	3,903	(36)	-0.9%
Building & Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance	3,345	2,989	356	11.9%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, & Media	3,273	3,260	13	0.4%
Community & Social Services	2,231	1,821	410	22.5%
Personal Care & Service	1,886	1,780	106	6.0%
Life, Physical & Social Science	1,614	1,554	60	3.9%
Protective Service	1,218	1,207	11	0.9%
Others (3)	784	725	59	8.1%
<b>Total Ads</b>	<b>155,482</b>	<b>136,643</b>	<b>18,839</b>	<b>13.8%</b>

Source: The Conference Board Help Wanted OnLine (HWOL), monthly volume; not seasonally adjusted.

Employment in some sectors, such as Health Care and Social Assistance, didn't suffer from the effects of the recession and grew over the recession period, while employment in other sectors, such as Construction and Manufacturing, experienced significant declines.

Total employment in North Carolina is projected to grow by 548,650 during the 2012-2022 period to reach a projected employment of 4.8 million. This represents a 12.9% increase which is expected to be the results of growth in some occupations and decline in others. The service-providing sectors are responsible for nearly 80% of total employment and for the most of the job growth over the projection period. The Health Care and Social Assistance sector is expected to add the largest number of jobs (166,500) and remains the sector with the largest number of jobs by 2022. The enacted Affordable Health Care Act, aging population, and advances in technology, should continue to drive employment growth in this sector.

The recovery in the Construction sector will account for all the job growth in the goods-producing sectors over the projection period. Manufacturing is expected to experience a significant decline in employment because of various factors, such as increasing

productivity, international trade, and consolidation of firms. Construction is projected to have the fastest employment growth (38.5%), followed by Health Care and Social Assistance (31%) and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services (29.7%). These three sectors are projected to have the largest number of new jobs, together accounting for about half of the employment growth by 2022.

Within the Health Care and Social Assistance sector, Ambulatory Health Care Services which provides in-home care such as nursing and physical therapy, is projected to grow 39.3% over the 2012-2022 period, adding the largest number of new jobs (70,860) among all industry sub-sectors. Within Construction sector, Specialty Trade Contractors sub-sector which comprises establishments involving in building construction or other similar activities, is projected to experience a 43.3% increase in employment, adding 47,840 new jobs.

**Table X: Projected Employment Change by Major Industry, 2012-2022**

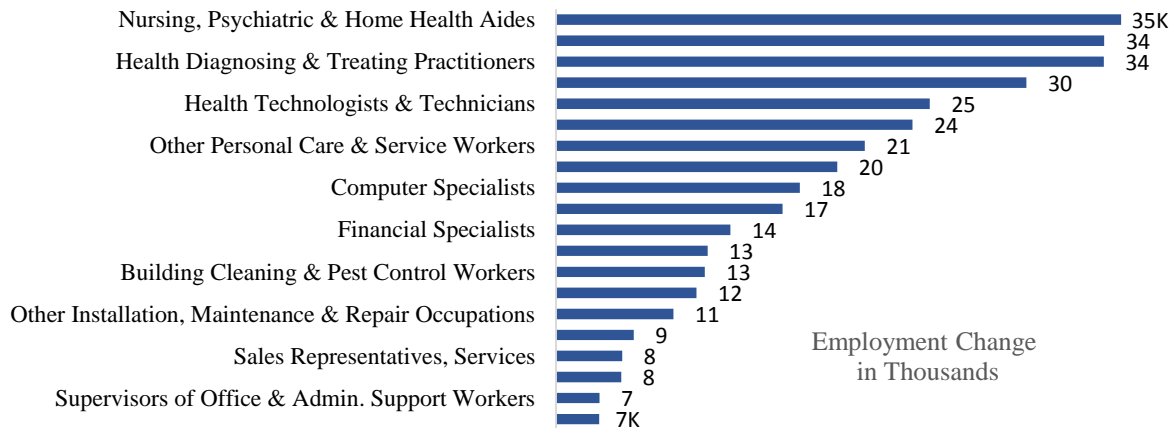
Occupational Group	2012 Emp	2022 Emp	Net Change	Percent Change
Health Care & Social Assistance	537,862	704,405	166,543	31
Construction	172,296	238,619	66,232	38.5
Professional, Scientific & Technical Services	195,234	253,156	57,922	29.7
Accommodation & Food Services	357,228	403,703	46,475	13
Educational Services	365,675	409,974	44,299	12.1
Retail Trade	451,437	493,020	41,583	9.2
Finance & Insurance	148,358	186,572	38,214	25.8
Administrative & Waste Services	258,145	291,130	32,984	12.8
Wholesale Trade	171,997	192,367	20,370	11.8
Other Services (except Government)	155,065	173,683	18,618	12
Government	289,441	299,491	10,050	3.5
Transportation & Warehousing	127,104	136,048	8,944	7
Real Estate & Rental and Leasing	48,153	56,561	8,408	17.5
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	58,068	65,900	7,832	13.5
Management of companies & Enterprises	80,552	87,181	6,629	8.2
Mining	3,019	3,019	0	0
Utilities	12,279	11,029	-1,250	-10.2
Information	69,289	67,679	-1,610	-2.3
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & Hunting	22,251	17,151	-5,100	-22.9
Manufacturing	440,034	396,076	-43,958	-10

Source: NC Department of Commerce, LEAD, 2012-2022 Occupational Projections

Occupations related to Health Care and Social Assistance, as well as Construction are projected to have the fastest job growth between the 2010-2012 period. Of the 20 occupations projected to experience the largest employment increases, five are related

to healthcare and personal care. Together, these 5 occupations are projected to add about 126,200 jobs over the projection period, representing nearly one-fourth of the employment growth. Nursing, Psychiatric, and Home Health Aides are projected to add the most new jobs by 2022, followed by Construction Trade Workers, Health Diagnosing and Treating Practitioners, and Food and Beverage Serving Workers.

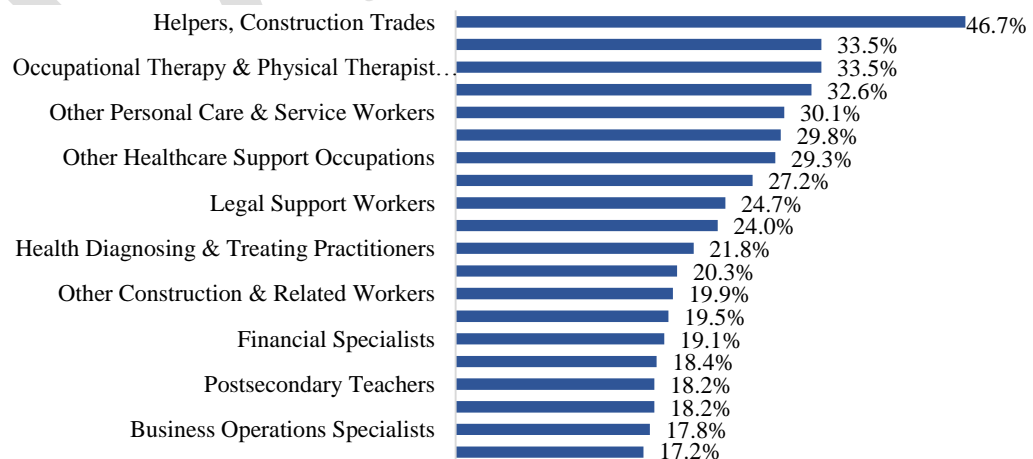
**Chart X: Occupations with Largest Employment Growth, 2012-2022 (numbers in thousands)**



Source: NC Department of Commerce, LEAD, 2012-2022 Occupational Projections

Of the 20 occupations projected to grow the fastest include 6 in healthcare and personal care fields and 4 in construction. Helpers in Construction Trades are projected to experience the fastest employment growth (46.7%), followed by Nursing, Psychiatric, and Home Health Aides (33.5%) and Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapist Assistants and Aides (33.5%), Supervisors of Construction and Extraction Workers (32.6%).

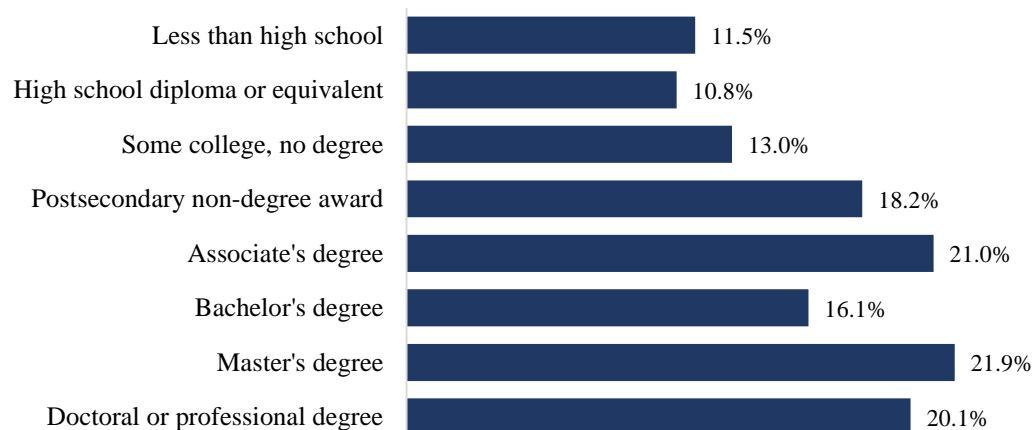
**Chart X: Occupations with Fastest Employment Growth, 2012-2022**



Source: NC Department of Commerce, LEAD, 2012-2022 Occupational Projections

In 2012, approximately 1.4 million jobs in North Carolina were in occupations that typically require at least some postsecondary education for entry, compared with 2.8 million jobs that require a high school diploma or less. Occupations requiring postsecondary education accounted for only one third of the overall employment in 2012; however, they are projected to grow 17.6% by 2022. Occupations requiring a high school diploma or less are projected to grow 11.1%. Though a growing proportion of jobs is projected to require a postsecondary education, occupations that typically require no more than a high school diploma or equivalent are expected to add 72,000 more jobs than jobs projected for those requiring at least some postsecondary education. Occupations requiring a high school diploma or less are usually have lower wages than those postsecondary occupations.

**Chart X – Projected Employment Growth by Education, 2012-2022**



Source: NC Department of Commerce, LEAD, 2012-2022 Occupational Projections

## Existing Supply

The labor supply available to employers is not restricted to just those living in their state, region, or county. Residential migration and commuting play important roles as well. North Carolina is fortunate to be a fast growing state, attracting talent from across the country and around the world. Between 2010 and 2014, North Carolina's population grew by a net of 263,000 – meaning 180 more people relocated to our state than moved out each day. Migration accounted for 63% of the net residential growth.

Growth is not equal across the state. Thirty-seven North Carolina counties experienced an overall decline in population between 2010 and 2014. That number would have

been 52 had it not been for the growth in net migration in those communities. No region had a decline in overall population. However, one Prosperity Zone, Sandhills, had more out-migration than in-migration. See Table 7 for details. This can be a serious problem if the region is having difficulty retaining or attracting highly skilled residents. Unfortunately, no reliable data tracks skill migration.

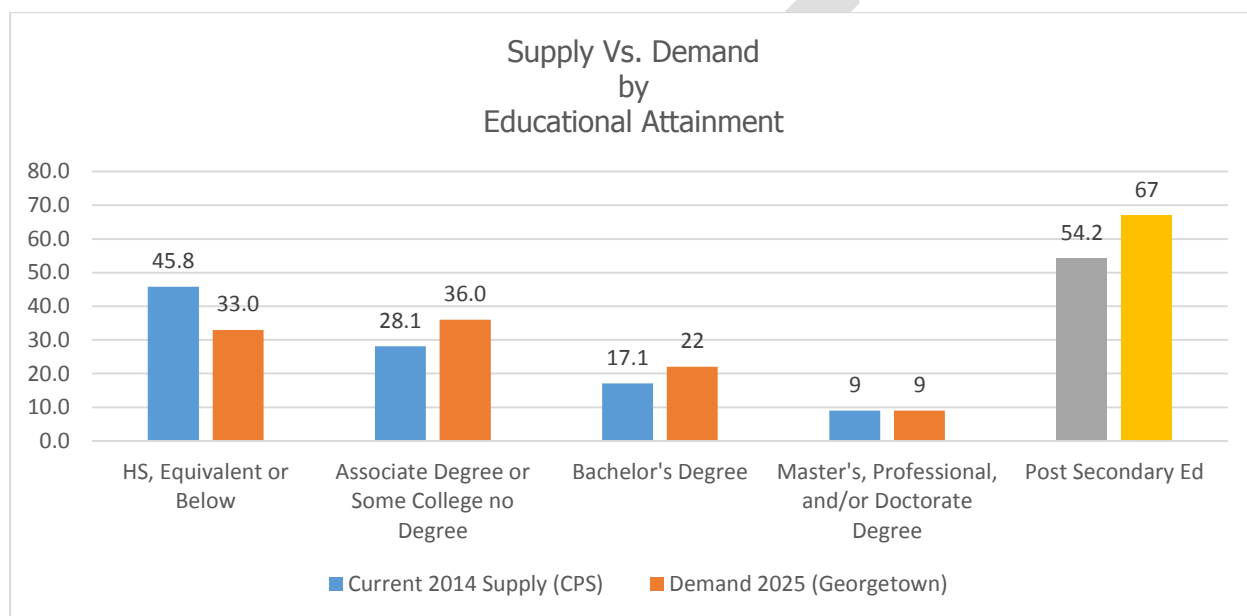
Out-of-county commuting has increased to record numbers. Eighty-seven of North Carolina's 100 counties found the majority of their residents working outside their home county in 2013.<sup>5</sup> The number of counties with more out-commuter residents has increased steadily since 2003, when it was 53. This is a sign that both the labor force and employers are more willing to look outside of their community for the right employment match than ever before.

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<sup>5</sup> Primary jobs in the private sector only. Moore County had nearly an even distribution with only 10 more residents working outside their county than inside.

## Demand vs. Supply

Research conducted by Georgetown Public Policy Institute in their “Recovery – Job Growth and Education Through 2020” indicates that a gap exist between the projected employer needs and the educational attainment of the NC labor force. In 2020, they estimate that 67% of the jobs will require some type of postsecondary education. While currently, the percent of those in the labor force with some type of postsecondary education is 54%.



## Employment Mismatch

Job vacancies became much easier to fill during the recession, but they started becoming harder as the economy rebounded. Some evidences show that hiring difficulty is most severe especially for skilled jobs. According to the North Carolina 2014 Employer Needs Survey, approximately 45% of Manufacturers and Non-Manufacturers who attempted to hire reported difficulty. Employers in Educational Services, Construction, Health Care & Social Assistance, Manufacturing, and Wholesale Trade most commonly reported hiring difficulties.

Employers cited a variety of reasons for hiring difficulties. Most frequently candidates lacked work experience, education credentials, and technical skills, according to over 40% of industry-wide employers.

Manufacturers were far more likely to cite a lack of technical skills as reason for difficulties, with 70% citing this factor. Insufficient numbers of applicants (1 in 3 employers) and candidates' unwillingness to accept the offered wages (1 in 4

employers) were also mentioned, which may suggest issues with wage levels and/or expectations among jobseekers and employers.

A lack of soft skills, which include skills like communication, enthusiasm, and interpersonal skills, was selected by roughly one in four employers. When asked about specific skills, employers frequently reported technical skills such as machining, skilled trades, blueprint reading, electrical skills, engineering technologies, customer service, computer operation and business/accounting. They also mentioned soft skills such as communication, enthusiasm, interpersonal skills, critical/analytic thinking and problem solving, and attendance dependability.

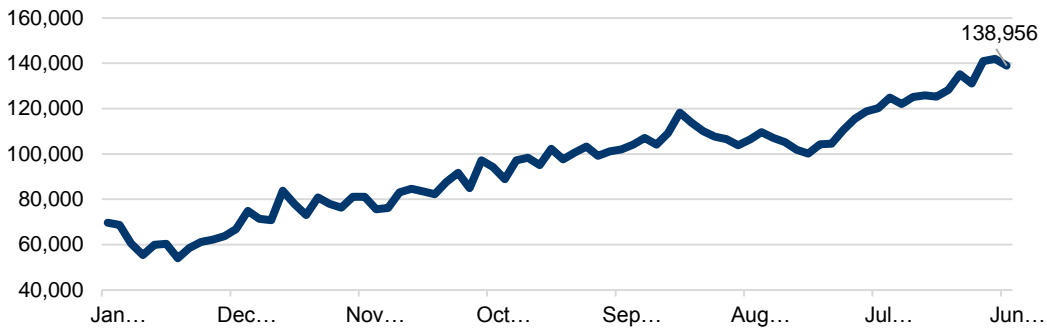
As the economy continues to expand, hiring difficulty for skilled workers may worsen until substantially more people graduate or are trained with the right skills to fulfil the employer's needs.

**Table 1: Employed & Unemployed, July 2015**

	Employed	Unemployed	Unemployment Rate	Chg in Employed since July 2014	% Chg in Employed Since July 2014
North Central	1,106,348	70,425	6.0%	25,111	2.3%
Northeast	230,276	18,114	7.3%	2,360	1.0%
Northwest	267,871	17,869	6.3%	3,033	1.1%
Piedmont-Triad	761,119	50,926	6.3%	23,331	3.2%
Sandhills	314,128	27,950	8.2%	1,456	0.5%
Southeast	430,324	29,550	6.4%	7,348	1.7%
Southwest	1,081,338	68,456	6.0%	40,485	3.9%
Western	310,150	18,812	5.7%	7,985	2.6%

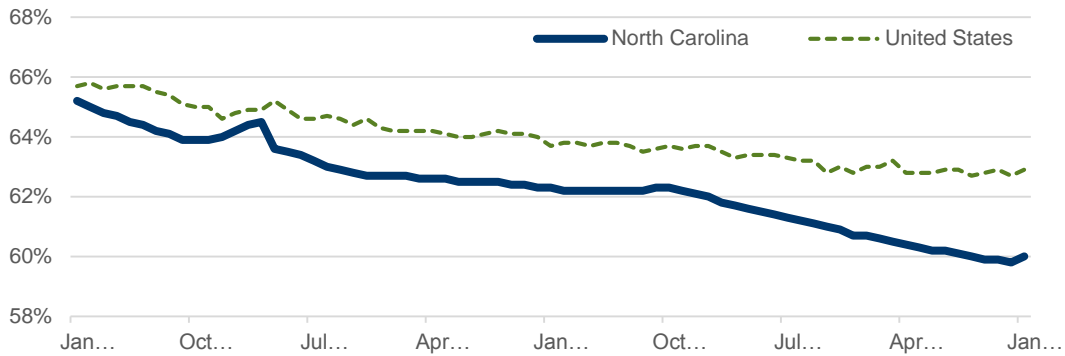
Source: NC Department of Commerce, LEAD, CES seasonally unadjusted

**Chart 1: North Carolina Job Openings**



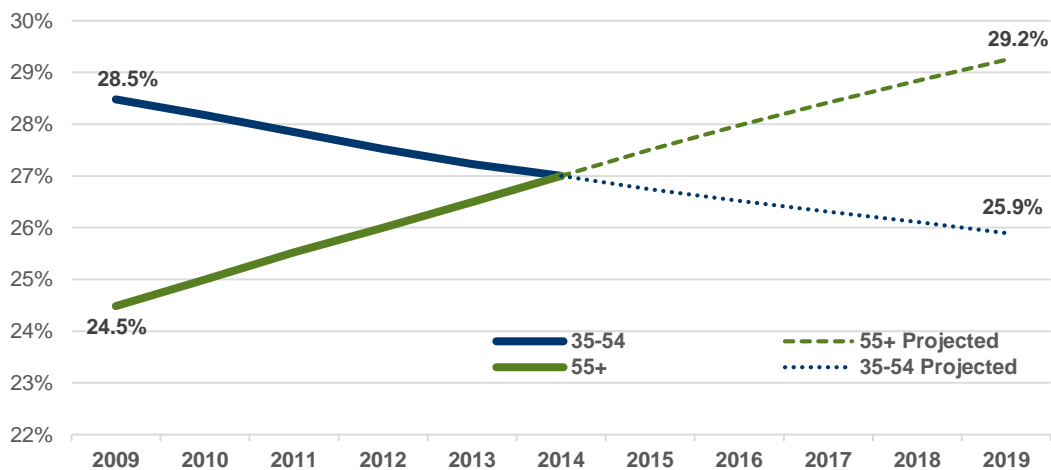
Source: NC Department of Commerce, LEAD, calculated using JOLT and The Conference Board's Help Wanted Online

**Chart 2: Labor Force Participation Rate Decline**



Source: BLS, LAUS

**Chart 3: Changes in NC Population Age Groups**



Source: NC Office of State Budget & Management

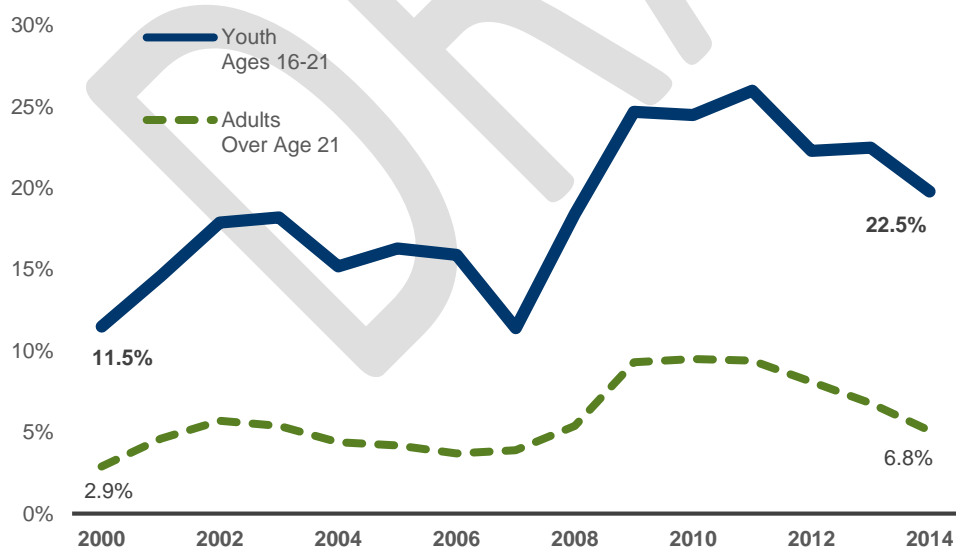


**Table 2: Ratio of Population Ages 35-54 to 55+**

	2009	2014	2019	Change 2009-2019
North Central	1.39	1.19	1.03	0.35
Northeast	1.01	0.84	0.74	0.28
Northwest	0.99	0.84	0.72	0.27
Piedmont-Triad	1.12	0.95	0.82	0.30
Sandhills	1.12	0.94	0.84	0.28
Southeast	0.98	0.83	0.76	0.23
Southwest	1.39	1.22	1.07	0.32
Western	0.81	0.70	0.65	0.16
North Carolina	<b>1.16</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>0.28</b>

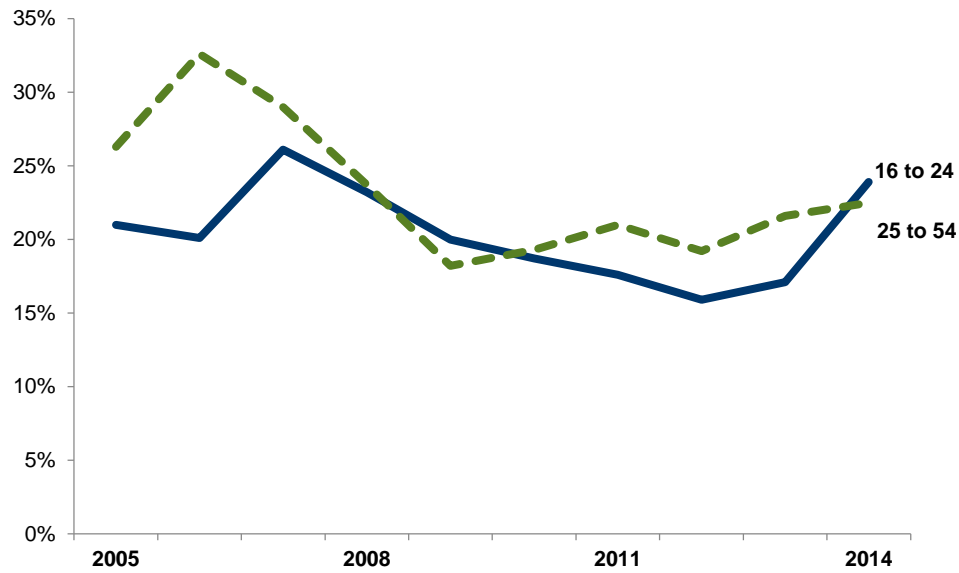
Numbers above 1.0 mean there are more 35-54 year olds. Numbers less than 1.0 mean there are more 55 and older. 1.0 means there are equal numbers of the two cohorts. The greater the change between 2009 and 2019, the more the growth of older residents (55+) is outpacing younger residents (35-54).

Source: Department of Commerce, LEAD. Calculation based on data from NC Office of State Budget & Management

**Chart 4: Youth Unemployment Rates in NC**

Source: BLS, Current Population Survey

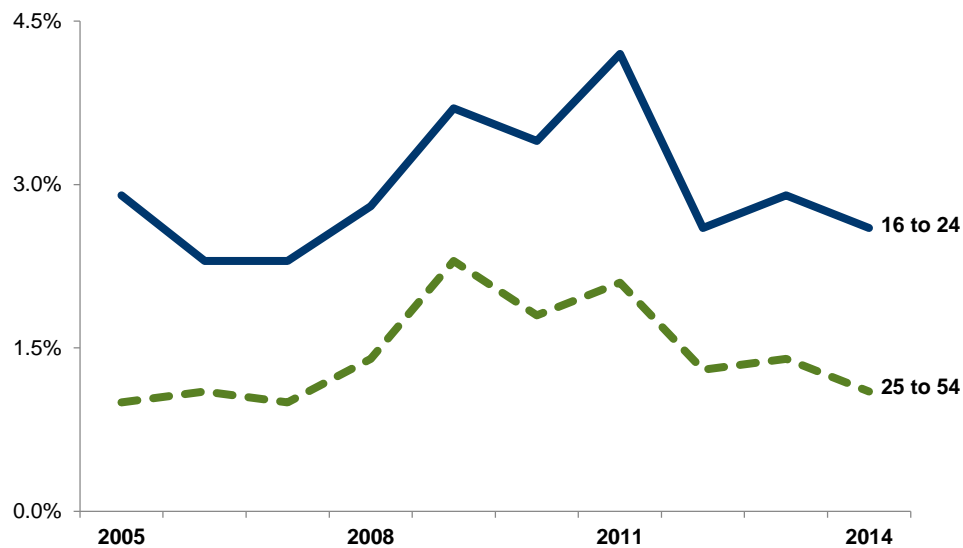
**Chart 5: NC Job Finding Rate**



*Annual average rate of monthly change of the unemployed moving to employed as a percentage of the unemployed.*

Source: Department of Commerce, LEAD. Calculated using data from BLS, Current Population Survey

**Chart 6: NC Job Separation Rates by Age Group**



Source: Department of Commerce, LEAD. Calculated using data from BLS, Current Population Survey

**Table 3: Changes in Proportion of Total Local Employment in Selected Industries, 2000-2014**

	Northeast Region	Southeast Region	North Central Region	Sandhills Region	North Carolina
Health Care & Social Assistance	31%	21%	34%	45%	37%
Professional & Technical Services	7%	30%	30%	48%	37%
Accommodation & Food Services	20%	26%	31%	32%	30%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	-2%	11%	31%	-7%	29%
Educational Services	14%	8%	18%	20%	23%
Administrative & Waste Services*	6%	10%	1%	-4%	17%
Finance & Insurance	7%	0%	16%	-18%	16%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	32%	2%	-4%	15%	4%
Wholesale Trade	-5%	-10%	6%	-11%	2%
Retail Trade	-1%	2%	-4%	-1%	-1%
Other Services (Ex. Public Admin)	4%	-14%	1%	-4%	-1%
Ag., Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	-2%	-26%	-17%	-14%	-13%
Transportation & Warehousing	-2%	-21%	-24%	-9%	-13%
Information	-23%	-10%	-20%	-29%	-18%
Construction	-35%	-30%	-24%	-25%	-26%
Manufacturing	-37%	-28%	-42%	-41%	-44%

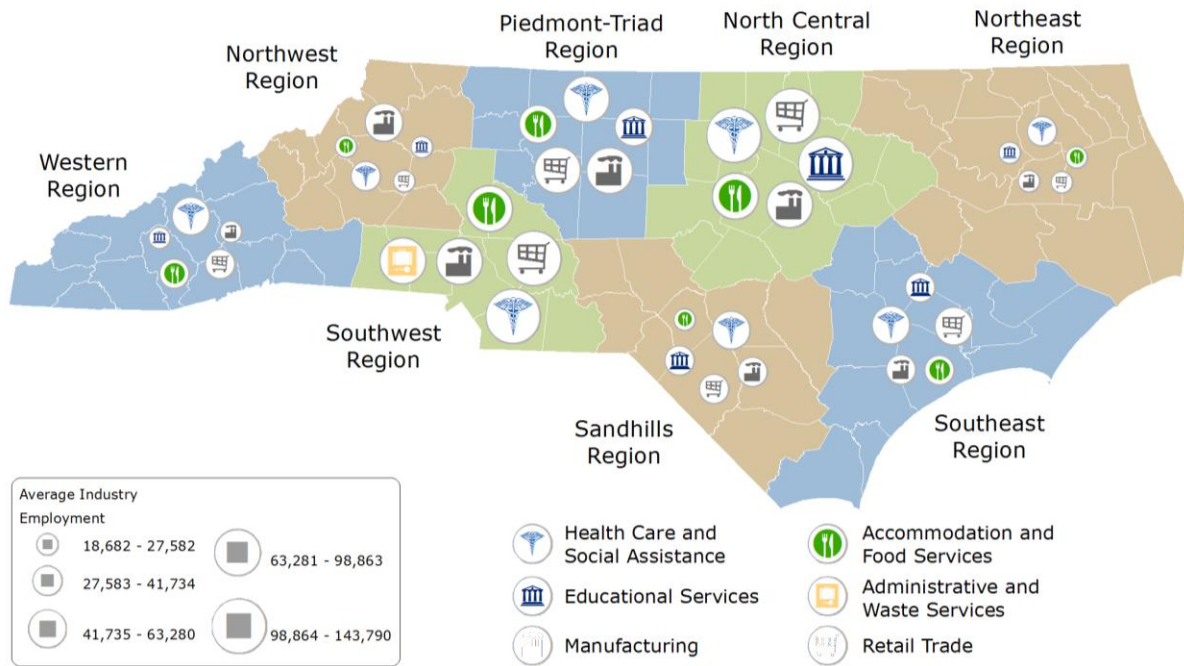
  

	Piedmont-Triad Region	Southwest Region	Northwest Region	Western Region	North Carolina
Health Care & Social Assistance	55%	43%	46%	30%	37%
Professional & Technical Services	4%	29%	36%	44%	37%
Accommodation & Food Services	39%	32%	36%	34%	30%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	24%	54%	16%	25%	29%
Educational Services	36%	34%	33%	18%	23%
Administrative & Waste Services*	25%	17%	53%	22%	17%
Finance & Insurance	-4%	31%	-4%	3%	16%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	-6%	4%	12%	15%	4%
Wholesale Trade	5%	-16%	20%	-8%	2%
Retail Trade	3%	1%	12%	2%	-1%
Other Services (Ex. Public Admin)	1%	-3%	20%	-2%	-1%
Ag., Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	10%	11%	4%	-8%	-13%
Transportation & Warehousing	-16%	-5%	10%	-21%	-13%
Information	-36%	-22%	-12%	-9%	-18%
Construction	-27%	-22%	-25%	-37%	-26%
Manufacturing	-40%	-48%	-39%	-46%	-44%

\* Includes temporary help services and employment services.

Source: Department of Commerce, LEAD, QCEW Total Employment

**Map 1: Top 5 Largest Employer Industries by Prosperity Zone, 2014**



Source: Department of Commerce, LEAD, QCEW Total Employment

**Table 4: North Carolina Industry Changes Since 2000**

	2000	2007	2014	2000-2014	% Chg 2000-2014
Health Care & Social Assistance	401,992	534,224	579,594	177,602	44.2%
Retail Trade	458,632	470,432	478,478	19,846	4.3%
Manufacturing	758,815	537,919	448,623	-310,192	-40.9%
Accommodation & Food Services	279,672	343,872	382,672	103,000	36.8%
Educational Services	288,442	362,901	370,960	82,518	28.6%
Administrative & Waste Services	231,500	246,446	284,159	52,659	22.7%
Public Administration	216,360	228,586	238,343	21,983	10.2%
Professional & Technical Services	146,850	186,115	210,768	63,918	43.5%
Construction	231,066	254,686	178,986	-52,080	-22.5%
Wholesale Trade	166,053	182,706	176,928	10,875	6.5%
Finance & Insurance	125,858	153,075	153,707	27,849	22.1%
Transportation & Warehousing	145,230	140,067	132,682	-12,548	-8.6%
Other Services (Ex. Public Admin)	98,744	104,202	102,771	4,027	4.1%
Management of Companies	85,431	70,771	80,461	-4,970	-5.8%
Information	85,193	74,069	73,577	-11,616	-13.6%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	48,533	56,057	65,625	17,092	35.2%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	47,900	54,143	52,383	4,483	9.4%
Ag., Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	31,340	29,623	28,754	-2,586	-8.3%
All Other	19,909	35,101	17,772	-2,137	-10.7%
<b>Total All Industries</b>	<b>3,867,506</b>	<b>4,064,977</b>	<b>4,057,234</b>	<b>189,728</b>	<b>4.9%</b>

Source: Department of Commerce, LEAD, QCEW Total Employment

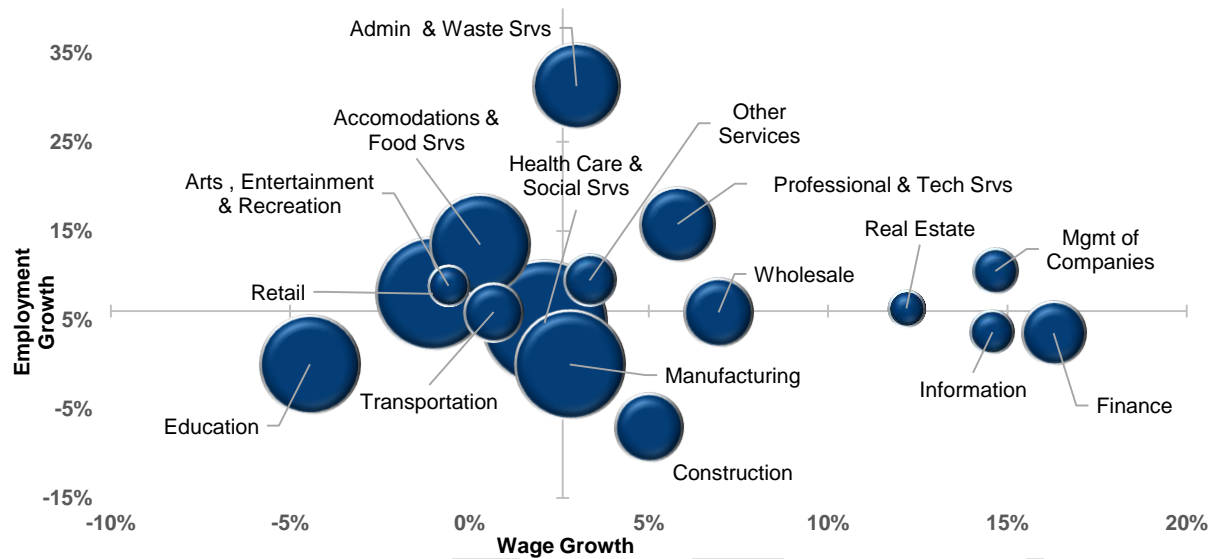
**Table 5: North Carolina Real Wage Growth 2009-2014**

	2009*	2014	% Chg 2009-2014
Finance & Insurance	\$73,117	\$85,029	16.3%
Management of Companies	\$87,037	\$99,802	14.7%
Information	\$64,034	\$73,370	14.6%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	\$39,037	\$43,792	12.2%
Wholesale Trade	\$62,347	\$66,676	6.9%
Ag, Forestry, Fishing & Hunting	\$30,077	\$32,017	6.4%
Professional & Technical Services	\$68,195	\$72,152	5.8%
Construction	\$43,380	\$45,552	5.0%
Other Services (Ex. Public Admin)	\$29,520	\$30,508	3.3%
Administrative & Waste Services	\$31,426	\$32,362	3.0%
Manufacturing	\$53,680	\$55,183	2.8%
Health Care & Social Assistance	\$44,799	\$45,736	2.1%
Transportation & Warehousing	\$45,789	\$46,096	0.7%
Accommodation & Food Services	\$15,543	\$15,589	0.3%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	\$30,538	\$30,358	-0.6%
Retail Trade	\$26,463	\$26,191	-1.0%
Educational Services	\$43,240	\$41,315	-4.5%
<b>Total All Industries</b>	<b>\$43,819</b>	<b>\$44,967</b>	<b>2.6%</b>

\* Wages in 2014 dollars per adjustment from the BLS Consumer Price Index.

Source: Department of Commerce, LEAD, QCEW Total Employment.

**Chart 7: Employment & Wage Growth by Size of Industry, 2009-2014**



Bubble size represents total employment in 2014. Wages are adjusted for inflation per the BLS Consumer Price Index. X-Axis is set to the average wage growth in NC, 6.0%. Y-Axis is set to the total employment growth in NC, 2.6%.

Source: Department of Commerce, LEAD, QCEW Total Employment

**Table 6: Regional Nominal Wage Growth, 2009-2014**

	2009*	2014	Wage Growth
North Central Region	\$45,176	\$49,900	10.5%
Northeast Region	\$32,152	\$35,664	10.9%
Northwest Region	\$31,240	\$34,299	9.8%
Piedmont-Triad Region	\$37,376	\$41,882	12.1%
Sandhills Region	\$32,717	\$35,396	8.2%
Southeast Region	\$33,051	\$35,849	8.5%
Southwest Region	\$44,898	\$51,609	14.9%
Western Region	\$32,645	\$35,481	8.7%
<i>North Carolina</i>	<b><i>\$39,835</i></b>	<b><i>\$44,967</i></b>	<b><i>12.9%</i></b>

Source: Department of Commerce, LEAD, QCEW Total Employment.

**Table 7: Migration & Natural Population Growth Trends by Region**

	2010	2014	Total Change 2010-14	Change Due to Natural Growth	Change Due to Net Migration
North Central	2,167,216	2,308,738	141,522	55,996	85,526
Northeast	535,141	538,461	3,320	2,241	1,079
Northwest	620,537	623,638	3,101	-1,639	4,740
Piedmont-Triad	1,613,008	1,655,979	42,971	15,405	27,566
Sandhills	856,111	873,618	17,507	20,132	-2,625
Southeast	995,343	1,047,966	52,623	20,469	32,154
Southwest	2,067,001	2,202,578	135,577	47,053	88,524
Western	681,334	702,709	21,375	-4,829	26,204
<i>North Carolina</i>	<b>9,535,691</b>	<b>9,953,687</b>	<b>417,996</b>	<b>154,815</b>	<b>263,181</b>

Source: NC Office of State Budget &amp; Management

## **(2) Workforce Development, Education and Training Activities Analysis**

### **(A) The State's Workforce Development Activities**

North Carolina's workforce development system, NCWorks, is a statewide partnership that is putting people back to work and helping businesses connect with the talented workers they need. N.C.'s workforce system consists of programs and networks designed to enable individuals to succeed in the workplace by providing skill development, training and employment services; and to help businesses obtain a skilled workforce by providing employment services, training programs and subsidized employment.

In March 2014, Governor Pat McCrory announced the NCWorks initiative to promote one consistent, cohesive strategy for workforce development across the state of North Carolina. This initiative brought together key workforce partners, including the Department of Commerce, the North Carolina Community College System, and the Department of Public Instruction, to unite the state's workforce development activities under one workforce system. The focus of the initiative is on one goal: connecting North Carolina jobs with North Carolina people through the efficient use of resources, streamlined customer service for citizens and businesses, alignment of programs, and a consistent, cohesive strategy all under one name; NCWorks.

The NCWorks system provides workforce development activities that increase employment, retention and earnings, and increase occupational skill attainment by participants. These programs are designed to improve the quality of the workforce, reduce welfare dependency, link talent to jobs, and enhance the state's productivity and competitiveness.

NCWorks is comprised of a variety of programs with a broad range of activities that serve a diverse group of people of varying ages. Activities for job seekers range from self-service activities online, to staff-assisted services in a workforce office, to multi-year training programs at a public school or community college. Individuals and employers may participate in a single program or activity or may be eligible to receive services through a variety of programs and entities.

In addition, programs serve people with varying levels of education, employment experience, and barriers. Specialized programs, like those offered through the Department of Health and Human Services, provide intensive services to individuals with disabilities or significant barriers to employment. Other services for adults, youth and dislocated workers include job coaching, resume preparation, education and training, work-based learning and supportive services. In many cases, program participants are new to the workforce and require extensive intervention to obtain part-time or full-time employment.



The NCWorks system also works closely with employers throughout the state, helping them find the right candidates and develop training programs that can improve the skills of their current workforce. Workforce development services for businesses include recruiting, assessing, screening, and referring candidates; work-based learning and customized training opportunities; assistive technology and other support for companies that hire people with disabilities; and labor market information to connect employers to a steady pipeline of talented citizens who have the skills to help their businesses thrive.

Core workforce programs are provided to job seekers and employers via local one-stop career centers (in North Carolina, NCWorks Career Centers) and online through NCWorks Online. NCWorks Career Centers are operated by North Carolina's 23 local workforce development boards and are overseen by the state's workforce board, the NCWorks Commission. Career Centers are located throughout the state, serving as frontline touch points to provide job seekers, training seekers and employers access to a variety of employment and training services all under one roof.

NCWorks Online is the state's one-stop online resource for jobs seekers and employers. It is a job-matching portal that helps connect people to jobs and helps businesses find the talent they need. Individuals can develop a resume, assess their skills, find training to gain the skills they need, and apply for jobs. Businesses can find candidates, post jobs, and search for labor market information.

In 2014, the NCWorks Commission completed a review of 20 workforce development program plans, policies and services across five agencies in North Carolina. This review included an analysis of core programs as well as other one-stop delivery system partners. The commission reviewed workforce program funding levels and sources, service provision types, special populations served and business outreach initiatives. The following table summarizes the information obtained during this review: Workforce Development Programs

					Individual Services					Employer Services	
	Federal Funds Received	State Funds Received	Other Funds Received	# of Counties where Services Available	Skills Development & Training	Employment Services	Subsidized Employment	Support Services	Adults (A), Youth (Y) Served	Employment Services	Training Programs
Department of Administration											
American Indian Workforce Development Program	✓			59	✓	✓	✓	✓	A	✓	
Department of Commerce											
Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth Programs (WIOA Title I)	✓			100	✓	✓	✓	✓	AY	✓	✓
Wagner-Peyser (WIOA Title III)				100	✓	✓			AY	✓	
Trade Adjustment Assistance	✓			100	✓	✓	✓	✓	A	✓	✓
Veterans' Program	✓			100	✓	✓	✓	✓	A	✓	✓
Apprenticeship	✓	✓	✓	100	✓				A		✓

NC Community College System											
BioNetwork		✓		100	✓				A	✓	✓
Customized Training		✓		100	✓				A	✓	✓
Small Business Center Network		✓		100	✓	✓			A	✓	
Adult Education and Family Literacy, Basic Skills (WIOA Title I)	✓	✓		100	✓				A		
Occupational Continuing Education		✓	✓	100	✓	✓			A		
Postsecondary Career Technical and Vocational Education	✓	✓	✓	100	✓	✓			A		
Department of Health & Human Services											
Community Services Block Grant	✓			100	✓	✓	✓	✓	A,Y		
Food and Nutrition Services	✓	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	✓	✓	A		
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	✓	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	✓	✓	A		
Employment Services, Vocational Rehabilitation (WIOA Title IV)	✓	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	✓	✓	A	✓	✓
Employment Services, Services for the Blind (WIOA Title IV)	✓	✓		100	✓	✓	✓	✓	A	✓	✓
Long-term, Vocational Support Services	✓	✓		100	✓				A,Y		
Senior Community Service Employment	✓	✓	✓	100	✓	✓	✓	✓	A		✓
Department of Public Instruction											
Career & Technical Education	✓	✓		100	✓	✓			Y		

Through its assessment of the workforce development system, the NCWorks Commission found North Carolina's programs to be service-driven with a focus on mission and target populations. Overall, the programs prioritize employment, career counseling and assessments for the adult population. In addition, the commission found that while many programs provide service to employers, these efforts were not a focus of the programs.

As illustrated in the above table, the majority of North Carolina's workforce development programs offer some type of skill development and employment service for adults. Although programs provide similar services like skill development, training and employment services, the programs serve very different target populations.

Below is a summary of the main activities of core programs, mandatory one-stop delivery system partners, and additional workforce partners, as well as the populations they serve.

## Core Programs

Agency	Program	Program and Activities with Target Population
North Carolina Department of Commerce	Adult Program	The Adult program through the Department of Commerce prepares individuals for participation in the labor force by providing access to employment planning, career counseling, job training, and workforce services ranging from skill assessment, labor market information, consumer reports on training programs, job search, placement assistance, literacy activities, and support services. Education and training activities may include: occupational skills training; on-the-job training; incumbent worker workplace training; skill upgrading; customized training; and job readiness training. The program is designed to serve the general public and unemployed or underemployed jobseekers.
North Carolina Department of Commerce	Dislocated Worker Program	The Dislocated Worker program through the Department of Commerce prepares those dislocated from employment for participation in the labor force by providing access to employment planning, career counseling, job training, and workforce services ranging from skill assessment, labor market information, consumer reports on training programs, job search, placement assistance, literacy activities, and support services. Education and training activities may include: occupational skills training; on-the-job training; incumbent worker workplace training; skill upgrading; customized training; and job readiness training. The program is designed to serve individuals dislocated from employment or those who received notification of pending dislocation.
North Carolina Department of Commerce	Youth Program	The Youth program through the Department of Commerce prepares youth with barriers to employment for academic and employment success. The program serves out-of-school youth aged 16-24 and low-income in-school youth aged 14-21. The youth program provides youth a variety of options for improving educational and skill competencies, supportive services and effective connections to employers. Youth services shall provide assessments of the individual's academic level, basic skills, occupational skills, prior work experience, employability, interests, aptitudes, and support service needs for the purpose of identifying career pathways for the individual. In addition, these assessments will yield the individual's service strategies linked to their career pathway's education and employment goals and establish the necessary activities required to complete postsecondary education, occupational education and preparation for employment. In order to achieve the individuals chosen career path and career readiness, youth have access to fourteen defined program elements to include comprehensive counseling and mentoring. Available education and training activities may include: tutoring and study skills leading to the completion of secondary school, or dropout prevention; alternative secondary school services; summer employment opportunities; work experience (paid and unpaid), including internships and job shadowing; occupational skills training; and leadership development opportunities. The program is designed to serve out-of-school youth aged 16-24 and low-income in-school youth aged 14-21 with identified barriers to employment.

## Core Programs

Agency	Program	Program and Activities with Target Population
North Carolina Community College System	Basic Skills	The Basic Skills program through the North Carolina Community College System provides adult education and literacy services to assist adults to complete a secondary school education and/or become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency. North Carolina's 58 community colleges offer classes in Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education and English as a Second Language. Instruction is offered in reading, writing, mathematics and English. Participants who do not have a high school diploma may work towards a high school equivalency or Adult High School diploma. In addition, the program assists adults who are parents to obtain the educational skills necessary to become full partners in the educational development of their children. The program is designed to serve individuals lacking basic literacy skills.
North Carolina Department of Commerce	Wagner-Peyser Act Program	The Wagner-Peyser program through the Department of Commerce provides all job seekers access to self-service or staff-assisted job search preparation, job referral, and placement assistance. Employers may receive general or specialized recruitment services through self-service or staff assisted job referral and placement. Depending on the needs of the labor market, other services may be available through the Wagner-Peyser program, such as job seeker skills assessments, career guidance, workshops, and referral to training. Other services offered to employers include assistance in the development of job order requirements and skills, arranging job fairs, and assisting with job restructuring. The program is designed to serve the general public, unemployed or underemployed job seekers, and business owners.
North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services	Vocational Rehabilitation Program	The Vocational Rehabilitation, Employment and Training program through the Department of Health and Human Services provides an array of activities designed to help individuals with disabilities prepare for, and engage in, gainful employment consistent with their strengths, interests and abilities. Services include skill assessments, counseling, training, education, transportation, job placement, assistive technology and other support services for people with physical, psychiatric, or intellectual disabilities as well as those who are deaf or hard of hearing or have other communicative disorders to assist them with living independently and with finding and maintaining employment. The program is designed to serve job seekers with disabilities.
North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services	Services for the Blind, Employment and Training	The Services for the Blind, Employment and Training program through the Department of Health and Human Services provides counseling, training, education, transportation, job placement, assistive technology, and other support services for blind and visually impaired people as well as people with vision and hearing loss to assist them with living independently and with finding and maintaining employment. The program is designed to serve job seekers who are blind or visually impaired.

## Mandatory One-stop Delivery System Partners

Agency	Program	Program and Activities with Target Population
North Carolina Department of Public Instructions	Career and Technical Education (Perkins)	<p>The Department of Public Instruction is the primary agent for Perkins funds. The Career and Technical Education program through the Department of Public Instruction provides middle and high school students the opportunity to take Career and Technical Education courses that are aligned with the 16 National Career Clusters and 79 related career pathways. The 16 Career Clusters include Manufacturing, Transportation, Health Science, Education, and Information Technology, among others. In addition to classroom and lab instruction, students participate in work-based learning experiences and in student organization activities.</p> <p>The program is designed to serve students in grades 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup>, many of whom have a barrier to employment.</p>
North Carolina Community College System	Post-Secondary Career, Technical, and Vocational Education (Perkins)	<p>The Post-Secondary Career, Technical, and Vocational Education program through the North Carolina Community College System provides individuals the opportunity to expand their education in one of the 260 programs aligned with diverse industries across North Carolina. Currently included are Agricultural &amp; Natural Resources, Biological &amp; Chemical Technologies, Business Technologies, Commercial &amp; Artistic Production, Construction Technologies, Engineering Technologies, Health Sciences, Industrial Technologies, Public Services Technologies, and Transportation System Technologies. Other program activities include: building rigorous programs of study by integrating academic and technical skills; linking high school and community college technical programs; improving the use of technology in instruction; and providing professional development for faculty, administrators and counselors.</p>
North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services	Community Services Block Grant	<p>The Community Services Block Grant program through the Department of Health and Human Services provides support to individuals who are currently at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. The program provides funding to Community Action Agencies and Limited Purpose Agencies to carry out activities that enable low-income families to move out of poverty and to become self-sufficient. Low-income participants are assisted with employment, education, housing, emergency assistance, community involvement, and more effective use of resources. The program is designed to serve low-income families and individuals.</p>
North Carolina Department of Administration	American Indian Workforce Development Program	<p>The American Indian Workforce Development program through the North Carolina Department of Administration provides comprehensive employment and training activities for Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian individuals in order to develop academic, occupational and literacy skills to achieve self-sufficiency. Services may include: classroom training, work experiences, job search and placement assistance, and supportive services. The program is designed to serve unemployed, underemployed and low-income American Indian job seekers.</p>
U.S. Department of Labor	Job Corps Program	<p>The Job Corps program administered by the U.S. Department of Labor and delivered by local Job Corps centers is a no-cost education and vocational training program that helps young people ages 16 through 24 improve the quality of their lives through vocational and academic training. North Carolina's four Job Corps centers may provide the following activities: academic training, including basic reading and math; courses in independent living, employability skills, and social skills to help students transition into the workplace; career technical training in several vocational trades including Advanced Manufacturing, Automotive Construction, Business Technology and Health; GED/high school programs; and support services. The program is designed to serve young people ages 16 through 24.</p>

## Mandatory One-stop Delivery System Partners

Agency	Program	Program and Activities with Target Population
North Carolina Department of Commerce	Veterans Services Program	The Veterans Services program through the Department of Commerce provides specialized services to assist veterans and eligible persons with employment services, including case management of veterans with significant barriers to employment and extensive employer outreach conducted on behalf of veterans. Eligible participants are served by Wagner-Peyser and WIOA integrated staff in the state's network of NCWorks Career Centers. Disabled Veterans Outreach Specialists (DVOPS) offer intensive services designed to assist veterans in overcoming barriers and becoming employed. Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVER) conduct employer outreach on behalf of veterans, conduct staff training on veteran services and educate employers and other groups on the benefits and requirements associated with hiring veterans. The program is designed to serve veterans and eligible persons with barriers to employment.
U.S. Department of Labor	National Farmworker Jobs Program	The National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP), directed by the U.S. Department of Labor and delivered in North Carolina by a local nonprofit, provides eligible farmworkers and their dependents with the means to reach self-sufficiency through better employment. The NFJP provides access to education services and job training, support, and additional services suited to the customer's career goals. Activities may include job search assistance, skills assessments, career counseling, classroom training, customized training programs, emergency service assistance, English as a Second Language, job placements, on the job training, work experiences, pre-employment training, remedial education and GED preparation. The program is designed to serve eligible farmworker or a dependent of an eligible farmworker.
North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services	Senior Community Service Employment Program	The Senior Community Service Employment Program through the Department of Health and Human Services provides individuals 55 and older who are economically disadvantaged with part-time community service assignments while helping them transition into unsubsidized employment. The program empowers low-income older workers to achieve economic independence while training in community service activities that assist in gaining marketable skills to re-enter the workforce. The program is designed to serve low-income job seekers age 55 and older.
North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services/Division of Social Services	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)	The WorkFirst, Employment and Training program through the Department of Health and Human Services provides work experience opportunities for recipients to gain skills for employment, become employed, keep a job and become self-sufficient. The program is designed to serve low-income job seekers.
North Carolina Department of Commerce	Trade Adjustment Assistance Program	The Trade Adjustment Assistance program through the Department of Commerce provides re-employment assistance to workers who have been negatively impacted by foreign trade. Through job referrals, training, and income support, this program is designed to help workers find new jobs. Services may include: skills assessments, career counseling, labor market information, training, income support, job search allowances, relocation allowances, and wage subsidies. The program is designed to serve trade-affected workers.

**Mandatory One-stop Delivery System Partners**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Program</b>	<b>Program and Activities with Target Population</b>
North Carolina Department of Commerce	Unemployment Insurance Benefits	Unemployment Benefits through the Department of Commerce, Division of Employment Security provides unemployment insurance payments to eligible participants who are unemployed due to no fault of their own. Recipients are required to be able, available and actively seeking work. Work search activities must include: registration in NCWorks Online, the internet based job search and referral system provided by the North Carolina Department of Commerce; proof of job search activities; and participation in an employability assessment interview (EAI) at an NCWorks Career Center. The program is designed to serve eligible individuals who have become unemployed.
U.S. Department of Labor	YouthBuild	YouthBuild, overseen by the U.S. Department of Labor and operated by local community organizations, serves low-income young people, aged 16 to 24, to work full-time toward their GED or high school diploma while learning job skills by building affordable housing in their neighborhoods. Emphasis is placed on leadership development, community service, and the creation of a positive mini-community of adults and youth committed to each other's success. At exit, they are placed in college, jobs, or both. The program is designed to serve low-income, high school dropouts between the ages of 16 and 24.

## Additional State Workforce Partners

Agency	Program	Program and Activities with Target Population
North Carolina Department of Commerce	Apprenticeship	<p>The Apprenticeship program through the Department of Commerce provides on-the-job learning with job related education experience. Working with the community colleges, technical institutions, universities, and individual employers, registered apprentices are provided a structured training that enhances their skills on the job.</p> <p>The program is designed to serve incumbent workers and business owners.</p>
North Carolina Community College System	BioNetwork Program	<p>The BioNetwork through the North Carolina Community College System provides education and training resources for the biotechnology and life science industry sector and for community college credit and non-credit programming through the customized training program, laboratory resources, course development and delivery, e-learning tools, workshops, and collaborative projects. BioNetwork also provides teacher training, STEM outreach, and career guidance to K-14.</p> <p>The program is designed to serve individuals, students, teachers, and employers.</p>
North Carolina Community College System	Customized Training Program	<p>The Customized Training program through the North Carolina Community College System supports the economic development efforts of the State by providing education and training opportunities for individuals at eligible businesses and industries. The program is designed to react quickly to the needs of businesses to ensure the presence of a well-trained workforce. Services may include pre-employment training and post-employment training. The program is designed to serve incumbent workers and new, expanding and existing businesses.</p>
North Carolina Community College System	Human Resources Development	<p>The Human Resource Development program through the North Carolina Community College System provides skill assessment services, employability skills training, and career development counseling to unemployed and underemployed adults based on six core components of assessment, positive self-concept, employability skills, communication skills, problem-solving skills, and awareness of the impact of information technology in the workplace. The program is designed to serve unemployed or underemployed job seekers.</p>
North Carolina Community College System	Small Business Center Network	<p>The Small Business Center Network program through the North Carolina Community College System provides education and training, counseling, referral, and information to prospective and existing North Carolina small business owners. With one location at each community college, the 58 Small Business Centers are community-based providers of entrepreneurship training, business counseling, referral and information. The program is designed to serve individuals interested in starting a business and current business owners.</p>



#### Additional State Workforce Partners

Agency	Program	Program and Activities with Target Population
North Carolina Community College System	Workforce Continuing Education	The Workforce Continuing Education program through the North Carolina Community College System provides post-secondary students the opportunity to attain education and training through participation in one of 800+ short-term training courses. These programs provide instruction around skill competencies that lead to a recognized credential (licensure, certification, renewal, registry listing) and/or meets local workforce labor needs. The program is designed to serve the general population, unemployed or underemployed job seekers, and incumbent workers.
North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services	Food and Nutrition Services, Employment and Training	The Food and Nutrition Services, Employment and Training program through the Department of Health and Human Services prepares adult Food and Nutrition Services recipients' for employment through assistance with job searches and other work activities as well as short-term training opportunities. The program is designed to serve low-income job seekers.

## (B) Strength and Weakness of Workforce Development Activities

### **Strengths**

In 2014, the NCWorks Commission approved the biennial strategic plan with a shared mission and vision for the workforce development system. This plan was the result of the commission's desire to create a comprehensive workforce development system that is transformable, sustainable, and demand-driven. The four strategic goals as approved take advantage of the system's current strengths and proposes new strategies for aligning the services in a way that results in high quality workers trained for in-demand occupations. The plan also aligns with Governor McCrory's NCWorks initiative that reshaped how North Carolina's workforce system responds to the needs of job seekers and employers.

Overall, North Carolina's workforce development programs offer a wide variety of services to a broad range of individuals with the goal of helping jobseekers and students obtain and/or maintain employment through training, education, and/or support. North Carolina's workforce development system is designed to help workers find good paying jobs by assessing skills, providing information on careers, connecting people to needed training and education programs, and referring people to jobs. Overall, the commission found North Carolina's programs to be service driven with a focus on mission and target populations.

Programs provide similar services like resume development, career counseling, and skill development. However, the commission found that although it seems duplicative, North Carolina's workforce development programs serve very different target populations. Programs have specialized services geared towards meeting the needs of their targeted customers. In addition, the commission found that while many programs provide services to employers, these efforts were not particularly focused.

### ***NCWorks***

NCWorks is a statewide partnership that's putting people back to work and helping businesses connect with the talented workers they need. The three NCWorks partners are NC Department of Commerce, the NC Community College System, and the NC Department of Public Instruction. These agencies and their workforce programs work together to ensure that citizens are able to get the help they need to find sustainable employment, including workshops, one-on-one coaching, and training programs, and are prepared for the jobs employers want to bring to the state. The partners also work closely with businesses throughout the state, helping them find the right candidates and develop training programs that can improve the skills of their current workers. By offering these services, North Carolina's system is connecting employers to a steady pipeline of talented citizens who have the skills to make their businesses thrive. The partnership was launched by Governor Pat McCrory, to better serve North Carolina by

strengthening our partnerships between business, education and workforce agencies for more effective programs.

### ***1000 in 100***

Citing the need for workforce and business leaders to work hand-in-hand to provide training that will equip workers with skills that are in-demand, Governor Pat McCrory launched the "1000 in 100" workforce development initiative in September 2014. The initiative was a fact-finding tour in which local workforce development teams visited 1,000 businesses throughout North Carolina's 100 counties in 100 days to learn the skill sets the state's economy demanded. The goal was to learn first-hand the workforce needs of employers, to develop a stronger set of services to businesses. The "1000 in 100" project was part of the NCWorks initiative.

### ***Integrated Service Delivery***

The Division of Workforce Solutions implemented the integrated service delivery model in conjunction with the local workforce development boards in 2013. Below are the key features of this model:

- integrated Career Center staffing;
- integrated customer pool;
- integrated customer flow; and
- integrated technology

### **Integrated Services to Better Serve Customers**

- While all career center partner programs are valued, WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and the Wagner-Peyser Employment Services program are the operational backbone of the centers. As a result, these programs are the initial focus of a customer-focused, skill-based, integrated service strategy.
- An integrated customer flow was developed and implemented that responds to customer need – not just to program requirements. Staff-assisted services are emphasized and center services will be continuously promoted and provided until the customer's goal has been achieved. This integrated flow includes three major functions that include customer welcome, skill development, and employment activities.

- The customer flow function is fulfilled by integrated, cross-trained staff with functional leadership. The integrated, functional teams will include both Wagner-Peyser and WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker funded employees and the focus is on the assigned function – not just the requirements of a particular funding stream.
- Another very important functional team provides services to employers that both assists in the alignment of center services with the needs of employers, as well as develop employment opportunities for center jobseeker customers. This team may operate on a regional labor market basis, but is a valuable asset to each center in the area.
- All career center customers (when eligibility permits) are enrolled in the performance pool of both the WIOA Title I Adult program and Wagner-Peyser program during the first visit to a career center. All Trade Act customers will also be enrolled in the performance pool of the WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker Program.

### ***Career Center Service Model Values Both Skills and Jobs***

- All career center customers, including unemployment insurance claimants, are provided with the opportunity to know their skills, improve their skills, and get the best job possible with their skills. Every jobseeker that enters the career center leaves as a better job candidate because of the value-added services received.
- The career center customer flow includes a first-visit, standardized initial skills assessment, easy access to a wide range of skill development services, and the opportunity to improve employment opportunities through skill upgrading, skill validation, and credentialing.

### ***Career Center Customers Accessing Skill Development and Training Services***

North Carolina's career centers develop, continuously improve, and actively promote a wide range of skill development opportunities through multiple service delivery methods. All services in this robust "product box" are available to all center customers, embedded in an integrated customer flow, and easily accessed by eligible customers with the support of all Center staff. Local Workforce Boards are very strongly encouraged to invest and dedicate more of their valuable resources to pre-vocational skill improvement intensive services.

### ***Implement Lean Processes and Streamline Service Delivery by Removing Bureaucratic Barriers and Waste***

- In order to better serve customers staff time is reserved for value-added service delivery. To make integrated services a reality, the North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions actively works to streamline requirements and alleviate bureaucratic barriers to support the delivery of customer-focused quality service. The division is working to remove unneeded paperwork, reduce unnecessary documentation and reporting, change outdated policies that inhibit integrated and efficient service delivery and provide modern technology that accommodates the integrated service delivery approach.
- The division focuses its monitoring on quality service delivery and with “compliance” as a necessary responsibility, but not as an end in itself. Local workforce boards will be expected to respond to this continuous, state-level streamlining, by analyzing and streamlining their own policies, procedures, and practices.

### ***Redesign and Re-Purpose Employer Services***

- Services to employers move beyond listing jobs and making referrals of job candidates. Local staff closely align and coordinate with state and local economic development partners to ensure a system of workforce services that helps North Carolina employers reach their full potential. Local staff must be aware of the current business climate and the human resource needs of employers. Emphasis is placed on assisting existing North Carolina employers with accessing workforce services; including matching employers with career center participants that have the skills they require and assisting them access available activities, such as work-based learning, pre-employment skill development, and apprenticeship programs.
- A renewed emphasis is on developing sector strategies that target high-growth industries, such as green industries, healthcare, life sciences, emerging technology and advanced manufacturing.

### **NCWorks Certified Career Pathways**

North Carolina has been an innovator in developing strategies that support transitions from education to employment. Founded on partner collaboration and targeted resources, career pathways meet and exceed the requirements of WIOA and have become a pillar of workforce development initiatives in the state.

Certified Career Pathways are created by regional and local teams that consist of engaged employers, workforce development boards, high schools and community

colleges. The most successful Certified Career Pathways also include universities, local community leaders and chambers of commerce as team members. \

Statewide certification further establishes NC as a leader in workforce development. Certified Career Pathways are integrated, seamless systems of education and workforce development programs, initiatives and resources that focus on matching worker preparation to employer need in high-demand occupations. Following are the criteria for certification as an NCWorks Certified Career Pathway.

### ***Demand-Driven and Data-Informed***

Pathways must be created in sectors of the economy that have a demonstrated economic and workforce development need. These sectors must be validated by all partners and meet one or more of the following indicators:

- Growing, with a demand for jobs and included in economic development plans to attract industry that requires skilled workers;
- Identified as having documented gaps in the labor supply and shortages of skilled workers to fill current or future openings;
- Aligned with the State's Jobs Plan; and
- Inclusive of occupations identified on the NC Department of Commerce's Hot Jobs publication.

### ***Employer Engagement***

Pathways are developed through partnerships with a group of engaged employers that represent various aspects of the industry sector. Engaged employers:

- Commit to long term participation in the pathway system;
- Determine which occupations within the cluster are included in the pathway;
- Identify knowledge, skills and abilities needed to work in this industry sector;
- Identify learning outcomes and help design and vet the education and training components;
- Provide for and participate in a variety of work-based learning opportunities;
- Recommend certificates and credentials required for key occupations in the pathway; and
- Hire individuals who successfully exit the pathway.

### ***Collaborative***

Pathways must be developed collaboratively and have input, leadership and commitment from the following organizations (at a minimum):

- Local Educational Agency - representation from secondary school systems in the identified region; could include Superintendent, CTE Director, or Curriculum Director;
- Higher Education - representation from public and private 2- and 4- year institutions in the identified region; could include President, Vice President/Chief Academic Officer, CTE Dean, Vice President/Workforce Development or Continuing Education program area deans;
- Workforce Development Board - representation from the local workforce development boards in the identified region; could include director, business service representative, or program area specialists;
- Industry – representation from employers within the sector for the pathway being developed; and
- Community – representation from local leaders in the collaborative such as commissioners and town leaders as well as local economic development partnerships and Chambers of Commerce.

### ***Career Awareness***

Career awareness requires knowledgeable system staff advising students and jobseekers on the multiple opportunities along a high-growth pathway. At a minimum, career advising and counseling strategies must include:

- A description of the career advising strategies in place for all local partners working with students and jobseekers. This descriptions must include professional development and cross-training opportunities which ensure and sustain knowledge of and consistent use of the career pathway across agencies;
- Academic support and advising of students in setting career goals beginning in middle school and continuing throughout high school and community college;
- The use of short-term or time limited work-based learning opportunities (such as job shadowing, mentorships, field trips, etc.) that help individuals explore careers and prepare individuals to enter longer term work-based learning opportunities such as paid internships, related work experience, pre-apprenticeship, registered apprenticeship, etc.;
- A continuum of other activities around career exploration, awareness, the relationship between the individual's interest, skills and abilities to occupational choice, skill development, etc.;
- The use of labor market data and job growth projections in the identified region;
- Deliberate connection of older youth and adults to NCWorks Online; and
- Joint professional development by all partners to ensure consistent understanding of workforce demands and career and economic development in the region.

### ***Articulation and Coordination***

A program of study includes a comprehensive, structured approach for delivering academic and technical education to prepare individuals for postsecondary education and career success that connects skilled graduates to job opportunities. Rigorous programs of study must:

- Provide integrated academic, technical, and occupational skills training through classroom, on the job, online and experiential learning for individuals to meet employer needs;
- Offer secondary students the opportunity to earn postsecondary credit through programs such as Career and College Promise;
- Provide individuals opportunity to earn academic and technical certificates, diplomas, and degrees;
- Include coordinated, non-duplicative progression of courses that allow for articulated credit, for prior learning and in accordance with existing articulation agreements between institutions; and
- Allow individuals to stack credentials such as career readiness certificates, industry validated recognized third party certifications, and state licenses or certificates.

### ***Work-Based Learning***

Pathways must include work-based learning as a strategy for career exploration and workforce engagement related to the individual's program of study or training/employability plan. Work-based learning is a critical part of the pathway system that:

- Provides skills development related to the individual's program of study or training plan and offers course credit;
- Includes in-depth industry tours, shadowing, mentorships, project based learning, service learning, cooperative education, structured volunteer experiences, junior achievement, internships, apprenticeships, etc.; and
- Provides for a structured experience that is supported with demonstrated commitment from employers.

### ***Multiple Entry/Exit Points***

Pathways must be designed to easily allow individuals to enter and exit at different points without duplicating credit/effort. Where possible, pathways must:

- Include non-degree training that articulates credit to degree pathways (including awarding credit for appropriate prior learning experiences, attained third-party certifications or Badges);



- Provide special considerations for veterans to demonstrate skills based on experience (i.e., MOS or Badges) and provide accelerated educational/training opportunities for gap fulfillment; and
- Include postsecondary registration with Department of Labor's RACC program to offer registered apprenticeship completers a pathway to complete their postsecondary degree.

### ***Evaluation***

Pathways must include a plan for assessment of outcomes that are developed and approved by the pathway partnership team. This plan must include:

- Baseline data;
- Definition of success including goals and timelines;
- Regular assessments; and
- Mechanism for updating the pathway and associated strategies.

### **Meet New Performance Expectations: Success Defined Through New Quality Service Metrics**

North Carolina is working to move beyond the WIOA and Wagner-Peyser common measures that focus exclusively on silo and programmatic performance measures to value-added service delivery. Shared success metrics that value inputs and results are being developed to better track center performance— not just performance standards management.

### ***System-wide performance measures***

In 2014, the workforce development system worked collaboratively to design and implement universal performance measures. The commission which oversaw these efforts, recognized that by using common metrics and applying them across a wide range of workforce programs, the performance measures offer a comprehensive program-by-program look at North Carolina's workforce system. This information on the status of the former workforce program participants was used to develop a set of measures for each program for the cohort of former workforce program participants.

North Carolina's universal performance measures include:

- percent employed;
- average wage of those employed;
- percent enrolled in North Carolina public higher education and/or workforce development program;
- percent enrolled in the University of North Carolina System;
- percent enrolled in the NC Community College System;
- percent enrolled in other workforce development programs; and

- percent not found in available records.

The NCWorks Commission produces an annual report that provides the information above for each workforce development program in North Carolina.

### ***Common Follow-Up System***

North Carolina workforce development data is provided annually to the N.C. Department of Commerce Common Follow-up System (CFS), administered by the Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD). The CFS database contains information on:

- individuals that have participated in publically supported education, employment, and training programs in North Carolina;
- services received by each individual; and
- wages from employers covered by North Carolina's Unemployment Insurance Laws.

Staff from LEAD use CFS to match information from an individual's workforce development system participation with wage records to determine the employment status and wages of each individual. It is the only database currently available in North Carolina that collects workforce data from multiple agencies and can be used to determine the employment status of individuals participating in the workforce development system.

Data from CFS is used to determine the annual performance of North Carolina's workforce development programs and is a robust tool which helps the workforce development system respond to the needs of the economy.

## Limitations

Even with some of the best programs in the country, there is an opportunity to improve North Carolina's workforce development system. For example, there are many places across the state where a seamless system for workforce development will better serve customers.

The commission recognizes that further integrating programs and services and ensuring that the system is customer-centered will transform North Carolina's workforce development system. This will help ensure that programs serve customers beyond their funding source, individual missions, and location. Beyond common goals and desired outcomes, programs have the opportunity to strengthen outreach efforts to include a common brand and shared marketing efforts.

While our system is complex, North Carolina aims to simplify the message for our customers. The commission understands businesses want services that provide value to their company, are easy to understand, and accessible. Integrated business services ensure that employers understand what the system can offer and their unique needs are met from the beginning.

North Carolina's workforce development system has some of the best programs in the country that train workers to meet the needs of businesses. There is an opportunity to increase the number of businesses who take advantage of these services through improved outreach and communication. In addition, the workforce development system needs a strong relationship with economic development organizations across the state to understand the needs of the current and future economy. This strong relationship will also help the workforce development system prepare the workers that are needed by new and expanding businesses in North Carolina.

The current system is operated by five different state agencies. It is essential that moving forward, information provided to customers is consistent and targets high growth areas. Providing consistent information to individuals and strong programs in critical career clusters will not only help individuals find good-paying jobs, but it will also help businesses find the talent they need to grow.

The workforce development system must also gather, evaluate, and utilize feedback from businesses and individuals about their experience with the system. This information will help the system and its individual programs understand what's working, and where improvements are most urgently needed.

North Carolina's workforce programs supports several independent case management/data collection systems. It is imperative that consistent data sharing processes address referral tracking, common intake, and service delivery.

While these limitations have not historically impeded programs from meeting the needs of customers, they do impact the creation of a seamless workforce system. The NCWorks Commission, which is focused on developing an innovative, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system, took these into account with the creation of the biennial strategic plan. The plan provides a roadmap for how the state workforce programs will achieve the goals and objectives that will address these limitations while creating a more customer-centric system that listens and responds to the needs of businesses, and trains workers to be successful in the current and future economy.

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## **(C) State Workforce Development Capacity**

As previously mentioned, North Carolina's workforce development system is comprised of a variety of programs, services and activities. The system serves people with varying levels of education, employment experience, needs, and barriers. Specialized programs, like those offered through the Department of Health and Human Services, provide intensive services to individuals with disabilities or significant barriers to employment.

North Carolina is exceptionally poised to implement the Opportunity Act and the NCWorks Commission has been working to align the agencies responsible for the six core programs. Specifically, a System Alignment and Transformation Committee of the commission has assembled a group of state agency leaders to help coordinate and integrate workforce programs across agencies. This state-agency group is working on policy alignment, a unified branding strategy, and a unified business services strategy to ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach to workforce development. By establishing a unified brand identity and clearly communicating this brand to customers, the system can sharpen its focus, avoid system fragmentation, and eliminate costly duplication.

The six WIOA core workforce programs are provided to job seekers and employers via local one-stop career centers (in North Carolina, NCWorks Career Centers), online at the state's official job matching and labor exchange portal, NCWorks Online at local vocational rehabilitation offices, and at community colleges. NCWorks Career Centers are operated by North Carolina's 23 local workforce development boards and are overseen by the state's workforce investment board, the NCWorks Commission. These centers provide Title I and III services and referrals to Title II and IV services. Approximately 80 Career Centers are located throughout the state, serving as frontline touch points to provide job seekers, training seekers, and employers access to a variety of employment and training services all under one roof. In addition there are approximately another 20 or so career center outposts where services are provided.

These NCWorks Career Centers provide workforce development services as well as access to other programs and activities carried out by One-Stop partners identified in the WIOA. The programs identified in the WIOA are listed below, yet North Carolina recognizes that all of these programs and activities are not available in all parts of the state:

- Adult Education and Literacy
- Carl Perkins Career & Technical Education
- Community Services Block Grants
- HUD Employment and Training Programs

- Indian and Native American Program
- Job Corps
- Local Veterans' Employment Representatives and Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program
- Migrant & Seasonal Farm Worker Program
- National Farmworker Jobs Program
- Rehabilitation Act Title I Programs
- Senior Community Service Employment Program
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
- Trade Adjustment Assistance Programs
- Unemployment Compensation Programs
- Wagner-Peyser
- WIOA Adult
- WIOA Dislocated Worker
- WIOA Youth
- YouthBuild

Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Youth (Title I) are assisted at career centers by trained staff who use labor market information to help customers find quality jobs in high demand industries.

Basic services provided to job seekers and those seeking to upgrade their skills include:

- career assessment and guidance;
- access to training and education programs;
- learn about job fairs and workshops;
- information on the job market;
- assistance with searching for jobs;
- resume and cover letter preparation;
- practice interviewing for jobs;
- free computer and internet access; and
- help registering with and using NCWorks Online.

Services provided to employers include:

- job applicant screening and qualified candidate referrals;
- valuable and up-to-date labor market facts and projections, such as wages;
- information on tax credits for hiring particular groups of workers;
- space to conduct job interviews;
- help arranging job fairs;
- workshops on employer-related subjects;
- employee training resources;
- layoff/closure prevention services for employers; and
- information about federal bonding (insurance for hiring at-risk workers).

To increase capacity to serve customers, NCWorks Career Centers have embarked on an integrated services delivery model. *Integrated services delivery* is organized around services to customers, not discrete programs offered in silos. Centers implementing this system deploy integrated staffing and utilize integrated technology to generate an integrated customer pool and customer flow. Integrated staffing refers to center staff organized by function, not by program or employer (funding source), with the purpose of serving customers efficiently and effectively. Staff organized by function is cross-trained so that all center staff has the capacity to serve all customers and is knowledgeable about all services the center offers.

Integrated technology refers to the single, web-based system (NCWorks Online) that provides job matching services to job seekers and employers, as well as program and client management/participant tracking used by staff. It is this web-based system that helps achieve an integrated customer pool, where all customers (when eligibility permits) are enrolled in both the WIOA Title I Adult program and Wagner-Peyser program; and all Trade Adjustment Act customers are enrolled in the WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker program.

Integrated customer flow refers to four major functions found at a career center that comprise customer welcome, skill development, employment services, and employer services. Integrated customer flow responds to customer needs, not just to program requirements. Adults and Dislocated Workers are able to take advantage of career services, training services, and access to data, information and analysis which are offered in a more streamlined, customer-centric approach. Each new customer receives a one-on-one initial assessment to determine that customer's need and to register in NCWorks Online, North Carolina's web-based job-matching system.

In serving Title I customers, career centers work with local community partners, non-profit organizations and public schools to meet their employment and training needs. With a renewed focus on skill-development services for job seekers, there is also a renewed emphasis to put youth customers into work-based learning experiences, such as on-the-job training and internships, and in serving out-of-school youth.

In every community where there are NCWorks Career Centers, local Vocational Rehabilitation offices provide counseling staff, vocational evaluators, human resource placement specialists and other staff as appropriate to meet the needs of those individuals who enter an NCWorks Career Center and require the specialized services offered by Vocational Rehabilitation. Specific arrangements and staffing patterns by Vocational Rehabilitation staff vary from site to site depending on local needs and agreements. Enhanced working relationships with key partners of the workforce

development system such as Social Services, NC Division of Employment Security, NC Community College System, and other local partnerships allow all the agencies to better meet the needs of the individual.

The Department of Health and Human Services (overseeing Title IV) continues to be an active partner throughout North Carolina to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access core workforce services. Vocational Rehabilitation staff are represented at the state level as well as on local workforce development boards. DHHS remains an active partner with the workforce development system and supports the NCWorks concept to provide more universal access to placement and training services; to integrate programs by offering a common core of information and services; and by offering consumers more choices regarding where and how they get services.

Adult Education and Family Literacy Act programs (Title II) are offered through North Carolina's Community College system. There are currently 77 Adult Education and Literacy providers that operate under the auspices of the NC Community College System as the lead agency for Title II: 58 community colleges and 19 community-based organizations. In addition, there are 33 providers that offer English Language and Civics Education.

North Carolina will build on a solid foundation of current programming and transition models to address the three new requirements included in the definition of Adult Education and Literacy Activities:

- *Integrated Education and Training* (providing adult education/literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation/occupational cluster). Integrated Education and Training aims to lead to individual educational and career advancement.
- *Workplace Preparation Activities* to help individuals acquire basic academic skills, critical thinking skills, digital literacy skills and self-management skills (including soft skills and the skills needed to transition into and complete postsecondary education, training or obtain employment).
- *Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education*. This combines language and cultural literacy, with "civics education" including knowledge of American government, individual freedom and the responsibilities of citizenship.

There is community college representation on all 23 workforce development boards in North Carolina.

Staff at NCWorks Career Centers, Community Colleges, and Vocational Rehabilitation offices all maintain good referral processes among each other when serving customers.



Some career centers are co-located with a community college, social services offices, or offices where vocational rehabilitation services are available.

North Carolina's agencies overseeing the six core WIOA programs have been gearing up and enhancing their partnerships, locally, regionally, and at the state level in anticipation of WIOA. Capacity building has been a focus this past year as all workforce development partners, working off of a solid foundation and history of collaboration, are ready to serve the state's businesses, job seekers, training seekers and those with disabilities in accordance with new WIOA legislation.

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## **State Strategic Vision and Goals**

### **(1) Vision**

At the direction of Governor McCrory, the NCWorks Commission, North Carolina's state workforce investment board under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, developed and adopted in February 2015 a strategic plan with interagency input that sets forth a vision and goals for the state's workforce development system. The vision and goal statements below are from this plan and, upon review of current economic conditions, workforce statistics and workforce development activities, remain relevant and serve as the backbone of the state Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Unified Plan.

Governor Pat McCrory has a top priority of growing the state's economy by ensuring North Carolina has an innovative, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system that develops adaptable, work-ready, skilled talent to meet the current and future needs of workers and businesses to achieve and sustain economic prosperity. This includes preparing the state's workforce for the opportunities of today and tomorrow, and ensuring businesses have the talent they need to be globally competitive. Achieving this vision will require policies and strategies that enable a strong workforce development system and provide the education, training, and supports necessary for a skilled workforce.

Over the past few decades, North Carolina has transitioned from a traditional economy based on tobacco, furniture and textiles to a global economy that is driven by knowledge-based enterprises. The state's economy has also experienced major changes as a result of structural shifts and technological advances. Many jobs once done by workers have now been automated due to improved technology. Many businesses have streamlined their operations and need fewer workers overall, yet have an increased need for more highly-skilled workers. The Great Recession only accelerated these trends.

In 2014, Governor Pat McCrory announced NCWorks, a new partnership between the N.C. Department of Commerce, the N.C. Community College System, and the N.C. Department of Public Instruction to improve the state's workforce system. The focus is on one goal: connecting North Carolina jobs with North Carolina people through the efficient use of resources, streamlined customer service for citizens and businesses, alignment of programs and a consistent, cohesive strategy all under one name: NCWorks.

Through the NCWorks initiative, partners create a stronger alignment of services and resources to meet the workforce needs of businesses, connect North Carolinians to career and technical training and quality employment, provide the appropriate supports

for populations with barriers to employment, with and use data to monitor and assess program outcomes.

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## **(2) Goals**

The Governor seeks to increase North Carolina's competitive advantage through an innovative, relevant, effective and efficient workforce development system. Four goals outline how to achieve this:

### Create an integrated, seamless, and customer-centered workforce system.

Governor McCrory understands the need to align efforts among workforce partners to achieve an accessible, seamless, integrated, and comprehensive system. Workforce programs serve the business community and people from all walks of life with varying levels of education, employment experience, and barriers to employment. Services range from self-service activities online, to staff-assisted services in a workforce or vocational rehabilitation office, to multi-year training programs at a public school or community college, and include services to businesses.

This goal includes:

- aligning partner services and strategies;
- developing a common brand to be used across workforce programs that is recognizable to all customers;
- increasing awareness of and accessibility to workforce services;
- developing shared marketing strategies that promote the talent in North Carolina;
- increasing and sustaining employer engagement as part of an integrated, customer-centered workforce system; and
- addressing the unique needs of workforce system customers to help them succeed in education and careers.

The above will be achieved especially with regard to low-income populations, low-literacy or limited English proficiency populations, military personnel and veterans, people with disabilities, youths, high school dropouts and first-generation college students, dislocated workers and unemployed or underemployed workers, and others with barriers to employment, job retention or educational attainment.

Only through the seamless integration of service delivery and coordination and efficient handoffs among the workforce development agencies will the state realize true success in serving job seekers and employers. This goal promotes the collaboration of the state's agencies and organizations with varying areas of expertise that provide workforce development services state-wide. It supports the alignment of North Carolina's multiple and interdependent workforce programs and services to better serve businesses and customers under a cohesive system.

Create a workforce system that is responsive to the changing needs of the economy.

North Carolina's workforce system must be flexible, adaptable, and change with the times. The workforce needs of businesses are continuously changing, so it is important that the system remains relevant and easily accessible to the business community.

This goal includes:

- ensuring the workforce system is relevant, valuable, and easy to access by the business communities;
- developing and strengthening connections between workforce development and economic development;
- developing and implementing a coordinated and seamless approach to engage business and respond to business needs; and
- reducing employer skill gaps by increasing involvement in curriculum design, pathway implementation and sponsorship of work-based learning.

Policy leaders and frontline staff of the state's system must stay attune to current economic trends, and listen consistently to businesses so they can be responsive to provide employers what they need in a timely manner. This includes policies and strategies that engage business leaders in decision-making processes and leverage labor market information in education and agency program planning.

Prepare workers to succeed in the North Carolina economy and continuously improve their skills.

In today's world, workers and job seekers must continually seek to gain new skills and stay up-to-date in their industry or field of expertise, and businesses must continually develop their workforce to remain competitive in their industry. The state's workforce system must provide the education and training programs, including work-based learning opportunities, so that workers are prepared and capable for the jobs of today and tomorrow, and businesses can compete in a global economy.

This goal includes:

- strengthening career development services, improve career awareness efforts, and align with career pathway advising;
- enhancing programs and enrollment in critical career clusters by targeting resources;
- strategically coordinating programs among workforce partners to develop skill and education pathways; and
- becoming a national leader in providing structured work-based learning, and helping individuals gain the credentials, skills and experience they need for in-demand occupations or entrepreneurship opportunities.

The Governor continues to make education and preparing the state's youth to enter the workforce a key focus of NCWorks. The state is making investments to ensure high school graduates are college and career ready by strengthening K-12 education, enhancing Career and Technical Education (CTE), Adult Literacy programs, and high-demand courses at Community Colleges, and creating high expectations for employment among youth, including youth with barriers to employment.

Efforts are being made to help prepare young people for careers in critical cluster areas, by increasing competency-based credentials, work-based learning opportunities and apprenticeship programs across the state. The Governor also supports the university system's effort to align higher education with changing market needs and current economic conditions, to prepare students for workforce demands in various high-growth sectors.

Use data to drive strategies and ensure accountability.

North Carolina's workforce system is designed to improve the state's economy by enabling workers to find good-paying jobs by assessing skills, providing information on careers, connecting people to needed training and education programs, referring people to jobs, and providing appropriate supports for individuals with barriers to employment.

To do this, policies and strategies must be data-driven. The accuracy and timeliness of data in the digital world is vital.

This goal includes:

- developing a consistent and coordinated approach of identifying critical career clusters that workforce system partners will use to target resources to meet the needs of the economy;
- leveraging input from the business community and the analysis of data to make informed decisions and build a globally competitive workforce;
- gathering, evaluating, and utilizing information on the usage, quality, and accessibility of services;
- measuring and reporting on the effectiveness of the workforce development system; and
- helping adults, youths and businesses access clear and consistent analyses to make informed career and business decisions.

It is the goal of the Governor to ensure that accurate data is being used to inform and guide decisions regarding the direction in which the workforce system should be going. In addition, it is important that North Carolina's system is held accountable for the money spent on workforce programs and services, as well as for the quality of services provided. Government efficiency is both expected and necessary. It is Governor McCrory's expectation that all state agencies with workforce investment responsibilities work together to maximize the use of all funds, including federal dollars. The workforce system will promote demand-driven and data-informed decision making and evaluation to more effectively meet workforce customer needs and enhance system accountability.

### (3) **Performance Goals for Core Programs**

Based on preliminary analysis conducted with the core programs in collaboration with the NC Department of Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division, the State's expected levels of performance relating to the performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance described in section 116(b)(2)(A) of Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act are expected as the following:

Measures	Projected Baseline	PY 2016 / FY 2017			PY 2017 / FY 2018		
		Proposed	Negotiated	Proposed Final Change in Performance	Proposed	Negotiated	Proposed Final Change in Performance
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)							
Adults	59%	TBD					
Dislocated Workers	70%	TBD					
Youth	55%	TBD					
Wagner-Peyser / Labor Exchange	59%	TBD					
Adult Education	44%	TBD					
Rehabilitative Services	35%	TBD					

Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)							
Adults	59%	TBD					
Dislocated Workers	70%	TBD					
Youth	55%	TBD					
Wagner-Peyser / Labor Exchange	59%	TBD					
Adult Education	46%	TBD					
Rehabilitative Services	32%	TBD					
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)							
Adults	\$3,000	TBD					
Dislocated Workers	\$3,750	TBD					
Youth	\$2,300	TBD					
Wagner-Peyser / Labor Exchange	\$3,000	TBD					
Adult Education	\$3,100	TBD					
Rehabilitative Services	\$2,800	TBD					
Credential Attainment Rate							
Adults	40%	TBD					
Dislocated Workers	34%	TBD					
Youth	50%	TBD					
Wagner-Peyser / Labor Exchange							
Adult Education	69%	TBD					
Rehabilitative Services	TBD	TBD					
Measureable Skill Gains							
Adults	TBD	TBD					
Dislocated Workers	TBD	TBD					
Youth	24%	TBD					
Wagner-Peyser / Labor Exchange							
Adult Education	30%	TBD					
Rehabilitative Services	TBD	TBD					
Effectiveness in Serving Employers							
Adults	TBD	TBD					
Dislocated Workers	TBD	TBD					
Youth	TBD	TBD					
Wagner-Peyser / Labor Exchange	TBD	TBD					
Adult Education	TBD	TBD					
Rehabilitative Services	TBD	TBD					

#### **(4) Assessment**

North Carolina will conduct vigorous, objective and thorough assessments of Opportunity Act core programs as part of the overarching NCWorks system. Plans for this multi-faceted assessment process include:

- Collective quarterly review by cross-agency core program management team of enrollment, expenditure, outcome and customer input (individuals and employers) data
- Annual evaluation by NCWorks Commission of efficiency and effectiveness of core programs and NCWorks career center system
- Engagement of outside consultation for third-party review, analysis, evaluation and recommendations for continuous improvement of services and resulting



outcomes. Connection with North Carolina's excellent public and private universities' research capabilities is anticipated.

Program assessments conducted during the final two years of the Workforce Investment Act by the NCWorks Commission were reviewed and considered in formulating North Carolina's Unified Plan. Performance from the first two years of the Opportunity Act will be used as the baseline for future assessments of the effectiveness of core programs and NCWorks Career Center system under the Opportunity Act.

The NCWorks Commission guides the continuous improvement of the workforce development system using data-driven strategies. The State will assess the overall effectiveness of the workforce investment system in relation to the State's strategic vision and goals through multiple sources of information and service participant feedback, and use the results to make quality and continuous improvements.

As one example, in response to North Carolina Session Law 2012-131 and continuing under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the commission develops, continuously improves, and reports on system-wide performance measures assessing the effectiveness of the entire workforce development system. When first initiated, the commission convened an inter-agency work group to address common measures to track and analyze performance.

The workforce development system agencies worked collaboratively to design and implement universal performance measures. The commission which oversaw these efforts, recognized that by using common metrics and applying them across a wide range of workforce programs, the performance measures offer a comprehensive program-by-program look at North Carolina's workforce system.

The first assessment, "Measuring the Performance of North Carolina's Workforce Development System: A First Look" (January 2014) contained aggregate data on 17 of North Carolina's workforce programs. Data was provided from the North Carolina Common Follow-up System (CFS) and analyzed by the Department of Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD). CFS contains a rich longitudinal repository of information from a variety of education and workforce programs as well as employment, wage, claims, and benefit payment information from the unemployment insurance system.

The NCWorks Commission continues to work with LEAD to develop annual reports on the workforce development system as well as continuously improve performance measures. As a next step, the commission will develop an online dashboard to display information in an "easy-to-understand" format. The commission is also developing performance accountability measures for local workforce development boards, and is investigating options for a system-wide customer satisfaction survey to collect feedback to strengthen workforce development programs.

## **State Strategy**

### **(1) Strategies to Achieve Strategic Vision, Goals, and the (2) Alignment of Core Programs**

North Carolina's workforce system includes multiple agencies, programs, and funders. The health of the future economy requires a move towards agency collaboration, policy alignment, innovation & systematic communication.

The three agencies responsible for the six core programs under the Opportunity Act - the NC Community College System, the NC Department of Commerce, and the NC Department of Health and Human Services – are aligning core programs and one-stop partner services via the NCWorks Initiative. The focus of the initiative is on one goal: connecting North Carolina jobs with North Carolina people through the efficient use of resources, streamlined customer service for citizens and businesses, alignment of programs and a consistent, cohesive strategy all under one name – NCWorks. By focusing on common goals and building on each other's strengths, North Carolina will develop the organizational tools, structures and cross-agency protocols needed to support the vision of the Opportunity Act and the goals of NCWorks.

#### Career Pathways

North Carolina's workforce development system is implementing strategies that support the customer's transition from education to employment in high-growth occupations. Career pathways take advantage of the best available tools and resources to better serve customers and are founded on partner collaboration and targeted resources. Pathways give customers an edge by providing up-to-date information on opportunities in their community including critical career clusters and work-based learning opportunities.

- Develop accessible and consistent NCWorks Career Pathways for critical industry clusters with multiple entry/exit points. Certified career pathways support workers' transitions from education into and through the workforce by outlining the sequential training needed for high-demand occupations. The NCWorks Commission approved criteria for certified career pathways in May 2015.

- Require workforce development partners use the career pathways to target resources towards helping individuals gain the skills and experience needed for in-demand occupations.
- Provide programs that link low-skilled adults to career pathways and job-ready skills along with basic skills, including the Basic Skills Plus program and the Perkins Act-funded Career and Technical Education program and its recent career pathway pilot programs.
- Core program agencies will collaborate to develop information systems that enable customers' decision making regarding training and career choices.
- Support collaborative efforts under the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to provide individuals with disabilities the rehabilitative services, training, and supports needed to obtain or maintain employment.

### Coordinate Across Programs at State and Local Levels

In regards to workforce system planning and implementation, the state's Workforce Investment Board, the NCWorks Commission, and the three agencies responsible for core programs will:

- Establish the WIOA Steering Council as a permanent cross-agency body to meet quarterly to coordinate and align policy throughout the NCWorks system.
- Create new inter-agency teams at the local and regional levels to enhance alignment in workforce services.
- Establish memoranda of understanding with all statewide education and workforce development entities to get all workforce system participants enrolled in NCWorks Online.
- Create regional councils that include education, workforce, economic development, and industry leaders.
- Launch the NCWorks brand that all workforce development system programs will use to help customers recognize the value of the system.
- Develop and implement a system-wide and consistent outreach strategy.
- Develop a consistent menu of services and activities highlighting business and industry engagement opportunities, and develop interagency protocols to better meet employer and jobseeker needs.
- Individually and collaboratively address the unique needs of current and prospective customers, including community college students, youth, and individuals with barriers to employment, veterans, and other populations to help them succeed in education and careers.

### Proactively Address the Changing Needs of the Economy for a Job-Driven System

North Carolina's workforce development system will implement strategies that support the customer's transition from education to employment in high-growth occupations. Specifically involving education and training goals, the core program agencies aim to be supportive members of the workforce development system, addressing basic adult education, industry skill gaps, and other customer needs, including the specific needs of individuals with barriers to employment, youth, veterans and other populations.

- Reduce employer skill gaps by increasing their involvement in curriculum design, pathway implementation and sponsorship of work-based learning.
- Investigate how work-based learning activities could be incorporated into agreements with companies receiving state economic development incentives.
- Increase access for adults, youths and businesses to clear and consistent information and analyses that they can utilize to make informed career and business decisions.
- Expand the number of NCWorks Certified Work-Ready Communities.
- Create a framework for ensuring cross-trained, qualified staff have the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to support the local delivery system to ensure that North Carolina has the nation's most talented, collaborative professionals and leaders for workforce development.
- Connect Small Business Centers to workforce delivery access points to increase entrepreneurship locally.
- Establish and continue programs that support key high-growth industries in North Carolina.
- Use input from the business community along with analysis of data to make informed decisions and build a globally competitive workforce.
- Identify back-to-industry opportunities for teachers/instructors to help them stay current with industry trends, enhance curriculum appropriately, and integrate work-based learning into their programs.
- Support individuals with barriers to employment by mitigating obstacles for these populations and increasing access to education and other training opportunities.

#### Use Data to Drive Strategies and Ensure Accountability

From using data-driven decision making to improve workforce programs, to providing performance dashboards to stakeholders, system accountability is wide-ranging and imperative to North Carolina's workforce development's future. North Carolina's system will be accountable to the public for providing high-quality workforce development services.

- Identify and launch a customer relationship management information system that all workforce development partners are required to use.

- Initiate the process of interfacing NCWorks Online with North Carolina's array of workforce development case management systems.
- Develop an annual workforce development system report card with universal success metrics.
- Create metrics based on consistently collected feedback from customers to strengthen the workforce development system.
- Modify North Carolina's wage records to require the collection of employee occupation codes to better assess the outcomes of those individuals who participate in the workforce development system.
- Pilot consumer reporting that provides industry-recognized credentials to better assess the outcomes of those individuals who participate in the workforce.
- Core program agencies will collaboratively develop information exchange systems for demand-driven, data-informed decision making and evaluation.
- Core program agencies will continue to work together to develop and refine expected levels of performance relating to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act performance accountability measures.

### **III. Operational Planning Elements**

#### **State Strategy Implementation**

##### **(1) State Board Functions**

#### **State Board Operational Structures and Processes**

The NCWorks Commission is the designated workforce investment board for the state of North Carolina. The Commission is established by the Governor in accordance with the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, North Carolina Statute and commission bylaws. Appointees are given the responsibility for setting the strategic direction of the state-wide workforce development system. Commission members advise state leaders on how to strengthen the state's workforce and serve North Carolina businesses. The commission also develops policy to align workforce programs, assesses the effectiveness of core programs, and oversees the "one stop" career center system.

#### ***Membership***

Representation on the NCWorks Commission is mandated by federal and state law. Commission membership includes workforce agency leaders, elected officials, the

private sector, and labor, training and community based organizations across the entire state. The majority of the members are from the private sector. All members are appointed to four year terms by the Governor. The heads of the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Administration, Department of Public Instruction, Community College System, University of North Carolina System, and Department of Commerce all serve as ex-officio members.

### ***Subcommittees***

The work of the commission is accomplished through the work of subcommittees. These subcommittees, established by the chair, are created purposefully to accomplish the goals of the NCWorks 2014-2016 Strategic Plan and to carry out the functions under section 101(d) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Each committee is led by a chair and is supported by staff. The chairs of each committee, along with the commission chair also compose a small group referred to as the Executive Committee. Prior key accomplishments of the commission include:

- Developed criteria to ensure high quality and consistent customer service is delivered by staff at each of the state's career centers. To date 76 centers are certified and located throughout North Carolina.
- Established NCWorks as its identity to align with the Governor's NCWorks Initiative.
- Took the lead role in developing the Memorandum of Understanding for workforce development programs with the departments of Commerce, Health and Human Services, Administration, and the Community College System.
- Developed universal performance measures for all North Carolina workforce development programs.
- Developed and submitted to the Governor and General Assembly a biennial workforce development plan, referred to as the 2014-2016 Strategic Plan, to include: goals and objectives; assessment of workforce development programs, policies and delivery of employment and training services to special populations; and recommendations for policy, program and funding changes.

### ***Staff***

The Division of Workforce Solutions within the North Carolina Department of Commerce provides staff support to the commission to carry out the commission's duty to develop an effective and efficient workforce development system. Staff consists of a director and persons engaged in administrative, policy, technical research and support areas. Staff is responsive to the needs of the commission and initiates actions necessary to support the commission in its mandated functions.

### ***Meetings***

The commission conducts quarterly executive committee and business meetings at the call of the chair. The executive committee meets before each quarterly business session and is attended by the commission chair, subcommittee chairs, and appropriate staff. The executive committee also meets once per quarter in advance of the quarterly commission meeting via phone or in person.

Business meetings are attended by the entire commission and are open to the public. Meeting agendas are developed by commission staff and approved by the Chair. Actions of the commission are determined by a majority vote of the members present, and a majority of the commission constitutes a quorum for the transaction of business. The rules set forth in *Robert's Rules of Order, Newly Revised* govern the procedures of the commission.

The commission also conducts committee meetings comprised of commission members. Committees meet several times a year and are scheduled at the discretion of the chair. These meetings are attended by the assigned committee members, its chair and appropriate staff.

### ***Mission and Vision***

The NCWorks Commission developed and adopted in February 2015 a strategic plan with interagency input that sets forth a mission, vision and goals for the state's workforce development system. The mission of the commission is to ensure North Carolina has an innovative, relevant, effective and efficient workforce development system that develops adaptable, work ready, skilled talent to meet the current and future needs of workers and businesses to achieve and sustain economic prosperity. The vision is to grow the North Carolina economy by strengthening the state's workforce and connecting employers to skilled, high quality employees.

The Commission has four overarching goals:

- Create an integrated, customer-centered, and seamless workforce system.
- Create a workforce system that is responsive to the changing needs of the economy.
- Prepare workers to succeed in the North Carolina economy and continuously improve their skills.
- Use data to drive strategies and ensure accountability.

### ***Strategic Plan***

The commission's 2014-2016 Strategic Plan defines how the state will achieve its workforce goals and objectives. The creation of the Strategic Plan included an extraordinary engagement effort from North Carolina's workforce development stakeholders, leaders and professionals. The commission established a task force to

develop the Strategic Plan that included its members as well as representatives from local workforce development boards, economic development, community colleges, K-12 schools and businesses. Task force members ensured that the commission's Strategic Plan was aligned with the direction of the state's education and economic future.

The 2014-2016 Strategic Plan provides the framework for all workforce agencies to use to create a more aligned and coordinated system. The commission implements the Strategic Plan through the work of subcommittees. For 2014-2016, strategies fall into four key committees: System Alignment and Transformation, Strengthen Customer Services, Career Pathways and Accountability. These strategies align with the goals of the Opportunity Act of enhanced collaboration and partnership for a cohesive and responsive workforce system.

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## **(2) Implementation of State Strategy**

### **(A) Core Program Operations**

The Core Programs from Title I (Adults, Dislocated Workers and Youth), Title II (Adult Education and Literacy), Title III (Wagner-Peyser) and Title IV (Vocational Rehabilitation) will achieve North Carolina's Unified State Plan of strengthening the state's workforce and connecting employers to skilled, high quality employees.

To accomplish this task, North Carolina is using the Integrated Services Delivery (ISD) Model. ISD is North Carolina's movement towards a seamless, united approach and emphasizes the services, support and collaboration needed from the Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS), Division of Health and Human Services (DHHS), North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) and Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) across the state. ISD allows North Carolina's One-Stops, NCWorks Career Centers, to shift from being program specific to combined services to better serve our customers, both individuals and employers.

NCWorks Career Center staff is integrated into functional units, not separated by program or funding streams. While WIOA and Wagner-Peyser funded staff are the foundations of this new approach to service delivery, other partners and programs are required to participate in the staffing of NCWorks Career Centers. NCWorks Career Centers are designed to provide services to meet the needs of employers and job seekers by providing improved performance, more coordinated access to services, and accountability of workforce development service delivery.

NCWorks Career Center customers including unemployment insurance claimants are provided with the opportunity to assess their skills, improve their skills and obtain the best job possible with their skills. The goal is that all job seekers that enter NCWorks Career Centers leave as better candidates because of the value-added services received. In this integrated system, individuals easily move within the labor market, continuing to further their education and training over a lifetime to advance their careers. NCWorks Career Centers provide a wide range of short-term skills development opportunities through multiple service delivery methods.

NCWorks Career Center's customer flow include a standardized initial skills assessment, access to a wide range of skill development services and include options to improve their employment opportunities through skill upgrading, skill validation and credentialing.

The integrated customer flow responds to customer needs, fulfilled by cross-trained core partner staff that can deliver comprehensive services across agency lines to all customers. All customers of the system are served by staff organized by function, rather than by program or funding source, through a customer-focused, skill based, integrated service delivery strategy. Employment related labor exchange services provided at NCWorks Career Centers include, but are not limited to:

- matching individual skills with employer needs;
- assisting with special employer recruitment needs;
- assisting employers with hard-to-fill jobs;
- helping employers deal with layoffs;
- providing veterans with priority referral to jobs;
- services for youth;
- services for dislocated workers including reemployment assistance for individuals receiving unemployment insurance;
- services for persons with disabilities including services for the blind or visually impaired;
- services for older workers;
- apprenticeship;
- services for former offenders;
- services for individuals with limited English proficiency;
- services for agricultural workers;
- job referrals;
- job Fairs;
- referral to training; and
- supportive services

NCWorks Career Center services align with our four Core Programs to establish a full range of employment and training services that are accessible to a universal population of customers including individuals with barriers to employment, individuals with various levels of need and individuals with various levels of education.

NCWorks Career Centers are focused on enhancing the level of services for special applicant groups and improving the employability of these individuals. Proven strategies to address individual needs include literacy and basic skills programs, occupational skills training, job accommodations, assistive technologies, disability awareness training, and other activities that may address barriers and support achievement of positive employment outcomes. Core partners, North Carolina Community College System and North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, work closely together to ensure students receive appropriate services and to provide the necessary services to help students in school.

The NCWorks Commission, North Carolina's workforce investment board, established minimum certification criteria to certify NCWorks Career Centers in partnership with local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) to ensure a consistent level of quality service delivery throughout the workforce delivery system.

The criteria are used as standards to certify and re-certify centers. The commission understands the importance of establishing minimum standards that allow for local flexibility, while protecting the minimum service expectations of the system brand. It is the commission's vision that these criteria move the system to higher levels of quality and seamless service, as well as to foster performance accountability and continuous improvement.

Local workforce boards, under the WIOA and N.C. General Statute 143B-438.11, are policy, planning, and oversight entities responsible for organizing a comprehensive, community-wide response to the challenges of building a highly skilled workforce. In carrying out this responsibility, local boards are responsible for assessing the needs of employers and job seekers and determining the appropriate geographic areas where NCWorks Career Centers are needed. Working in partnership with the commission, it is the local boards' responsibility to ensure that operational and service quality standards are being followed by certified centers and to help protect the system brand.

Two tiers of centers have been defined by the Commission. While the type of services offered at a Tier 1 and Tier 2 center may differ, the customer service requirements for both remain the same. It is required that each local workforce investment area have at least one certified Tier 1 career center.

A Tier 1 NCWorks Career Center is a physical location, open full-time as defined by the local WDB, at which integrated services delivery is fully implemented and where services on-site include at least Trade Adjustment Act, Veterans Employment Services, Wagner-Peyser, WIOA Adult and WIOA Dislocated Worker.

To apply for certification as a Tier 1 Career Center and to use the NCWorks Career Center brand, minimum criteria must be met in the following categories:

- Location and Appearance
- Operations
- North Carolina's Integrated Web Portal – NCWorks Online
- Trained Staff
- Customer Satisfaction
- Partnerships

A Tier 2 NCWorks Career Center is a physical location, open to the public at least 16 hours a week, at which paid, trained staff are available to serve customers during all hours of operation. These are locations whose primary purpose is to provide workforce services and are considered by the workforce development board to be a part of their one-stop delivery system. These locations are staffed by at least two paid, trained staff personnel who are paid by a federal workforce funding stream. Criteria for these locations focus on requirements in the following five categories:

- Location and Appearance
- Services
- NCWorks Online
- Trained Staff

#### Relationship to NCWorks Career Centers

NCWorks Online, North Carolina's job matching system is an internet-based job matching system that customers can use to search for jobs, access labor market information, post job openings and where employers can view potential candidates. Through the NCWorks Online system staff are able to share information, provide case management, and develop internal reports to track activities and outcomes in a way

that is integrated and seamless to the customer. NCWorks Online is designed to connect employers with qualified job seekers in a way that is both convenient and effective.

Individuals who are Veterans receive priority referral to jobs. All qualified Veterans have an opportunity to view job openings before non-veterans. To accomplish this, a 24-hour plus overnight update hold is placed on all NCWorks Online job orders before they are released to the general public. Veterans also receive special employment services and assistance.

Youth receive services through partnership, collaboration and integrated services among core partners focusing on long-term, comprehensive youth services that provide the education, skills, work experiences and support youth need to successfully transition to career and productive adulthood. The delivery of comprehensive youth services is a coordinated effort by a variety of agencies, such as workforce development, education, vocational rehabilitation, community college, social services and community and faith-based organizations. Many agencies providing youth services are represented on the local Youth Councils that provide a forum for information exchange and establishment of local coordination strategies. Critical to the success is the integration of a youth development strategy that focuses on a young person's assets, provides a variety of interventions and supports and allows the youth to grow, learn and mature—successfully transitioning to careers and a productive adulthood. Youth development activities include leadership development and opportunities that encourage responsibility, employability, and other positive social behaviors.

The Division of Workforce Solutions and the Division of Employment Security are committed to providing assistance to persons receiving unemployment insurance with their efforts to return to employment as quickly as possible through the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) and Employability Assessment Interview (EAI) programs. All first payment claimants must participate in one of two reemployment programs in order to continue receiving financial assistance. At a minimum, a re-employment appointment must include the following:

- orientation of Career Center Services;
- registration in NCWorks Online;
- explanation of UI requirements for continuing eligibility of benefits;
- review of work search record;
- assessment of job-readiness/skill assessment;
- development of an individualized career assessment plan;
- an orientation to reemployment services;
- careers and labor market information;
- job development to include, job referrals, job development contacts, job leads, and referrals to workshops or training; and
- supportive services, as appropriate.

If a claimant does not report for his or her scheduled appointment, then his or her benefits may be affected.

Through NCWorks Online, employers are able to find information to help recruit, hire and retain employees with disabilities and persons who are blind or visually impaired as their primary disability. Job seekers with disabilities can find information to develop their skills and find the support needed to obtain employment. North Carolina is committed to ensuring that all persons, including those who happen to have a disability, have access to NCWorks Career Center services with the final goal for the customer of obtaining self-sufficiency employment.

NCWorks Career Center staff emphasize the delivery of employment related services for older workers to include job search skills, job referrals, job placement and supportive service referrals. These services are coordinated with area agencies on aging, including the Governor's Council, local Senior Centers and Senior Community Service Employment programs.

The NCWorks Apprenticeship program helps workers learn new specialized skills needed in today's workforce. Apprentices train for an industry by receiving a combination of classroom instruction and on-the-job learning. Participants are paid for their work, and their wages will increase as they progress in the program. Apprentices work as they complete their classes; their work schedule will be determined by their respective employers. When they graduate, apprentices will receive a Certificate of Completion and will have earned the highly skilled "journey worker" designation. The program can last one to five years, depending on the occupation. Employers work with NCWorks Apprenticeship to create a written agreement that specifies the length of a participant's training, the related technical instruction, and an outline of the skills that person will need to learn, and the wages he or she will earn.

Through NCWorks Apprenticeship employers gain:

- a proven process for imparting the knowledge and skills of experienced personnel to new employees;
- greater workforce competency and productivity;
- partnerships with certification and licensing agencies; and
- a valuable asset in the recruitment and retention of a highly qualified workforce.

Employees receive:

- on-the-job learning under the guidance of experienced and qualified personnel;
- occupation-specific education/technical instruction;
- training and certifications that meet industry/business standards; and
- opportunities to receive education, develop skills, and gain experience that will enable career advancement.

The Former Offender Initiative provides resources to job seekers with criminal records to help them overcome barriers having a criminal record can bring. NCWorks Career Centers provides services to former offenders. Career Center staff ensure job seekers with a criminal record have the necessary resources to conduct an effective job search.

In addition to the services provided to all job seekers, former offenders have access to the following services:

- Help with writing resumes and a “letter of explanation” detailing the reasons for their criminal record and/or incarceration.
- Knowledge about employer’s policies concerning hiring former offenders.
- Workshops geared toward former offenders.
- Referrals to community organizations that assist former offenders.
- Information on Federal Bonding and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit programs.
- Helping the individual transition from prison to society

Former Offender staff in NCWorks Career Centers also work with federal, state, and local providers of reentry services, including community and faith-based organizations, and vocational rehabilitation centers. The Former Offender coordinator monitors former offender activities statewide with assistance from six Regional Former Offender Specialists. There is a Regional Former Offender specialist in the following cities: Asheville, Concord, Greensboro, Raleigh, Greenville and Fayetteville

There are also Former Offender specialists in many of the NCWorks Career Centers who provide specialized services to persons with criminal records. North Carolina recognizes the value and is committed to assisting former offenders obtain employment. Since a former offender who finds a job is three times less likely to return to incarceration than those who do not obtain employment, assisting former offenders with their employment efforts is good for North Carolina.

The Limited English Proficiency (LEP) program helps individuals who do not speak English as a primary language by providing technical assistance and guidance to NCWorks Career Center staff. LEP works with individuals who have a limited ability to read, write, speak, or understand English. Specialists are located in NCWorks Career Centers. These specialists, working with the program coordinator, are responsible for identifying resources in the community to help customers receive the same level of services available to individuals whose primary language is English.

Agricultural job seekers can benefit from the services offered at our local NCWorks Career Centers. Our agricultural employment consultants help place farm workers on jobs and ensure that migrant and seasonal farmworkers have access to the same services as the general public. Consultants also refer migrant and seasonal farmworkers to various supportive services and refer complaints to the proper enforcement agencies.

Core programs will also align with the state's goal of creating an integrated, seamless, and customer-centered workforce system through three specific strategies. First, Adult Education and Literacy programs will provide services that lead to further education, training, and employment. Second, these programs will provide opportunities for adult learners through the provision of career pathways. These pathways will be customized at the local level and build on the Commission's framework and community college flexibility in curriculum and continuing education options.

Programs will align with the state's development of a workforce system that is responsive to changing needs of the economy in three specific ways. Adult Education and Literacy programs will provide education in the context of industry-specific needs. Second, these programs will integrate basic skills instruction with occupational skills training. And third, programs will use workforce preparation activities in work-relevant instruction.

Programs will align with the state's goal of preparing workers to succeed in the NC economy and continuously improve their skills through three specific strategies. First, programs will provide transition programming to employment and/or career enhancement. Second, programs will develop career pathways at all skills levels. Third, programs will enhance services to English Language learners, out-of-school youth, individuals with disabilities, and incarcerated individuals.

Programs will align with the state's goal of using data to drive strategies and ensure accountability in two ways. First, programs will work with other core partners to develop a consistent and coordinated approach to identifying critical career clusters so that workforce resources can be better targeted and utilized. Second, programs will collect and report data on effectiveness in reaching common follow-up measures using new methodologies and existing performance initiatives within the community college system.

Aligning NCWorks Career Center core partners involves local boards for all core partners developing increased awareness of each other and continued involvement with planning, developing and implementing programs and services in NCWorks Career Centers statewide. Best practices within agencies will need to be identified and replicated across North Carolina. North Carolina's public workforce development system is a key part of the state's economy. It is comprised of a variety of programs with a broad range of activities that serve a diverse group of people. It includes a group of interactive and interdependent entities, programs, and services. Activities range from self-service activities online, to staff assisted services in a workforce office, to multi-year training programs at a public school or community college. In addition, programs serve people with varying levels of education, employment experience, and barriers. Individuals may participate in a single program or activity or may be eligible to receive services through a variety of programs and entities. North Carolina's workforce development system through its core partners recognizes and is working to meet the needs of businesses and prepare workers for the jobs that are needed, by aligning and focusing on the customers. This involves helping individual's gain the skills and training they need to obtain and maintain employment and helping businesses find qualified workers to meet their present and future workforce needs.

## **(B) Alignment with Activities outside the Plan**

At the state level, there are several entities that have responsibility for the administrative management, oversight and/or operation of education, training and employment related programs, services and institutions. These entities include the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Commerce, the North Carolina Community College System, the Department of Public Instruction, the University of North Carolina, and the Department of Administration. These administrative entities and their respective institutions and programs play a vital role in helping to educate the state's citizens and preparing the state's current and future workforce.

North Carolina's current and future economic success is predicated on the State's ability to develop and retain a quality workforce. The activities of core programs will be aligned with other programs and activities provided by mandatory one-stop partners and other optional one-stop partners and activities provided under employment, training (including Registered Apprenticeships), education (including career and technical education), human services and other programs not covered by the plan, as appropriate, assuring coordination of, and avoiding duplication among these activities.

The three state agencies responsible for the administration of the core programs will also align with the state's goal of creating an integrated, seamless, and customer-centered workforce system through three specific strategies. First, Adult Education and Literacy programs will provide services that lead to further education, training, and employment. Second, these programs will provide opportunities for adult learners through the provision of career pathways. These pathways will be customized at the local level and build on the Commission's framework and community college flexibility in curriculum and continuing education options.

Programs will align with the state's development of a workforce system that is responsive to changing needs of the economy in three specific ways. Adult Education and Literacy programs will provide education in the context of industry-specific needs. Second, these programs will integrate basic skills instruction with occupational skills training. And third, programs will use workforce preparation activities in work-relevant instruction.

Programs will align with the state's goal of preparing workers to succeed in the NC economy and continuously improve their skills through three specific strategies. First, programs will provide transition programming to employment and/or career enhancement. Second, programs will develop career pathways at all skills levels. Third, programs will enhance services to English Language learners, out-of-school youth, individuals with disabilities, and incarcerated individuals.

Programs will align with the state's goal of using data to drive strategies and ensure accountability in two ways. First, programs will work with other core partners to develop a consistent and coordinated approach to identifying critical career clusters so that workforce resources can be better targeted and utilized. Second, programs will collect and report data on effectiveness in reaching common follow-up measures using



new methodologies and existing performance initiatives within the community college system.

Aligning NCWorks Career Center core partners will involve local Boards for all core partners developing increased awareness of each other and continued involvement with planning, developing and implementing programs and services in NCWorks Career Centers statewide. Best practices within agencies will need to be identified and replicated across North Carolina. North Carolina's public workforce development system is a key part of the state's economy. It is comprised of a variety of programs with a broad range of activities that serve a diverse group of people. It includes a group of interactive and interdependent entities, programs, and services. Activities range from self-service activities online, to staff assisted services in a workforce office, to multi-year training programs at a public school or community college. In addition, programs serve people with varying levels of education, employment experience, and barriers. Individuals may participate in a single program or activity or may be eligible to receive services through a variety of programs and entities. North Carolina's workforce development system through its core partners recognizes and is working to meet the needs of businesses and prepare workers for the jobs that are needed, by aligning and focusing on the customers. This involves helping individual's gain the skills and training they need to obtain and maintain employment and helping businesses find qualified workers to meet their present and future workforce needs.

Examples include:

- **NCWorks Apprenticeship** helps workers learn new specialized skills needed in today's workforce. Apprentices train for an industry by receiving a combination of classroom instruction and on-the-job learning. Participants are paid for their work, and their wages will increase as they progress in the program. Apprentices work as they complete their classes; their work schedule will be determined by their respective employers. When they graduate, apprentices will receive a Certificate of Completion and will have earned the highly skilled "journey worker" designation. The program can last one to five years, depending on the occupation. Employers work with NCWorks Apprenticeship to create a written agreement that specifies the length of a participant's training, the related technical instruction, and outline of the skills that person will need to learn, and the wages he or she will earn.
- The federal **Trade Adjustment Assistance Program**, like NCWorks services available through the WIOA Title I and NCWorks Apprenticeship program, is operated by the Division of Workforce Solutions and serves those dislocated workers that lose their jobs due to shifts in production to other countries or import competition. In the mid-2000s, North Carolina was the second most trade-affected state in the nation, and the global economy is continuing to shape and reshape industries in North Carolina. DWS coordinates usage of TAA and WIOA to best serve customers. For example, usage of TAA funds for training of trade-affected dislocated workers allows WIOA Dislocated Worker dollars to

stretch farther. Meanwhile, WIOA can provide supportive services to TAA participants that otherwise would not have access.

- **Career and Technical Education (federal Perkins funding)** in community colleges and public schools involves a close partnership between the NC Community College System and Department of Public Instruction. These partners and their local counterparts have a long history of career pathway development (employer engagement, mapped curricula, career advising, etc.), and community college/public school partnerships (via initiatives like Pathways to Prosperity grants) blazed trails for recent career pathway activity involving the broader set of NCWorks partners. In 2014, the Community College System and DPI worked closely with the Division of Workforce Solutions and other state/local partners to design and launch a career pathway pilot program. The local or regional pathway teams funded through the pilot are being watched for lessons learned, and the pilot influenced the development of the NCWorks Certified Career Pathway program. The NCWorks Certified Career Pathway program is now in operation, overseen by a Belk Foundation supported staff person at the Division of Workforce Solutions who also reports to leaders in the NC Community College System and Department of Public Instruction. Other career and technical education activities are also aligned with the goals and strategic plans of the NCWorks Commission, the State Board of Education, and the NC Chamber.
- **Federal Pell Grants** (Higher Education Act) and various public and private scholarship programs are important in supporting postsecondary education, and they are part of the financial support picture for education and training along with WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs. Given Governor McCrory's goal of having 67% of North Carolinians with education or training past high school by 2025, it will be especially important to use all tools in the toolbox to help students obtain postsecondary education or training. In the NCCCS strategic plan, action steps under the College Access and Affordability goal include:
  - 6.D.ii. Pursue braided funding solutions to meet the needs of students/prospective students.
  - 6.D.iii. Track state and federal program changes that could impact education and training affordability, and ensure that support through WIOA programs is connected with community college financial aid resources.
- **State-funded Community College Education, Training and Business Services** – with support from the Governor and thanks to the North Carolina General Assembly, North Carolina operates a comprehensive community college system with 58 colleges that offer transfer programs to four-year colleges/universities as well as short-term training (Workforce Continuing Education and Customized Training for businesses). As part of its programming, the Community College System offers a network of 58 Small Business Centers that offer small business training and counseling, and sector initiatives such as the

BioNetwork program. The NCWorks Strategic Action Plan, NC Jobs Plan (economic development plan), and NC Community College System Align4NCWorks plan all call for the state to enhance NC's workforce development programs through partnership with NC Community Colleges' Small Business Center Network. Biotechnology is one of the key industries that the NC Jobs Plan calls for the state to continue to emphasize in economic development, and the NCCCS BioNetwork program offers business-driven education and training in this high-demand field.

- **Alignment of community college programs** with federal activities covered in this plan occurs through structural connections and special initiatives. There is community college representation on all workforce development boards in North Carolina. Community colleges also operate several NCWorks Career Centers. As of the writing of this plan, the president of the NC Employment and Training Association, composed primarily of front-line NCWorks Career Center and workforce development staff, is the NCCCS CTE Director.

The North Carolina Community College System has committed to expand partnerships with core WIOA partners and other NCWorks partners through its 2015-2018 strategic plan, Align4NCWorks. Align4NCWorks supports the NCWorks Strategic Action Plan and state plans for education and economic development. The Community College System includes NCWorks partners from the Department of Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions, workforce development boards, and the NC Department of Health and Human Services on its strategic plan Project Management Team and implementation teams.

- **Work First**, North Carolina's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, is based on the premise that parents have a responsibility to support themselves and their children. Alignment with Work First will be achieved by inclusion among state and local cross-agency teams to coordinate and align policies on workforce development, such as common-intake systems and integrated case management systems. Through Work First, parents can get short-term training and other services to help them become employed and self-sufficient, but the responsibility is theirs, and most families have two years to move off Work First Family Assistance. Work First emphasizes three strategies:

*Diversion:* Keeping families off welfare by helping them cope with unexpected emergencies or setbacks.

Under Work First, qualifying families can get a one-time payment equivalent to up to three months worth of cash Work First benefits, based on a needs assessment by the county worker, Medicaid, child care and Food and Nutrition Services, if eligible, and other supportive services.

*Work:* Shortening the length of time that families are on Work First Family

Assistance by making work mandatory and by limiting how long a family can receive cash assistance. To receive Work First Family Assistance benefits, parents must register with the First Stop Employment Assistance Program, sign a Mutual Responsibility Agreement (MRA) and, once they move into the work components of the program, they can continue to receive benefits for up to 24 months. In most cases, families who have reached the 24-month limit cannot receive Work First Family Assistance for three years.

*Retention:* Helping families to stay off public assistance by encouraging them to save and by helping to make sure they really are better off working than on welfare.

- **Cooperative Agreements with other human services** not covered under Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act are maintained by the vocational rehabilitation programs include but are not limited to the Social Security Administration; the North Carolina Division of Medical Assistance; the North Carolina Division of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing; the North Carolina Office of Long-Term Services and Supports; North Carolina Division of Social Services; the North Carolina Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse. The Easter Seals / United Cerebral Palsy Society of North Carolina, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, the American Heart Association, and the North Carolina Arthritis Foundation are examples of consumer and advocacy groups for individuals with disabilities with which the Division has maintained agreements to facilitate the maintenance of the highest feasible level of communication and coordination in the joint development and implementation of operational methods.

North Carolina is exploring expansion and greater alignment among human service, workforce and education partners with the SNAP Employment and Training program. With technical assistance and support from Food and Nutrition Services staff with the USDA, the NC Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services has recently hired a SNAP E&T coordinator to concentrate on new partnerships, including greater use of the SNAP E&T "50-50" program whereby partners that use non-federal funds to serve SNAP clients can get a 50% reimbursement of their investments and expand services to serve more low-income individuals. One factor contributing to greater interest in SNAP E&T in North Carolina is legislation passed in the 2015 legislative session that will (starting in spring 2016) require Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDS) to work or participate in a work program to retain services beyond the initial three months. The Division of Social Services sponsored a SNAP E&T conference for local social services directors from across the state in September 2015 to explain and promote SNAP E&T and share best practices. Employment and training partners from DWS and NCCCS spoke at the conference and are exploring possible strategies with DSS. A graduate student in Duke University's

public policy program is exploring through her capstone project ways the NC Community College System can support SNAP E&T expansion and more services in the community college to benefit low-income students.

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### **(C) Coordination, Alignment and Provision of Services to Individuals**

As a system, NCWorks will pursue strategies to ensure job seekers have access to all assets across programs. For example, the State will investigate innovative options for integrated common intake systems to better collect and act on information provided by individuals. Further, as a result of the WIOA Stakeholder Summits held across North Carolina in the summer and fall of 2015, the NCWorks Training Center is organizing and meeting with regional cross-agency teams to establish cross-training curricula for staff education in order to better coordinate and align programs across all levels of operation. North Carolina continues to explore additional strategies for alignment such as professional development of common assessments, consolidated info-graphics describing services and eligibility and development of a common format for employment plans across all programs.

#### **NCWorks Career Center System**

NCWorks Career Center system provides workforce development services as well as access to other programs and activities carried out by one-stop partners identified in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act. Many centers are co-located with community colleges and have strong referral processes between the two. Other centers are co-located with county social services and have vocation Rehabilitation staff who work on-site.

North Carolina's focus for the Career Center system is on achieving a culture of quality customer service. The Career Center system is established to provide improved performance, coordinated access to services, and service delivery accountability. These Centers serve as the front-line touch points for the state's job seekers and businesses.

The Commission was charged with setting new criteria and standards for quality customer service for the state-wide career center system. This new criteria was approved by the Commission in May 2013, and addresses items laid out in the workforce reform law (Session Law 2012-131). It is also aligned with the integrated services delivery approach that emphasizes cross-training of staff and strong partnerships to serve customers better. The criteria for customer service, as well as a certification process, were developed to ensure a consistent level of quality customer service throughout the state's workforce delivery system.

The certification process is two-fold: local workforce offices send in an application describing how that office has met the Commission's criteria, and then a Quality Improvement team at the Division of Workforce Solutions visits the office to observe and evaluate operations. Following a successful evaluation, the local office is then certified by the Commission. At present, 76 career centers are certified. Local staff have built and enhanced partnerships internally and across agency lines, they've sought

to engage and assist businesses in finding a qualified workforce, and they've made process improvements to better serve their customers.

The Division of Workforce Solutions has implemented a state-wide, integrated services delivery approach to better serve the state's citizens and businesses by responding to customer needs. It is the commission's expectation that all certified centers adhere to this approach.

Integrated services delivery focuses on customer service and is organized around services to customers, not discrete programs offered in silos. In North Carolina, it is a system in which Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and the Wagner-Peyser Employment Services program are the operational backbone of NCWorks Career Centers.

Centers implementing this system deploy integrated staffing and utilize integrated technology to generate an integrated customer pool and customer flow. Integrated staffing refers to center staff organized by function, not by program or employer (funding source), with the purpose of serving customers efficiently and effectively. Staff organized by function is cross-trained so that all center staff has the capacity to serve all customers and is knowledgeable about all services the center offers.

Integrated technology refers to a single, web-based system (NCWorks Online) that provides job matching services to job seekers and employers, as well as program and client management/participant tracking used by staff. It is this web-based system that helps achieve an integrated customer pool, where all customers (when eligibility permits) are enrolled in both the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act Title I Adult program and Wagner-Peyser program; and all Trade Adjustment Act customers are enrolled in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act Title I Dislocated Worker program.

Integrated customer flow responds to customer need, not just to program requirements. Integrated customer flow refers to four major functions found at a career center that comprise customer welcome, skill development, employment services, and employer services. Regarding services offered, the term product box is used to describe a center's programs and services, including any number of "products" related to job placement assistance and job readiness activities, skill development services, occupational training that leads to a credential, and work-based learning.

Services provided to individuals through the NCWorks Career Center system include:

- career assessment and guidance;
- access to training and education programs;
- learn about job fairs and workshops;
- information on the job market;
- assistance with searching for jobs;
- resume and cover letter preparation;

- practice interviewing for jobs;
- free computer and internet access; and
- help registering with and using NCWorks Online;

Career centers also offer special programs to help the following populations find jobs: veterans, youth, migrant farm workers, former offenders, and others.

NCWorks Online, a web-based job matching system, is also available for individuals to search for jobs, learn about labor market information, complete an online profile with resumes, and receive alerts when jobs are available.

The Division of Workforce Solutions launched NCWorks Online, an integrated workforce system that offers powerful tools for employers to connect with talented job seekers, including advanced searches and real-time information on the labor market. NCWorks Online made its debut in August 2013, replacing nine older state-run systems, including the former job-search website NC JobConnector. The new one-stop virtual system was developed by Geographic Solutions of Florida, and is run and owned by the NC Department of Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions. Features include the ability to analyze real-time information on the labor market, including wage projects and industry trends. Even with all its features, NCWorks Online is expected to save taxpayers an estimated \$800,000 per year.

### Adult Education and Literacy Activities

There are currently 77 Adult Education and Literacy providers that operate under the auspices of the NC Community College System as the lead agency for Title II: 58 community colleges and 19 community-based organizations. In addition, there are 33 providers that offer English Language and Civics Education.

Per Section 202 of Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act, North Carolina will provide funding to eligible providers to offer the following adult education and literacy activities to individuals (see larger section on Adult Education and Literacy in the plan):

- Adult Basic Education
- Adult Secondary Education (Adult High School diploma program and High School Equivalency preparation and testing)
- English Language Acquisition
  - Reading, writing, speaking and comprehension in English
  - Mathematics skills
  - Acquiring an understanding of American civics
- Workplace Adult Education and Literacy Activities (offered at workplaces or off-site location)



- Family Literacy programs
- Basic Skills Plus
- Correctional Education

North Carolina will build on a solid foundation of current programming and transition models to address the three new requirements included in the definition of Adult Education and Literacy Activities:

- *Integrated Education and Training* (providing adult education/literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation/occupational cluster). Integrated Education and Training aims to lead to individual educational and career advancement.
- *Workplace Preparation Activities* to help individuals acquire basic academic skills, critical thinking skills, digital literacy skills and self-management skills (including soft skills and the skills needed to transition into and complete postsecondary education, training or obtain employment).
- *Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education*. This combines language and cultural literacy, with "civics education" including knowledge of American government, individual freedom and the responsibilities of citizenship.

Proposed activities to implement the new Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act requirements for adult education and literacy activities for individuals:

- *Explore expansion of Basic Skills Plus* (combining Adult High School or High School Equivalency + occupational training) to include all Basic Skills students. Currently, Basic Skills Plus is a subset of the larger Basic Skills program. The study would explore whether the program should/could be expanded to all Basic Skills students. Such a shift would deepen alignment across community college-supervised programs.
- *Develop Career Pathways and Transition Models* through curriculum review, development, and development of technical assistance. One focus area will be curriculum development with Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act core partners, focusing on the needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- *Disseminate Best Practices*. Innovative models previously funded will be disseminated to all providers through professional development activities. Best practice collection and dissemination will include insights about how adult education and literacy providers partner effectively with Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act core partners and mandatory One-Stop partners.
- *Enhance Partnership with NCCCS Human Resources Development (HRD) Program and NCWorks Centers*. Adult education and literacy providers will use the HRD program to provide employability skills to students enrolled in basic skills programs. Providers will also seek to build or expand partnerships with the programs and services available at NCWorks Career Centers.

- *Increase Services to Youth.* Strategies may include supporting real world work experience (via more transition programs between public schools and community colleges) and re-connecting disconnected youth to education and jobs (via stronger partnerships with Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act youth service providers).
- *Enhance accountability.* Continue to document and monitor progress toward Educational Functioning Level in order to encourage continuous improvement toward academic gains. Collect and report the common performance outcomes related to employment as part of the integrated data system shared by core programs.

Basic Skills Plus is high on the list of planned activities because it was originally conceived of as a career pathways program when it was developed. It provides additional “on-ramps” for individuals that tend to have difficulty establishing a career paying family-sustaining wages, and it advances the objectives of Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act for individual and employer customers. It builds skills, connects lower-skilled individuals to post-secondary education and the workforce, and through occupational training, helps achieve successful employee/employer matches.

The Unified Plan process and the NCWorks Certified Career Pathways are also opportunities to bring together Adult Education/Literacy and Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act Youth programming in new ways.

The NC Community College System’s Align4NCWorks plan supports these types of integration strategies:

- Establish and strengthen policies and practices for students and adult learners to enter into and proceed successfully through career pathways leading to a post-secondary credential and into a quality career.
- Address the unique needs of current and prospective students to help them succeed in education and careers.

For Program Year 2016, the NC Community College System will have developed an application packet for prospective providers of Adult Education and/or Literacy activities. Applicants may apply to receive a designation of Comprehensive Program or Literacy Services Only. The application packet constitutes the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act-AEFLA Local Plan and addresses a wide range of topics. Some key topics related to individual services include:

- Teaching and Learning - with subtopics such as Learners Most in Need (including those with low literacy skills and English Language Learners); Student Engagement; and Adult Learners with Disabilities (including MOUs with core partners, social service and community agencies to ensure wrap-around services)
- Core Program Alignment - including subtopics of Economic/Workforce Analysis, Alignment Plan and Collaboration
- Program Management

- Performance Accountability

## Other Community College Services for NCWorks Customers

Beyond Adult Education and Literacy activities, community colleges in North Carolina meet the needs of individual Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act customers in other ways, too. Examples:

- Community college education and workforce training as Eligible Training Providers (Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act funding available for tuition, books, and supplies, etc. for Adults and Dislocated Workers)
- Community college education or training as the classroom component for many Apprenticeship and Pre-Apprenticeship Training programs
- Referrals from community colleges to NCWorks Career Centers, NCWorks Online, and services funded under the Workforce Innovations and Opportunities Act
- One-stop services by community college personnel at NCWorks Career Centers and support for Career Center events such as job fairs
- Employability training through the Human Resources Development (HRD) program<sup>6</sup>
- Career Readiness Certificate preparation, testing and certification
- Collaborative career pathway development
- Collaborative career awareness and guidance

The role of HRD employability training vis-à-vis NCWorks Career Centers will be explored as part of Align4NCWorks implementation. The aim is to tap both federal and state resources to most effectively meet the needs of jobseekers and students.

The role of HRD employability training vis-à-vis NCWorks Career Centers will be explored as part of the implementation of Align4NCWorks, the Community College System's strategic plan for collaborative workforce development." The aim is to tap both federal and state resources to most effectively meet the needs of jobseekers and students.

*Align4NCWorks Goal 2: Connect students to quality careers and employers to quality employees.*

*Objective 2.A.: Enhance, integrate and market NC's education and workforce development programs, initiatives and resources to maximize talent connections.*

- *Action Step 2.A.iii.: Explore opportunities for increased collaboration between community college and employability training/career services and NCWorks Career Centers.*

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<sup>6</sup> The Human Resources Development program, which is within Workforce Continuing Education at NC community colleges, is available for free for dislocated workers and certain other populations in North Carolina using state funding, and can be offered as a standalone offering or paired with education or workforce development programming. Examples of programs it is paired with include Basic Skills Plus, Workforce Continuing Education occupational training programs, and major past WIA initiatives such as Jobs NOW. In some communities, NCWorks Centers tap HRD to offer employability training, resume development, etc. at the One-Stop.

Other goals addressing the needs of individuals in the strategic plan include the following:

*Goal 3: Ensure education and training address and validate skill and competency needs and attainment.*

*Goal 4: Expand work-based learning opportunities.*

*Goal 5: Improve career awareness and mapping.*

*Goal 6: Increase opportunities for college access while keeping education and training affordable.*

*Goal 7: Promote demand-driven and data-informed decision making... to more effectively meet workforce customer needs...*

Throughout the Align4NCWorks strategic plan, the Community College System identifies opportunities for new and expanded workforce collaboration. More than sixty individuals, including representatives of the core WIOA programs, have been named to Collective Impact Teams that will undertake program action, protocol and policy development, and general problem-solving to improve services to workforce customers through collaboration. The implementation phase of Align4NCWorks will take place from July 2015 through June 2018.

### Vocational Rehabilitation Programs

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Services for the Blind have relatively strong ties with other components of the statewide Workforce Development System. The partnerships and linkages that were established prior to the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act amendments of 1998 have served as a stable and effective foundation for effective service delivery. Cooperative agreements or memorandum of agreements have been established with all local area workforce boards. The agreements provide for the following strategies:

Provision of inter-component staff training and technical assistance with regard to:

- the availability and benefits of, and information on eligibility standards for vocational rehabilitation services; and
- the promotion of equal, effective, and meaningful participation by individuals with disabilities receiving workforce development system services in all of the states NCWorks Career Centers in the state through the promotion of accessibility; the use of non-discriminatory policies and procedures; the provision of reasonable accommodations; auxiliary aids and services, and rehabilitation technology for persons with disabilities.

Identification of service delivery strategies by the Division within the NCWorks Career Centers and other components of the workforce development system.

Development and implementation of information systems that link all components of the statewide workforce development system; that link the components to other electronic networks including non-visual electronic networks; and that relate to such subjects as employment statistics and information on job vacancies, career planning, and workforce development activities.

Further development and use of customer service features such as common intake and referral procedures when feasible, customer databases, resource information, and human services hotlines.

Establishment of cooperative efforts with employers to facilitate job placement and carry out any other activities that Vocational Rehabilitation and the employers determine to be appropriate.

Identification of staff roles, responsibilities, and available resources, along with specification of the financial responsibility of each component of the statewide workforce development system with regards to paying for certain services (consistent with state law and federal requirements).

The rehabilitation needs of individuals who are served through components of the statewide workforce development system other than through the public vocational rehabilitation program will be updated and reassessed through the methodology outlined in that section of the VR portion of the Unified State Plan. One of the ongoing goals for both the vocational rehabilitation and NCWorks system is to continue to refine the processes and procedures for NCWorks staff to better determine which consumers with disabilities utilizing the centers should be referred to DVRS rather than being served through NCWorks. First it is necessary to determine which consumers served by the NCWorks system have a disability. Strategies to improve this will be further explored via mutual collaboration between VR and NCWorks Career Centers to establish training for its staff.

The Division enthusiastically participated in the development of NCWorks Career Centers and continues to be an active partner throughout North Carolina to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access core workforce services. Vocational Rehabilitation staff are represented on the state level as well as on local boards. The Division remains an active partner with the workforce development system and supports the NCWorks concept to provide more universal access to placement and training services; to integrate programs by offering a common core of information and services; and by offering consumers more choices regarding where and how they get services. Through local agreements, direct service delivery staff within the Division have gained more access to comprehensive Division of Employment Security data, which enables faster service delivery and cross-agency collaboration. Nearly all DVRS offices have obtained access to these databases to date.

In every community where there are NCWorks Career Centers, local Vocational Rehabilitation offices provide counseling staff, vocational evaluators, human resource placement specialists and other staff as appropriate to meet the needs of those individuals who enter an NCWorks Career Center and require the specialized services

offered by Vocational Rehabilitation. Specific arrangements and staffing patterns by Vocational Rehabilitation staff vary from site to site depending on local needs and agreements. Enhanced working relationships with key partners of the workforce development system such as Social Services, NC Division of Employment Security, NC Community College System, and other local partnerships allow all the agencies to better meet the needs of the individual.

The number of individuals served or identified through components of the workforce development system is increasing. Local division management represents Vocational Rehabilitation on the local workforce development boards while staff also actively participate in planning, development, and service delivery with both individual component agencies or within the NCWorks Career Centers already established.

State-level meetings with identified partners of the workforce development system continue to promote effective collaboration and equal access to services by individuals with disabilities.

## **(D) Coordination, Alignment and Provision of Services to Employers.**

The three agencies responsible for the six core programs work together in local, regional, and state-level teams to meet the needs of employers in North Carolina. Currently, NCWorks is coordinating via development of comprehensive employer services literature and brochures for dissemination across all programs, investigating options for an integrated customer relationship management tool, and establishing regional business services teams to ensure coordination among local workforce development boards. Further, the State will recommend a business services committee be established by local workforce development boards that will develop local and regional strategies for employer engagement and report to the Boards quarterly.

With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, emphasis for local success is built on the concepts of (1) regionalism as an approach to engage businesses, (2) creating collaborative partnerships with economic development/education to provide solutions, and (3) developing sector strategies to build talent pipelines.

Local workforce areas are pursuing a regional approach, and establishing a framework, for business engagement through the Business Services Representative (BSR) position. The framework provides a foundation to support the work of the BSR through its alignment with the North Carolina Integrated Service Delivery System (NCWorks). The framework seeks to ensure consistent delivery of services to businesses across the state, and to create a comprehensive approach for forging collaborative partnerships with key stakeholders, all with the purpose of pursuing business engagement, developing comprehensive solutions, and satisfying the talent needs of those businesses.

The following overarching goals are essential:

- businesses are targeted proactively and strategically based on sector analysis and in alignment with local board strategic plans;
- employers are offered a single point-of-contact throughout the relationship to ensure relationships are maintained;
- comprehensive solutions are provided to address business needs throughout the entire business life cycle; and
- technology is leveraged to facilitate information sharing and collaboration.

For Business Services to work well as a collaborative, and deliver excellent customer service, each local area will position BSRs to lead their regional efforts to meet business needs.

NCWorks Career Centers help employers find, train, and retain qualified employees. Each center provides services to help local businesses, including the following:

- job applicant screening and qualified candidate referrals;
- valuable and up-to-date labor market facts and projections, such as wages;
- information on tax credits for hiring particular groups of workers;

- space to conduct job interviews;
- help arranging job fairs;
- workshops on employer-related subjects;
- employee training resources;
- layoff/closure prevention services for employers; and
- information about federal bonding (insurance for hiring at-risk workers.)

NCWorks Online, a web-based job matching system, is also available for businesses to post jobs, get real-time analysis on the labor market, find qualified candidates to fill open positions, and all at no cost.

Each workforce development board has business services staff available to meet employers' needs. Local areas have begun to form regional employer service teams, which include various partners.

There are a number of workforce programs for businesses, including the Registered Apprenticeship Program, On-the-Job Training Program, and Incumbent Worker Program.

### Apprenticeship

Employers work with NCWorks Apprenticeship to create a written agreement that specifies the length of a participant's training, the related technical instruction, and outline of the skills that person will need to learn, and the wages he or she will earn. Through NCWorks Apprenticeship employers gain:

- a proven process for imparting the knowledge and skills of experienced personnel to new employees;
- greater workforce competency and productivity;
- partnerships with certification and licensing agencies; and
- valuable asset in the recruitment and retention of a highly qualified workforce.

Per federal guidelines, Registered Apprenticeship requires education/training, supervised/mentor-based work-based learning, and a progressive wage scale.

A few years ago, North Carolina added Pre-Apprenticeships to its portfolio for work-based learning to offer greater flexibility to employers while establishing a process for individuals to get "credit" toward a Registered Apprenticeship based on work-based experiences and/or classroom training.



Apprenticeships and Pre-Apprenticeships involve a great deal of coordination with employers and among workforce development partners, including Commerce/Division of Workforce Solutions apprenticeship consultants; community colleges, public schools, and other education providers; and workforce development boards as promoters of Apprenticeship strategies as a part of their overall portfolio of business services.

### DWS On-the-Job Training

DWS On-the-Job Training provides North Carolina a means to expand and enhance workforce service delivery to the State's citizens. OJT is a viable pathway for unemployed workers seeking employment and for employers seeking workers. It offers the unique opportunity to offset initial training costs to fill skilled positions while building organizational productivity as the employee learns job requirements. An OJT arrangement can be the impetus for an employer to create a job opportunity. Local Workforce Development Boards should consider OJT placements in the context of in-demand occupations or industries where career pathways exist with employer partners who have a documented plan to add jobs.

DWS On-the-Job Training is defined in Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act Section 3 (44) as training by an employer that is provided to a paid participant while engaged in productive work in a job that:

- provides knowledge or skills essential to the full adequate performance of the job;
- is made available through a program that provides reimbursement to the employer of up to 50 percent of the wage rate of the participant, except as provided in Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act Section 134(c)(3)(H), (see note below) for the extraordinary costs of providing the training and additional supervision related to the training; and
- is limited in duration as appropriate to the occupation for which the participant is being trained, taking into account the content of the training, the prior work experience of the participant, and the service strategy of the participant, as appropriate.

DWS On-the-Job Training is a viable and compatible part of North Carolina's Integrated Services Delivery product box. Local Workforce Development Board OJT policy is critical for consistency, institutionalizing services the local board seeks to deliver, and managing and leveraging OJT funds. Local OJT policy also provides guidance on how to comply with federal and state OJT requirements and leverage other hiring.

## NCWorks Incumbent Worker Training Grants

Businesses grow stronger when their employees are trained in new skill sets, but the cost of training can be expensive. To meet this need, the state offers NCWorks Incumbent Worker Training Grants for qualifying employers.

The grant program reimburses businesses for the cost of training their workers, helping to improve the skills of employees and the business' competitiveness. Employers can receive up to \$60,000 lifetime total over the course of the company's lifetime.

The grants cover the costs of the following training programs:

- instructional costs for training courses;
- classes for certification exams;
- online training;
- skills assessments related to requested training;
- textbooks and manuals;
- computer software for training purposes; and
- instructor travel (if the training location is not within a reasonable distance to the business)

## The 1000 in 100 Initiative

In 2014, Governor Pat McCrory kicked off the statewide 1000 in 100 workforce development initiative aimed at listening to businesses about workforce development needs as a unified workforce team. The initiative, announced as a part of the new NCWorks program, called for local workforce development teams across the state to visit at least 1,000 businesses throughout the state's 100 counties during 100 days to seek input from employers about their workforce needs. Teams were co-led by workforce development boards and community colleges, and they consisted of representatives from the Department of Commerce/Division of Workforce Solutions, local chambers of commerce, economic development entities, Vocational Rehabilitation offices and other agencies.

Citing the need for educators and business leaders to work hand-in-hand to provide training that will equip workers with skills that are in-demand, local workforce development teams visited over 1,000 businesses to learn the skill sets the state's economy demands. Teams focused on industries identified as priorities in the state's "Jobs Plan" but also tailored their mix of businesses to each county's economy. These businesses had the opportunity to share their concerns about finding, hiring and retaining skilled workers.

By the end of the 2014, 1,106 summaries of employer conversations had been recorded from the 1,000 in 100 initiative. This is believed to be the largest set of on-site interviews with employers in state history.

The information gathered from the 1,000 in 100 initiative is being used along with other research to develop recommendations for changes to improve North Carolina's workforce development system. In addition, the concept of team-based employer services is promoted in the NCWorks Strategic Action Plan and the NC Community College System's Align4NCWorks plan. The information and lessons about team-based business services will guide continued streamlining of workforce development under the NCWorks umbrella.

### Employer Needs Survey

In 2013-14, the North Carolina Employer Needs Survey was jointly designed and conducted by the statewide Business Services Representatives (BSR) network affiliated with the workforce development boards and NC Department of Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD). Key questions related to whether employers had difficulty filling any positions (and if so, why?), as well as understanding employers' needs and recruitment strategies.

The survey was based upon an earlier survey conducted by the BSRs (published in 2012), adding the perspective of a research office and a formal survey methodology and analysis. The Department of Commerce developed a Survey Monkey tool and turned to local Business Service Representatives working with other workforce partners (community college Customized Training staff, NC Department of Commerce economic developers, and local partners) to follow up with employers and encourage them to complete the survey. The Department of Commerce also turned to the Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services at NC State University to do phone-based follow-up to achieve usable responses from almost 800 employers. The Department of Commerce analyzed the data, published a report, and presented findings to the NCWorks Commission and numerous other workforce development audiences.

Key findings from the survey:

- Many NC employers have had difficulty hiring workers (but not the majority and not all are critical needs).
- Issues exist in a wide variety of industries and occupations.
- Workforce needs reported most frequently related to Experience, Education, Credentials, and Technical skills.
- Another Employer Needs Survey is planned for 2016.

### Work Opportunity Tax Credits

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit encourages employers to hire individuals who are qualified for open positions but face barriers to employment. Businesses can receive a

one-time tax credit of \$2,400-\$9,600 for hiring a qualified job applicant; the amount varies, depending on the hire.

To be eligible for the tax credit, employers must hire an individual from one of the following groups:

- recipients of Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP);
- former offenders;
- vocational rehabilitation program participant;
- recipients of long-term family assistance;
- veterans unemployed at least four weeks; and
- veterans with a service-connected disability

In North Carolina, the NC Division of Workforce Solutions accepts applications for the tax credit, which is authorized by the U.S. Congress.

### Services to Employers through the Community Colleges

The North Carolina Community College System is a system of 58 comprehensive community colleges that melded the collection and missions of the state's public junior colleges and its public Industrial Education Centers in the 1960s. The System has a long-standing history of serving employers throughout its programs and became known nationally for [one of] the nation's first and most robust Customized Training programs. Adult Education and Literacy (Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act Title II) services reflect the system's employer focus, and there are many education and training offerings that Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act participants access with tuition or related student support through Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act or VR.) The Community College System's current strategic initiative, Align4NCWorks, has a major emphasis on employer services and seeks to meet employer needs through a collaborative approach.

Adult Education and Literacy Services meet the needs of employers in a variety of ways:

Increase the pool of employable workers by helping high school dropouts and individual with low literacy gain basic skills and the base level of education required for most entry level jobs (high school diploma or its equivalency).

Help immigrants become part of the talent pool by improving their English language skills and knowledge of the country and work values.

Connect talent to the digital economy by emphasizing digital literacy.

Besides these core services, North Carolina's Adult Education and Literacy program emphasizes simultaneous accumulation of skills for employment through its Basic Skills Plus program. Under the Basic Skills Plus program, approved colleges may use up to 20% of their adult literacy funding to provide accelerated job training and basic skills instruction for students who are functioning on the high school level. These students are co-enrolled in Basic Skills courses and occupational career pathways. Colleges may waive tuition for these students. Currently, 57 of the 58 community college have approval to offer Basic Skills Plus.

Colleges must have approval by the State Board of Community Colleges to have a Basic Skills Plus program and to enroll students in career pathways. Career pathways selected by the college must have a demonstrated demand for employment in local and regional labor markets and offer integrated instruction and student support. Some of the employer-focused criteria required for Basic Skills Plus career pathways include Sector Strategies, Stackable Education/Training Options, Contextualized Learning, and Industry Recognized Credentials.

#### Employer Input in Design of Education and Training

The Community College System requires business advisory committees as per SACSCOC (reinforced through its program review and accountability process), and (where applicable) federal requirements.

All technical programs at a community college have program advisory committees which generally meet at a minimum one to two times a year. Many colleges involve deeper involvement; for example, Brunswick Community College works with an extensive set of economic development and workforce development partners to aggressively seek input on college programming and other workforce services from businesses throughout the county.

#### Sector Strategies

In deciding what education, training or certification programs to offer, community colleges rely on a combination of direct input from business (as referenced above), data analyses, and priorities established by economic development partners. Data analysis is generally conducted by college Institutional Research staff (primarily for planning of one- and two-year programs), by college Workforce Continuing Education program leaders (for short-term training), and/ or procured from the NC Department of Commerce/Labor and Economic Analysis or local economic development partners. There is increasing use of supply and demand analyses as well as a variety of economic and labor market data analyses to determine priorities for education/training based on

industries that need workers (and thus education/training) and current/projected hiring within specific occupations.

The state Jobs Plan (economic development strategic plan) lays out a set of target industries, and county/regional economic development entities define their area's specific needs. The NCWorks Strategic Action Plan encourages workforce programs under the NCWorks system's purview to target resources to economic needs.

North Carolina has a long history in sector strategies using WIOA funded services, with locally and regionally defined initiatives as well as statewide sector initiatives in areas ranging from Allied Health, Green Energy, Advanced Manufacturing (including specific areas such as Aviation), etc. Community colleges have played major roles throughout the state and local sector strategies, as leaders or collaborators in initiatives that include WIOA partners.

One notable example of a sector strategy that the Community College System leads is the NC BioNetwork program, funded by the General Assembly. The program has regional centers based at community colleges that specialize in key sectors within biotechnology that are important for North Carolina (e.g., food processing and biopharmaceuticals), and these support the development and provision of community college biotech-related education, training and certification across the state.

#### *NCWorks Customized Training*

North Carolina's primary workforce tool for economic development is NCWorks Customized Training, state-funded community college training tailored to the needs of manufacturing and other "economic base" industries that are looking to expand, relocate to North Carolina or make new investments. Services are typically provided to one employer at a time, although Customized Training projects can pave the way for development of Workforce Continuing Education programs that typically serve multiple employers. There is also a new pilot program testing a pre-hire approach through Customized Training that (with the help of two workforce development boards in eastern North Carolina) would serve multiple employers that individually have the need for just one or two welders at a time.

Customized Training and Workforce Development Board/Career Center services already are interwoven in certain areas. An example is shown below, demonstrating how Beaufort County Community College and the area NCWorks Career Center worked together to meet the needs of a company (idX), using tools including WIA/WIOA On-the-Job Training.

The focus on employers needs is being intensified as part of the 2015-2018 Align4NCWorks strategic initiative, as is the focus on meeting needs collaboratively. The first goal in the NC Community College System's "Align4NCWorks" strategic plan is to

"Increase and sustain employer engagement as part of an integrated, customer-centered workforce system."

There are plans underway via both the NCWorks Commission's and Community College System's strategic plans to better connect Customized Training/other community college education and training services for employers with workforce development board protocols.

#### Small Business Center Connections to WIOA services

Every community college in North Carolina has a Small Business Center that provides education, training, and counseling for prospective business owners. The state's Jobs Plan, NCWorks Strategic Action Plan, and Align4NCWorks (community college) plan all call for better coordinating entrepreneurship training and development through the Small Business Center Network with the network of NCWorks Career Centers.

#### *Strategic Focus on Business in Align4NCWorks Strategic Plan*

The focus on employers needs is being intensified as part of the 2015-2018 Align4NCWorks strategic initiative, as is the focus on meeting needs collaboratively. The first goal in the NC Community College System's "Align4NCWorks" strategic plan is to *"Increase and sustain employer engagement as part of an integrated, customer-centered workforce system."* Objectives under Goal one are:

- Ensure the workforce system is relevant, valuable and easy to access by the business community:
  - In collaboration with workforce and education partners, develop protocols for serving businesses as a unified business services team with joint marketing materials, and promote use of a single customer relationship management tool.
  - In collaboration with workforce and education partners, develop and implement a system-wide and consistent business outreach strategy.
  - Analyze results from the "1,000 in 100" initiative and identify continued opportunities for success.
- Increase business and industry's commitment to contribute to curriculum design, pathway implementation and sponsorship of work-based learning:
  - Create protocols for business representatives, business associations and industry sector groups to contribute to the design and delivery of top-quality coursework at all levels
  - Increase employer engagement in the identification and support of work-based learning.
- Develop and enhance connections between workforce development and economic development to strengthen local economies:

- Work with workforce and economic development partners to ensure that business outreach protocols are focused on economic priorities.
- With the involvement of business and industry, provide training and development to education/workforce partners on how to build and manage industry partnerships and business advisory boards.

Most of these objectives and action steps were strategies that were originally set in partner strategic plans – the NCWorks Strategic Action Plan, NC Jobs Plan, BEST NC (corporate leader plan for education) and State Board of Education plan. The strategies will be pursued together through our respective strategic plans. The Community College System aims to promote collaboration by including other agencies on the teams that will implement its Align4NCWorks Project Management and implementation teams.

### Vocational Rehabilitation Programs

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) currently utilizes a dual customer approach by providing services to both businesses and individuals with disabilities. The Division emphasizes the definition and marketing of business services to ensure the dual customer approach is recognized and implemented. Business services include recruitment, hiring, consultation on Section 503 compliance, sensitivity/diversity training, accessibility consultation, internships, On-the-Job Training (OJT), education on tax incentives, and follow-up and job retention services. NC DVRS continues to market business services by employing 67 business relations representatives (BRR) that serve as employment specialists across the state. These individuals are often have education and experience in a business-related field, such as human resources and marketing, so that the Division is equipped with personnel who understand the needs of employers. In addition to providing individualized job seeker services, the business relations representatives connect with local industry through participation in networking events and working relationships with workforce system partners. The performance of business relations representatives is measured, in part, by assessing relationships with business as evidenced by direct and indirect placements of eligible jobseekers with disabilities. DVRS believes that relationships with employers is the essence of creating positive connections between jobseekers and business, and that providing follow-up and technical assistance to business fosters these relationships so that they can have a sustainable impact on the supporting individuals with disabilities in finding, maintaining, and advancing in employment.

#### *Provision of VR Services through Coordination with Employers*

DVRS services to adults intersects with business services in the areas of vocational evaluation and career development, job seeker preparation, and job development and



job placement of individuals with disabilities who are ready to work. DVRS staff continue to be trained in the dual customer approach and employment outcomes to identify these intersection points between the VR services that DVRS provides to jobseekers and those services provided to employers. The unique role of the business relations representatives highlights this intersection well.

DVRS staff plan to expand the role of employers in vocational evaluation and career development services. DVRS will be enhancing policies around internships and on-the-job training (OJT) services so that the service procedures are consistent with employer practices while still preparing the individual for competitive employment. DVRS plans to work towards a service definition that is complementary to other internship and OJT programs available in the state through our workforce system partners.

DVRS staff, including business relations representatives, will continue to develop relationships with business based on the individual placement needs of eligible individuals with disabilities who are placement-ready. Employers will be engaged in the individual preparation of job seekers with disabilities by involving them in Employment Marking Skills training classes as well as Job Clubs. Employers participate in job interview preparation of job seekers in addition to information-sharing with job seekers about employer expectations in general and within their specific industry.

DVRS plans to increase the quantity and improve the quality of business partnerships in the future with the expectation that an increased number and depth in business relationships will result in increased opportunities to assist individuals with disabilities with vocational evaluation and career development, job seeker preparation, and job development and job placement. We plan to identify methods for capturing information on employment relationships within our case management system in order to map out the presence of business partnerships and identify opportunities for growth and means for leveraging peer-to-peer marketing of VR business services.

#### *Provision of Transition Services through Coordination with Employers*

While youth and students with disabilities have access to the same VR services as adults, there are some VR services reserved for or targeted to transition-aged youth for the purposes of assisting them with leaving high school and preparing for competitive employment. The Division plans to focus on program development in the coming year in order to meet the 15% required spending allocation for Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) to students with disabilities. A number of areas of program development are focused on increased engagement with employers in order to implement PETS. These include: summer internships for students and youth with disabilities including on-the-job supports, increased utilization of OJT for students and youth, and increasing the number of Project Search © sites.

DVRS plans to enhance its current internship policies to expand the service to a larger group of students with disabilities, including possibly, those who are college-bound or currently enrolled in college training. The goal is to create enriching work experiences for students that expose them to work options, allow them to develop high expectations around their capacity for competitive employment, and build a resume that will enable young people with disabilities to compete for quality jobs. DVRS plans to also enhance internship opportunities for individuals with disabilities by developing employer-based internship programs with businesses who recognize the value of building up workers. Internship opportunities for youth will be short-term, occur in conjunction with the student's educational requirements or during the student's school breaks, and may involve paid training and engage internship training supports such as job coaching.

DVRS will work on enhancing OJT utilization for students and youth with disabilities as well by engaging business in the development of young talent. DVRS plans to streamline OJT processes, revise policies so that they are complementary to similar OJT programs, and improve marketing and tracking materials and processes so that the materials are engaging to both student/youth participants and potential business as well as easy to complete and accessible.

DVRS will continue to explore unique business partnerships that benefit the unique training and recruitment needs of students and youth with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities. DVRS plans to continue partnering on Project Search © sites where there is a need and willingness by community partners. This model places business in the middle of the training and employment of young people by hosting student interns at the business and seeking placement opportunities within the business where they may exist. Project Search © host businesses can not only support the students enrolled in projects on their site, but can also be business advocates for people with disabilities in their industries.

DVRS will continue to explore unique training, career development, and placement opportunities with NC businesses that may result from greater collaborations with the NC Department of Public Instruction, local education agencies, the NC Community Colleges System, and Title I youth services providers.

Similarly, the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) VR Employment Services Specialist, VR Counselors and Business Service Representatives will reach out to employers in their geographic areas and statewide to make contact on behalf of the agency to ensure that area employers are aware of what DSB-VR has to offer regarding their employment needs. They will offer general information on DSB Services including opportunities for internships and job shadowing experiences, the Supported Employment Program, potential employees so that they may represent, disability sensitivity training available and benefits to employers that hire those with disabilities.

The DSB VR Employment Services Specialist, VR Transition Counselors and Community Employment Specialists will also communicate with employers regarding the expansive program DSB offers its students and youth with disabilities. They will offer general information on DSB Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) and Youth Services including opportunities for work-based learning experiences, the Supported Employment Program, potential employees that we may represent, disability sensitivity training available and benefits to employers that hire those with disabilities.

Through existing tools and continued innovation, North Carolina is intent on being a provider of Best Practices and Guidance to encourage the adoption of comprehensive employer services across all workforce programs in the state.

### **(E) Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions.**

NCWorks Career Centers all have formal partnerships with the 58 community colleges across the state, as well as the 115 local public school districts. Some career centers are even located on a community college campus. Enhanced partnerships and collaboration are highlighted in the NCWorks Commission's criteria for career center certification, which promotes improved customer service at all of the state's One-Stop locations. Letters of support from local community colleges and the local school districts are required for career center certification and must show viable partnerships are in place with the local workforce board. Also, many of the state's WIOA youth program contracts are with local school systems. Local boards, community colleges and public schools work together to offer services and activities to youth participants such as Career Days, mentoring, and job shadowing.

There is community college representation on all 23 workforce development boards in North Carolina, and some boards also have representation from local Career and Technical Education programs. North Carolina's local workforce development boards and career centers are called upon to collaborate with local education partners to help connect NC employers to the NC employees they need to succeed in our state and help our citizens gain new skills and find employment. Two examples of this recently are the Career Pathways initiative and the 1000 in 100 initiative.

In addition, the NCWorks Commission will now have a representative from the university system in North Carolina to enhance collaboration among workforce and education partners.

### *Career Pathways*

In order to prepare workers to succeed in the North Carolina economy and continuously improve their skills, the workforce development system must strengthen career development services and ensure consistency across programs; enhance programs and

enrollment in critical career clusters by targeting resources; coordinate programs among workforce partners to develop skill and education pathways; and become a national leader in providing structured work-based learning. One such strategy is the creation of NCWorks Certified Career Pathways.

Career pathways are purposeful plans for education and training leading to knowledge and skill acquisition and successful careers. Pathway development is led by engaged employers who identify the skills, credentials, and experiences needed to be successful in high-demand occupations. Local partners from workforce development boards, high schools, community colleges, and North Carolina's public universities use the data to craft programs of study across the educational spectrum and provide workforce services that offer individuals the opportunity to gain the targeted skills, credentials, and experiences.

The NCWorks Commission approved criteria establishing an NCWorks Certified Career Pathway. This criteria was created by an interagency group representing the NCWorks Commission, Division of Workforce Solutions, Community College System, Department of Public Instruction, and Labor and Economic Analysis Division. The criteria outline the required elements which local teams will use to draft employer-driven pathways. While career pathways have existed in North Carolina for several years, an NCWorks Certified Career Pathway will have more rigorous requirements including a work-based learning component.

#### NCWorks Career Pathways Application Guidelines

STEP 1: Local or regional partners create a career pathway that adheres to the criteria approved by the NCWorks Commission.

STEP 2: Local partners identify a lead individual to complete the application form, affirm that criteria has been met, and act as the point of contact for NCWorks Commission staff.

STEP 3: The local team submits completed application. Application and all supporting materials must be submitted electronically in one .pdf file.

STEP 4: NCWorks Commission staff conducts an initial review of the submitted application. As needed, staff will work with local point of contact to ensure application is complete. Completed applications are forwarded to the statewide interagency review team.

STEP 5: The interagency team will conduct a review of the application and provide feedback to the local team. Once the interagency team has determined that all criteria have been met, it will recommend certification to the NCWorks Commission.

STEP 6: The NCWorks Commission will accept or reject the certification recommendation. If accepted, the local team will be notified and a certificate will be issued. If rejected, the local team will be provided reasons for denial and an opportunity to correct any outstanding deficiencies.

The career pathway criteria ensure that consistent and comprehensive pathways are available across the state while providing local and regional workforce teams the flexibility to meet their community needs. Local workforce partners within the State will work together with a group of engaged employers to develop a career pathway in a high demand occupation. Once the pathway has been developed the local team will apply to have their career pathways certified. This certification will denote that the pathway has been vetted and validated by a statewide team of workforce development professionals. Eight evaluation criteria provide guidance for workforce partners to ensure flexibility to meet diverse workforce needs and consistency to stabilize a regional, sector-driven approach to workforce development statewide.

The Division of Workforce Solutions, within the NC Department of Commerce, is committed to ensuring North Carolina workforce preparation aligns with employer need through NCWorks Certified Career Pathways. Certified career pathways are in high-demand occupations and will help individuals become work ready in a shorter time period as they seek to reduce duplication of educational and work experience attainment. Employers will benefit from participation in certified career pathways by helping to create a pipeline of talent to meet their short- and long-term needs. Certified career pathways will also benefit the educational and workforce development institutions that serve dislocated workers by providing a guided, sector strategy approach – with a regional focus – to provide classroom and work based learning opportunities.

Core values of NCWorks Certified Career Pathways are that they demand the leadership of engaged employers within diverse sectors, innovation from educational institutions tasked with meeting the needs of a dynamic workforce and consistency of educational and work-based learning opportunities for pathway participants. From the mountains to the coast, any individual enrolled in a certified career pathway in NC will be assured his/her journey is focused, reducing the need to duplicate training thereby reducing the costs of tuition, fees and training materials. The result is a workforce that is well-trained, in a shorter period of time able to respond to the demands of the state's economy and to earn a wage that provides for a good quality of life.

In May 2015, the NCWorks Commission, the state's Workforce Investment Board, approved criteria for certified career pathways. The state's process for certifying career pathways is the result of two years of work between various workforce partners, including the NC Department of Public Instruction (K-12) and the NC Community College System (NCCCS). With NCCCS Career and Technical Education funding, the

NCCCS and DPI collaboratively developed a Career Pathways Pilot grant program that required local or regional teams to come together to develop programs. Much of the thinking behind that pilot fed into the development of career pathway criteria, and the pilot programs continue to offer lessons learned even as the initial NCWorks Certified Career Pathway applications come in for review in fall 2015.

*Other ways State strategies engage the State's education and training providers as partners in a job-driven education and training system:*

Establishment of ambitious postsecondary goals for the state, developed in partnership with key education and training providers. At the 2015 NCWorks Partnership Conference in October 2015, the Governor announced a new goal for North Carolina: by 2025, 67% of North Carolinians will have postsecondary education beyond high school. The governor announced this goal at an NCWorks Leadership Summit – a joint meeting of the NCWorks Commission, State Board of Community Colleges, State Board of Education, University of North Carolina Board of Governors, Board of Directors for the Economic Development Partnership of NC, NC Business Committee for Education, and Board of Independent Colleges and Universities.

The NCWorks and Align4NCWorks strategic plans both reference job-driven education and training and lay out a collaborative framework to support it.

#### *Vocational Rehabilitation Programs*

The Vocational Rehabilitation Programs have established policies and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students, and sponsorship of postsecondary education when appropriate for the participant's individualized plan for employment.

The NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation will revise and renew its state level memorandum of agreement (MOA) with NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) upon issuance of the final federal regulations on Title IV of Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act. The purpose of the MOU is to outline a collaborative partnership between the two agencies to provide state level approval and support for enhanced transition services to students with disabilities. The revised MOA with DPI will also specify the manner in which Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) will be coordinated and provided within NC schools as well as how students with disabilities, including those who are potentially eligible for VR services, will be identified and served in compliance with federal regulations.

In addition to a state level MOA, the VR unit offices and local education agencies (LEA) customize a local Third Party Cooperative Agreement (TPCA) to outline how the

agencies will work together to ensure that vocational rehabilitation services are administered to students with disabilities. The TPCA stipulates administrative funding to support VR staff, outlines procedures for information sharing, and requires a process for referring students with disabilities to VR in order for the Division to carry out the vocational rehabilitation process. DVRS TPCAs with 99 of the 115 LEAs in North Carolina contribute funding towards 202 positions including VR counselors, business relations representatives, vocational evaluators and additional VR support staff including casework assistants and casework technicians available to provide VR transition services in the local community. In areas where a TPCA has not been established, the local manager has designated a VR counselor to directly serve the students with disabilities in the local schools. Since 2003, DVRS has implemented strategies for serve transition-aged youth. Under Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act and as the Title IV regulations are finalized, DVRS will be enhancing programs and services to transition-aged youth with increased focus on students with disabilities and PETS. New programs are intended to align the Division with federal requirements under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, namely PETS, as well as provide improved transition services to students while they are in high school. DVRS expects that NC public schools will see a value-add for investing in the VR partnership.

## **(F) Leveraging Resources to Increase Educational Access.**

North Carolina is making access to education a priority. NCWorks Certified Career Pathways will serve as a fulcrum for increased educational access for citizens and collaboration among workforce partners. The establishment of regional business services teams will connect employer engagement activities with career pathways strategies on the local level. The three agencies responsible for the six core programs continue to strategize together and work collaboratively to leverage all resources available to serve the state's job seekers and training seekers. Many of the 23 local workforce development boards also leverage resources from their respective cities and counties to enhance access to educational and workforce programs. Other resources may come in the form of local grants, other federal grant money, and partnerships with nonprofit organizations and school districts.

One example of a current grant is the Job Driven Initiative, a grant funded by USDOL with the specific objective to implement new or expand local and regional job driven partnerships that will serve dislocated workers and achieve better employment related outcomes for this group of workers. In North Carolina, the Division of Workforce Solutions is partnering with local workforce development boards and the North Carolina Community College System to provide occupational skills training and on-the-job training with Job Driven Initiative funds.

The Job Driven Initiative is an opportunity to strengthen collaborative partnerships with employers, workforce development boards, NCWorks Career Centers and community colleges that support integrated, seamless and customer centered NCWorks system. There are six local workforce development boards and 13 community colleges participating and working regionally and collaboratively to support NCWorks through effective partnerships while building on previous initiatives. The Job Driven Initiative also seeks to foster responsiveness to the needs of the economy by continuing to build long term relationships with local employers through engagement that meets their training needs.

One outgrowth of the WIOA planning process is the formation of the cross-agency WIOA Steering Council, with executive representation from all core partners. This is one of many new collaborations in response to the Opportunity Act. The Steering Council will continue its efforts beyond implementation such as pursuing specific Federal Grants as a team.

### **Food and Nutrition**

The Food and Nutrition Services, Employment and Training program through the Department of Health and Human Services prepares adult Food and Nutrition Services



recipients' for employment through assistance with job searches and other work activities as well as short-term training opportunities. The program is designed to serve low-income job seekers.

The NC Department of Health and Human Services, with support of the US Dept. of Agriculture, aims to boost use of SNAP E&T in North Carolina to meet low-income individuals' employment and training needs, and they are promoting in particular the SNAP E&T "50-50" funding which encourages spending by partners on SNAP participants and generates 50% reimbursements to expand resources for this population.

Both the Department of Commerce/Division of Workforce Solutions and NC Community College System are exploring partnerships with state DHHS and between local partners, and representatives of both spoke at a SNAP E&T meeting aimed at local DSS directors in late September. The NC Community College System is in communication with NC DHHS and working with a graduate student from Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy to better understand the SNAP E&T program and explore options.

#### *Other Leveraged Resources to Increase Educational Access*

North Carolina currently leverages the following other sources of funding for educational access/workforce development:

- Pell grants. North Carolina Community College students rely on Pell grant funding each year.
- GI bill educational resources for veterans and initiatives and tools that make it easier for veterans to crosswalk their military experience and gain educational credit/credentials.
- State, local and private scholarships or sponsorships (e.g., Golden LEAF Foundation, Duke Energy/other private companies, State Employees' Credit Union, and other sources). Funding flows through the State Board of Community Colleges, local community college foundations, and directly to students.
- In addition to its scholarships for individual students, Golden LEAF Foundation is an important source of workforce development grant funding in North Carolina. Grants are made to community colleges, LEAs, nonprofit organizations, and other entities to boost education and training, pay for equipment needed for job training programs, etc.
- The Belk Foundation is supporting key work on career pathways in North Carolina.
- Other state and national foundations and corporative giving programs are important for workforce development access and success. North Carolina is part of the National Governor's Association Policy Academy on Alignment, which is supporting educational goal-setting and collaborative workforce development.
- If funding allows after paying for work-related needs, local departments of social services can use Child Care and Development Fund dollars and state Smart Start

dollars to assist with subsidized child care for those in training or looking for work.

- At the local level, decisions are made by community action agencies (with federal CSBG and private funding sources), nonprofit organizations and/or faith-based organizations to provide transportation assistance, child care assistance and/or occasionally direct educational assistance.

One of the eight goals in the North Carolina Community College System's Align4NCWorks strategic plan focuses on access: "Increase opportunities for college access while keeping education and training affordable." Some of the Action Steps that relate to leveraging resources to increase educational access include:

- Promote Career and College Promise to give high school students a jump start on higher education and possible reduction in time/cost at higher education institutions. (Support in the 2015 legislature will provide funding for NCCCS-supported Career Coaches in high schools across the state that provide postsecondary education information as well as guidance about community college programming.)
- Undertake a policy analysis to identify barriers to access, including but not limited to education costs, wrap-around costs (transportation...credentialing, child care, etc.) and non-financial barriers, and work in collaboration with workforce, education and nonprofit partners to mitigate barriers.
- Track state and federal program changes that could impact education and training affordability, and ensure that support through Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act programs is connected with community college financial aid resources.

### Vocational Rehabilitation

DVRS plans to maintain and strengthen its programmatic relationships with school transition services through its continued active participation by the Division's Transition Program Specialist on the State Capacity Building Team for Transition. This team, including NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) leadership, NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, University Center for Development and Learning, Parent/Child Advocacy Agency, Career and Technical Education, and NC Community Colleges System representation was formed in recent years to develop statewide goals and provide better coordinated transition activities for students with disabilities to achieve better results with post-school outcomes, including obtaining employment or attending post-secondary education. Currently, NC's Capacity Building Plan is focused on improving student involvement in the individualized education program (IEP) process so that planning is more meaningful and associated with a student's post-school goals. The state is continuing to work on a Transition Toolkit for teachers and anticipates the

development of toolkits for parents, students, and agencies that will be individualized at the local level. DPI consultants are providing transition training to LEAs to promote student-led IEPs, and NC DVR plans to provide training to VR counselors and LEA representatives in the Spring of 2016 to focus on the role of the VR Counselor in the IEP process.

DVRS plans to continue collaboration with DPI leadership on technical assistance grants that focus on improving transition services and employment outcomes for transition-aged youth, including re-submission for the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) Intensive Technical Assistance grant.

#### Description of Policies and Procedures for Coordination with Education Officials:

As the Title IV regulations are finalized, VR plans to increase transition service offerings to students with disabilities through partnerships with NC public schools. Some areas of program development and service enhancement being considered by DVRS are:

- summer internships for students/youth with disabilities;
- increased utilization of On-the-Job Training (OJT) with students and youth;
- utilizing Transition Navigators to identify and serve students with disabilities who are potentially eligible and/or to provide VR PETS services to groups;
- increasing Project Search sites;
- hosting Self-Advocacy summer summits, camps, or school-based workshops;
- enhancing vocational evaluation tools and allocating increased vocational evaluation staff to serve students with disabilities in exploring career options; and
- increasing work-based experiences for students with disabilities who require on-the-job supports, such as job coaching, by partnering in innovative ways with community rehabilitation programs.

DVRS plans to re-brand and revise marketing materials and communications about VR services to students with disabilities to highlight PETS offerings to both students and school personnel. This effort will include targeted marketing for youth disability groups whose incidence within DVRS is declining despite remaining steady or increasing within the public schools (e.g., students with learning disabilities). DVRS will revisit policies related to post-secondary training and learning disability eligibility to ensure that the needs of all eligible students with disabilities as well as those students for whom we are mandated to provide PETS are being met in terms of preparing students to obtain competitive integrated employment in such a way to promote advancement and ongoing career development.

By enhancing and incorporating new programs that promote and support work-based experiences, the Division will continue its commitment to students in pursuit of a high school diploma through the Occupational Course of Study (OCS), a pathway established by the NC Board of Education for students with IEPs to achieve a high school diploma by completing occupational coursework and work experiences. DVRS has recently revised policies for In-School Work Adjustment services to students with significant or most significant disabilities. The service is coordinated through school-based agreements to incentivize a student's participation in school-coordinated work experiences by providing guidance and counseling as well as an incentive payment to students for improvements in work behaviors and attitudes. The Division continues to offer internship and OJT services to students, but hopes to increase utilization and improve feasibility for students, schools, and partnering businesses through policy and procedure revisions and collaboration with workforce system partners. Other PETS programs/services under consideration are intended to address students' expectations around pursuing employment and to improve their preparedness for participating in additional rehabilitation services, such as training and placement.

DVRS requires each local VR office with vocational rehabilitation counseling staff serving on a local school transition services team to send an annual report to the school systems with which the Division has a TPCA. This report includes data about services and expenditures for students with disabilities provided by the Division, and addresses how VR staff members worked with school staff in transition planning for students with significant and most significant disabilities.

### **(G) Improving Access to Postsecondary Credentials.**

North Carolina's sector strategies, other job-driven workforce strategies and Career Pathways strategies all emphasize the importance of post-secondary credentials.

To this end, Governor Pat McCrory attended the annual NCWorks Partnership Conference in the fall of 2015 to unveil a new workforce goal for the state: By 2025, to have at least 67 percent of working adults in North Carolina achieve education and training beyond a high school diploma. Currently, the state's rate of post-secondary attainment is 54 percent.

This initiative will serve as a unifying goal that North Carolina's workforce partners will strive towards by leveraging strategies such as career pathways and work-based learning.

In the Align4NCWorks plan, the North Carolina Community College System sets a goal to "Ensure education and training address and validate skill and competency needs and assessment." Objective 3.C. (which reiterates a goal from the NC Chamber strategic plan) calls for the state to "Increase the number of students leaving the community college system with an in-demand job-ready credential" (e.g., third-party certification, state licensure, degree, certificate, or diploma). The Action Steps under that objective address the following:

- Industry-recognized credentials (pursued by the community colleges and in partnership with the state's public schools, which also set goals in its strategic plan about earning post-secondary credit and industry-recognized credentials while in high school)
- Credentials (of any kind) to further students' success toward career goals
- Continuing to support the implementation of WorkKeys assessments (which are part of the state's Work-Ready Communities designations)
- Expanding the community college transfer pipeline to universities
- North Carolina is also co-leading a national network of state agencies, research institutions, and national organizations that are researching and piloting strategies to capture industry-recognized credentials tracked by third-party organizations.
- Work-based learning strategies (including Registered Apprenticeship) are also part of the state strategy.

The NCWorks Certified Career Pathways include work-based learning as a criterion it is certification process, and in the NCWorks Strategic Action Plan, the NCWorks Commission's calls on the state to "Investigate how work-based learning activities could be incorporated into agreements with companies receiving state economic development incentives."

The Align4NCWorks plan's Goal 4 calls on the state to "Expand work-based learning opportunities." The North Carolina Community College System is one of about 10 state-level members of the U.S. Department of Labor's Registered Apprenticeship College Consortium (RACC). Although North Carolina was not successful in its bid for an American Apprenticeship Initiative grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, the interagency team members are exploring the possibility of other strategies to ramp up participation by employers (and individuals) in Registered Apprenticeship, Pre-Apprenticeships and other work-based learning programs.

Further, North Carolina will explore strategies regarding the cost of credentialing, especially with regard to industry-recognized credentials. This is a longstanding barrier identified at Align4NCWorks summits and in past grant making efforts, with the difficulty being the limited availability of resources for implementation and maintenance of effort.

### Registered Apprenticeship

Employers who want to gain highly skilled workers should consider working with NCWorks Apprenticeships. Apprenticeships offer several advantages to businesses. By training an apprentice in a way that most effectively meets your needs, employers can strengthen their companies by investing in an apprentice who will use his or her skills to make them stronger. Employers who are interested in starting an apprenticeship program at their company should contact the bureau (see below). A consultant will arrange a time to meet with interested businesses. Employers must be registered before they can take on apprentices.

Apprentices will be trained both in the classroom and at the job. Employers will be responsible for determining his or her work schedule. For each apprentice, companies will work with the bureau to develop a written agreement that specifies the length of the training, the related technical instruction, an outline of the skills to be learned, and the wages the apprentice will earn. All written agreements must be approved by the NC Department of Commerce. Employers can also ask to be approved to take on veterans who draw benefits under the GI Bill.

### Career Pathways

North Carolina's strategic focus on career pathways will help individuals' access training leading to in-demand postsecondary credentials.

A primary tenant of the career pathways initiative is the flexibility and creativity in providing opportunities for students and job seekers to enter and exit a pathway. In addition, the commission hopes that local and regional teams develop a system of crediting students for earned credentials, prior learning and demonstrated job skills.

Pathways must be designed to easily allow individuals to enter and exit at different points without duplicating credit/effort. Where possible, pathways must:

- include non-degree training that articulates credit to degree pathways (including awarding credit for appropriate prior learning experiences, attained third-party certifications or Badges);
- provide special considerations for veterans to demonstrate skills based on experience (i.e., MOS or Badges) and provide accelerated educational/training opportunities for gap fulfillment; and
- include postsecondary registration with Department of Labor's RACC program to offer registered apprenticeship completers a pathway to complete their postsecondary degree.

A core tenant of the career pathway philosophy is a strong work-based learning component. Local and regional teams must provide opportunities for students and job seekers to incorporate work-based learning into their programs of study. Pathways must include work-based learning as a strategy for career exploration and workforce engagement related to the individual's program of study or training/employability plan. Work-based learning is a critical part of the pathway system that:

- provides skills development related to the individual's program of study or training plan and offers course credit;
- includes in-depth industry tours, shadowing, mentorships, project based learning, service learning, cooperative education, structured volunteer experiences, junior achievement, internships, apprenticeships, etc.; and
- provides for a structured experience that is supported with demonstrated commitment from employers.

The commission also encourages local and regional teams to provide opportunities for students to obtain knowledge, skills and credentials efficiently. Maximize use of articulation agreements to encourage coordination of educational offerings. Encourage obtainment of stackable credentials to reduce duplication and foster a streamlined progression along the career pathway.

A program of study includes a comprehensive, structured approach for delivering academic and technical education to prepare individuals for postsecondary education and career success that connects skilled graduates to job opportunities. Rigorous programs of study must:

- provide integrated academic, technical, and occupational skills training through classroom, on the job, online and experiential learning for individuals to meet employer needs;

- offer secondary students the opportunity to earn postsecondary credit through programs such as Career and College Promise;
- provide individuals opportunity to earn academic and technical certificates, diplomas, and degrees;
- include coordinated, non-duplicative progression of courses that allow for articulated credit, for prior learning and in accordance with existing articulation agreements between institutions; and
- allow individuals to stack credentials such as career readiness certificates, industry validated recognized third party certifications, and state licenses or certificates.

### Vocational Rehabilitation

North Carolina's Vocational Rehabilitation programs improve access to postsecondary credentials for individuals with disabilities through the sponsorship of training and supportive services at colleges, universities, and vocational and occupational training programs as appropriate for the participants' individualized plan for employment. The Vocational Rehabilitation Programs have policies stipulating sponsorship requirements and cost limitations, including academic standards, the requirement for participant financial need and use of any comparable benefits, such as Pell grants, as contributory funding.



## **(H) Coordinating with Economic Development Strategies.**

The workforce development system needs a strong relationship with economic development organizations across the state to understand the needs of the current and future economy. This strong relationship will also help the workforce development system prepare the workers that are needed by new and expanding businesses in North Carolina.

Formed in 2014, the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC) is a public-private organization, with the mission of recruiting companies to our state and markets North Carolina as a business and tourist location under contract with the N.C. Department of Commerce. This partnership is the driving force behind statewide economic development activities, coordinating with local and regional economic developers across North Carolina to capitalize on prosperous opportunities. North Carolina's high quality workforce is a key component in attracting such opportunities and builds upon existing coordination between developers and workforce partners across the state.

Local and state economic development professionals are represented on the state's 23 local workforce development boards.

In order for the North Carolina economy to continue to recover from the recession and grow, it is important for the workforce development system to be responsive to the needs of the economy. A strong workforce is often stated as one of the top reasons a business decides to grow or move its operations

New jobs in high-growth and emerging industries are key to the economic vitality of North Carolina. Understanding the workforce needs of these industries and preparing workers to meet the needs of companies is key. Increased communication and collaboration between workforce partners locally, regionally, and at the state level is essential to developing a strong workforce development system that businesses can use to grow their businesses.

State-level coordination and alignment provide the framework, structure, and support for an integrated workforce development system, but it's local and regional activities that must truly be aligned to improve the system. The need for regional councils recognizes the uniqueness of North Carolina's regions and the need to develop and deliver services that meet these unique needs.

There are many ways for businesses to engage with the workforce development system that will help businesses access the services they need and provide opportunities for individuals to gain work experience necessary to be a successful candidate for employment. A recent survey of businesses found that lack of work experience was one of the top three reasons employers were having difficulty finding the talent they need. However, businesses may not be fully aware of the ways they can connect with the workforce development system to provide opportunities that both help individuals gain the experience they need and develop a pipeline of talent to meet the businesses' need.

Workforce development programs need to work together to identify all the ways that businesses can interact with the workforce development system from facility tours, to internships and externships, to apprenticeships, and on-the-job training opportunities. Then, business outreach specialists can share information with the businesses on the full range of activities, across programs, in which a business can engage to help develop the talent needed to grow their business.

By providing a consistent menu of services available to businesses that list the full range of services and opportunities available, more businesses will work with the system to develop the talent needed for their business and industry. In addition, workforce development specialists will have a better understanding of the programs offered across the system that work with businesses and will be better able to assist students and customers identify opportunities to gain work experience.

The North Carolina economy is recovering, and companies are interested in locating and growing in the state. A key factor in a company's decision to locate or grow is the availability of a qualified workforce that has the skills and experience to meet the company's needs. Businesses can play a major role in helping individuals gain these skills and experiences through work-based learning.

The NCWorks Commission will be investigating how work-based learning activities could be incorporated into agreements with companies receiving state and/or local economic development incentives. There are a variety of types of work-based learning in which a business could engage including internships for students, externships for educators, co-ops, and apprenticeships. Businesses would benefit from these programs by helping to develop the future talent they need to maintain or grow their business.

By including conversations on work-based learning into economic development incentive conversations, more work-based learning opportunities will be developed across the state. With lack of work experience being a key factor that hinders businesses from finding the talent they need, more opportunities are needed for individuals to gain work experience. In addition to helping individuals gain experience, work-based learning programs will also help develop the pipeline of future workers for that business and industry.

#### Certified Work Ready Communities

The availability of a skilled and ready workforce drives economic development activities throughout North Carolina. The Certified Work-Ready Community certification demonstrates the employability of a local workforce, which strengthens the important connection with economic development.

This initiative rewards the many workforce partners and local employers who have committed to improving the skill level of its workforce and achieves high standards of workforce quality. Local businesses benefit from this partnership through lower employee turnover, decreased training time and costs, and related efficiencies that enhance North Carolina's global competitiveness. Several states have explicitly credited

the Certified Work-Ready Communities program with attracting large businesses to its certified communities.

In North Carolina, Work-Ready Communities meet four criteria:

- signed letters of commitment to workforce excellence from workforce partners;
- demonstrated annual increases in the high school graduation rate working toward the goal of 94%;
- demonstrated achievement of Career Readiness Certificates (CRCs) issued to the labor force based on goals established by ACT as part of the national Certified Work Ready Communities initiative; and
- demonstrated employer commitment to workforce excellence by obtaining support from employers that recognize, prefer, or require the CRC for recruitment and hiring.

Once certified, communities will receive a certificate and template that may be used to create signs for posting at gateway points and business areas within the community. Achievement of work-ready status will be announced by the Governor and communicated to the media and appropriate state agencies. They will also have the right to use this status in their own marketing and promotion.

The NCWorks Certified Work-Ready Communities initiative will enhance economic development by demonstrating the community has a workforce with documented foundational skills as measured by the independently awarded Career Readiness Certificate. This certificate will also increase awareness of local employment opportunities and technical education alternatives for job seekers and students. There is a renewed focus on the graduation rate while encouraging students to obtain a portable credential that demonstrates achievement and a certain level of foundational workplace skills.

As part of the state's comprehensive workforce development effort, the NCWorks Certified Work Ready Communities initiative is a collaborative effort between workforce development partners including the Office of the Governor, the North Carolina Chamber, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the North Carolina Community College System Office and the North Carolina Department of Commerce aimed at leveraging data and analysis tools to continue economic growth in North Carolina.

In 2005, the North Carolina Community College System, in partnership with the Department of Commerce, began a pilot program to assist individuals in achieving the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC). The awareness and popularity of this work laid a foundation for the [North Carolina East Alliance](#) (formerly the North Carolina Eastern Region) to pilot a process to certify counties as Work Ready Communities, beginning in 2011, in partnership with the North Carolina Rural Center. The announcement of NCWorks as the state's framework for workforce development

initiatives in 2013 allows the previous pilot work to be scaled throughout the state to all counties that wish to earn the NCWorks Certified Work Ready Community designation.

The North Carolina Chamber Foundation serves as the final certifying body to designate an NCWorks Certified Work Ready Community. In order to be certified as an NCWorks Work Ready County, a community must meet each of the following criteria:

- a letter of commitment to workforce excellence from county leaders;
- progress in the high school graduation rate toward the goal of 94%;
- achieve the number of [National Career Readiness Certificates](#) indicated in the Common Criteria; and
- gain commitment from employers to recognize the NCRC.

By participating in the NCWorks Certified Work Ready Communities initiative, counties, regions and states are helping:

- business and industry know exactly which foundational skills they need for a productive workforce – and to easily communicate their needs;
- individuals understand which skills are required by employers – and how to prepare themselves for success;
- policy makers consistently measure the skills gap in a timely manner at the national, state and local levels;
- educators close the skills gap, via tools integrated into career pathways with stackable industry-recognized credentials; and
- economic developers use an on-demand reporting tool to market the quality of their workforce.

### Promoting entrepreneurship

For many people, starting a business is the best strategy to increase their wages, support their family, and improve their quality of life. Small Business Centers located on community college campuses across the state have resources to help individuals start businesses and be successful in these ventures. Stronger connections between

NCWorks Career Centers and Small Business Centers will help people know about and investigate the opportunities for starting small businesses. Entrepreneurship is key to North Carolina's continuing economic recovery. The Small Business Centers have been preparing individuals for future entrepreneurship opportunities for 30 years, making them a vital partner of the local workforce development system. The information available through the Small Business Centers should be made available to all customers accessing the system.

The Small Business Centers and workforce development boards will work together to ensure that information on entrepreneurship is shared and made available in a variety of ways to job seekers. By connecting the Small Business Center with the local

workforce delivery career centers, job seekers are exposed to exciting career alternatives that can help lift families out of poverty and improve the local economy.

### NCWorks Customized Training

The NCWorks Customized Training program is an economic development program that offers company-responsive training to manufacturers and other economic base companies that create new jobs, expand their operations in North Carolina, or boost investment in the state. The NC Community College System operates the program, in close collaboration with the state Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, NC Department of Commerce, the state's local and regional economic developers, and workforce development partners. While Customized Training services cannot be paid for with Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act funding (due to the recruitment focus), Customized Training programs connect with workforce development boards and career center activities in a number of areas of North Carolina, linking Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act customers with employers that are hiring.

### Economic Development Aiding in Priority Setting and Employer Connections

Throughout the workforce system, economic development partners aid in the identification of economic priorities – key industries and occupations for emphasis in career pathway development, education and training curriculum development, and assistance in reaching businesses that often have less regular communication with workforce development leaders than economic development leaders. In addition, in certain areas, economic development leaders have led the charge for workforce initiatives, ranging from eastern North Carolina regional economic development entities demonstrating the value of Work-Ready Communities to efforts in western NC (Henderson County) to close the “interest gap” and change perceptions of manufacturing jobs.

The importance of connections with economic developers and their roles in workforce development will grow in the next several years as North Carolina's state strategic plans call for more demand-driven workforce development, more work-based learning, and a greater emphasis on employment outcomes for all programs, including Adult Education and Literacy.

The NCWorks Strategic Action Plan and NCCCS Align4NCWorks plan both call for North Carolina to “Develop and enhance connections between workforce development and economic development...”

### Vocational Rehabilitation

DVRS has relatively strong ties with other components of the statewide Workforce Development System. The partnerships and linkages that were established prior to the

provisions of the Rehabilitation Act amendments of 1998 have served as a stable and effective foundation for effective service delivery. Cooperative agreements or memorandum of agreements have been established with all local area workforce boards. The agreements provide for the following strategies:

Provision of inter-component staff training and technical assistance with regard to:

- the availability and benefits of, and information on eligibility standards for vocational rehabilitation services;
- the promotion of equal, effective, and meaningful participation by individuals with disabilities receiving workforce development system services in all of the states NCWorks Career Centers in the state through the promotion of accessibility;
- the use of non-discriminatory policies and procedures;
- the provision of reasonable accommodations; auxiliary aids and services, and rehabilitation technology for persons with disabilities;
- identification of service delivery strategies by the Division within the NCWorks Career Centers and other components of the workforce development system;
- development and implementation of information systems that link all components of the statewide workforce development system;
- link the components to other electronic networks including non-visual electronic networks; and that relate to such subjects as employment statistics and information on job vacancies, career planning, and workforce development activities;
- further development and use of customer service features such as common intake and referral procedures when feasible, customer databases, resource information, and human services hotlines;
- establishment of cooperative efforts with employers to facilitate job placement and carry out any other activities that Vocational Rehabilitation and the employers determine to be appropriate; and
- identification of staff roles, responsibilities, and available resources, along with specification of the financial responsibility of each component of the statewide workforce development system with regards to paying for certain services (consistent with state law and federal requirements.)

The rehabilitation needs of individuals who are served through components of the statewide workforce development system other than through the public vocational rehabilitation program will be updated and reassessed through the methodology outlined in that section of the VR portion of the Unified State Plan. One of the ongoing goals for both the vocational rehabilitation and NCWorks system is to continue to refine the processes and procedures for NCWorks staff to better determine which consumers with disabilities utilizing the centers should be referred to DVRS rather than being served through the NCWorks. First it is necessary to determine which consumers served by the NCWorks system have a disability. Strategies to improve this will be further

explored via mutual collaboration between the Division and NCWorks Career Centers to establish training for its staff.

The division enthusiastically participated in the development of NCWorks Career Centers and continues to be an active partner throughout North Carolina to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access core workforce services. Vocational Rehabilitation staff are represented on the state level as well as on local boards. The Division remains an active partner with the workforce development system and supports the NCWorks concept to provide more universal access to placement and training services; to integrate programs by offering a common core of information and services; and by offering consumers more choices regarding where and how they get services. Through local agreements, direct service delivery staff within the Division have gained more access to comprehensive Division of Employment Security data, which enables faster service delivery and cross-agency collaboration. Nearly all DVRS offices have obtained access to these databases to date.

In every community where there are NCWorks Career Centers, local Vocational Rehabilitation offices provide counseling staff, vocational evaluators, human resource placement specialists and other staff as appropriate to meet the needs of those individuals who enter an NCWorks Career Center and require the specialized services offered by Vocational Rehabilitation. Specific arrangements and staffing patterns by Vocational Rehabilitation staff vary from site to site depending on local needs and agreements. Enhanced working relationships with key partners of the workforce development system such as Social Services, NC Division of Employment Security, NC Community College System, and other local partnerships allow all the agencies to better meet the needs of the individual.

The number of individuals served or identified through components of the workforce development system is increasing. Local Division management represents Vocational Rehabilitation on the local workforce development boards while staff also actively participate in planning, development, and service delivery with both individual component agencies or within the NCWorks Career Centers already established.

State Level meetings with identified partners of the workforce development system continue to promote effective collaboration and equal access to services by individuals with disabilities.

## **State Operating Systems and Policies**

### **(1) Implementation of State strategies - Operations**

North Carolina will investigate options for connected operating systems – consolidated case management systems, efficient communication platforms, and consistent reporting systems - that will support coordinated implementation of state strategies.

The State awaits further federal guidance on Data Collection and Reporting standards to update current practices reliant upon wage-record data from the Unemployment Insurance program.

#### NCWorks Online

For Title I and Title III workforce programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser, TAA) NCWorks Online is the state's official labor exchange and case management system. It is a one-stop online resource for job seekers and employers in North Carolina. Job seekers can search for jobs, create resumes, and find education and training. Employers can find candidates, post jobs, and search labor market information.

The site is a powerful online system accessed as a website on the Internet or an Intranet at an NCWorks Career Center. It was specifically designed for job seekers, students, case managers, employers, training providers, workforce professionals, and others seeking benefits and services. The system provides fast access to a complete set of employment tools in one website.

Each NCWorks Career Center utilizes NCWorks Online for client management and for data collection and reporting on workforce programs. Up-to-date career center contact information and hours of operation are posted in NCWorks Online as well. This system is designed to be comfortable for everyone, even the person who has little computer experience.

Features to help job seekers and students within the system include:

- Use a professional format to create and send resumes and cover letters to employers
- Assess your job skills, set goals, and research training providers
- Review available jobs and apply online
- Set up a Virtual Recruiter search agent to automatically review job postings and notify you of jobs that match your skills
- Track your job search efforts and resumes sent in a personal profile folder online
- Learn about services and benefits for which you may be eligible
- Determine a budget and plan for training



- Research regional labor market information, such as salaries
- Use the email/message center to contact employers and your case manager

Employer users will find the following features helpful:

- Define skills and post job orders to find potential candidates
- Research labor market information on salaries and economic data
- Set up a Virtual Recruiter search agent to automatically find candidates within the system that match the job skills of the job order
- Communicate with job seekers, case managers, training providers, and others within the system email and message center.

### Adult Education and Literacy

Adult education and literacy reporting is carried out in line with the guidelines of the National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS) and state-established measures. NRS is an outcome-based reporting system for the State-administered, federally funded adult education program. Developed by the U.S. Department of Education's Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL), the NRS continues a cooperative process through which State adult education directors and DAEL manage a reporting system that demonstrates learner outcomes for adult education. The NRS tracks 5 key outcomes for adult learners:

- 1) Educational gain
- 2) Entered employment
- 3) Retained employment
- 4) Obtained a secondary credential
- 5) Entered post-secondary education

NRS Secondary Measures include additional outcome measures related to employment, family, and community. They are listed on page 2 of the LEIS form and include:

- 1) Achieve work-based project learning goal.
- 2) Leave public assistance.
- 3) Achieve citizenship skills.
- 4) Increase involvement in children's education.
- 5) Increase involvement in children's literacy activities.
- 6) Vote or register to vote.
- 7) Increase involvement in community activities.

See more on NRS at [www.nrsweb.org](http://www.nrsweb.org) and [www.nrsweb.org/docs/NRSataGlance.pdf](http://www.nrsweb.org/docs/NRSataGlance.pdf).

A state snapshot for North Carolina is available at <http://www.nrsweb.org/reports/nc.aspx>.

In addition to federal performance measures, each Basic Skills program is held accountable one state measure:

Basic Skills Progress Measure. For this measure, the System Office has developed “baselines” and “goals.” Each year, a report is published that compares the three-year rolling average results of all colleges in relation to the performance measures, two of which involve Basic Skills. Incentive funding is available to community colleges that exceed goals. See [www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/analytics](http://www.nccommunitycolleges.edu/analytics) for more information.

North Carolina’s Community College System has relatively decentralized processes for data collection and reporting. The 58 community colleges collect data for their students, and the NC Community College System uses an LEIS data file extraction process to collect data from colleges quarterly. (LEIS is the Literacy Education Information System.) The LEIS captures enrollment data, functioning levels, testing, etc. Reports are submitted to the federal government annually, at the end of the Calendar Year for the past Program Year ending June 30.

The NC Department of Commerce (Labor and Economic Analysis Division – a sister division to the Division of Workforce Solutions that administers Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act Title I services) captures Adult Education and Literacy (Basic Skills) enrollments in the state’s Common Follow-up System.

Any case management systems and communication systems are developed and managed at the individual community college level.

#### Non-core program services

Beyond Adult Education and Literacy activities, community colleges play a large role in the workforce development system in terms of the education (Curriculum) and training (Workforce Continuing Education) they offer to Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act customers.

As with Basic Skills (Adult Education and Literacy) data, the NC Community College System Office extracts data from the 58 community colleges for Curriculum and Continuing Education students.

- CRPFA file (Curriculum Registration Progress and Financial Aid) for Curriculum students
  - Student demographics
  - Course enrollment
  - Grades
  - Graduation information
- CERF file (Continuing Education Registration File) for training programs and education that do not lead to an academic credential
  - Student demographics
  - Course enrollment

File extraction occurs on a semester basis (3X a year). As with Basic Skills data, Social Security numbers are used to feed the student information into the North Carolina

Common Follow-up System. The Common Follow-up System, established in the early 1990s, is a longitudinal database that enables the State to track individuals over time, evaluate programs, and understand the interplay between different workforce programs.

In 2014, the Labor and Economic Analysis Division of Commerce developed a customer-facing system that shows the public the workforce (employment and wage) outcomes of individuals that graduate from specific North Carolina community college and university programs. The system is known as NC TOWER – North Carolina’s Tool for Online Workforce and Education Reporting – and can be viewed at [www.nctower.com](http://www.nctower.com). The Community College System is currently exploring ways to better capture Continuing Education data to ultimately be able to present similar information in NC TOWER for the state’s job training programs.

Use of data to improve programs:

- Performance Partnership Program (peer mentoring, Performance Partnership Summit which will be biennial)
- System Conference and program conferences
- Incentive funding for colleges
- Adult Ed/Literacy Specific efforts (Adult Educators Conference, Basic Skills conference...)
- Professional development
- Etc.

#### Department of Health and Human Services

The North Carolina Department of Health of Human Services (NC DHHS) is the designated state agency (DSA) for the administration of the state’s Vocational Rehabilitation programs for individuals with disabilities. NC DHHS is the largest single agency in State government in terms of the budget and second largest in terms of number of employees. As such, enterprise level systems are integrated across the Department’s Health and Human Services programs and interface with other information systems at the levels of local, state, and federal government. The primary system used for the administration of the Vocational Rehabilitation programs is BEAM (Business Electronic Access Management system), a fully automated web-accessible case management and service payment solution. BEAM went live in July 2014, fully replacing several legacy mainframe systems.

In BEAM, the identifying and demographic information of VR program participants is managed through a system interface with the NC DHHS Common Name Data Service (CNDS), an enterprise service that allows NC DHHS applications and systems to store and retrieve unique identification information for clients that are participating in programs and receiving services and benefits from NC DHHS. Use of the CNDS is an integral part of NC DHHS case management consolidation.

VR vendor information, invoice payment, and accounting services functions are facilitated through a BEAM interface with the North Carolina Accounting System (NCAS). NCAS is the central accounting system for the State of North Carolina, operated under the authority of the Office of the State Controller (OSC). It provides control over the State's financial transactions, resource balances, and subsidiary accounts and records through a central general ledger and other uniform information databases. NCAS also provides financial statements and reports reflecting the current condition of all State agency accounts and assists central managers in maintaining financial control over State government operations.

For the purpose of VR Program applicant Social Security benefits verification, a BEAM interface was developed for the Social Security Administration's (SSA) State Verification and Exchange System (SVES). Administered by the SSA, SVES provides a data file with information on Title II--SSA Retirement, Survivors, Disability and Health Insurance benefits; and Title XVI--Supplemental Security Income benefits.

A separate data file exchange process is maintained for uploading VR participant information to the SSA portal for the SSA Ticket-to-Work program. This file exchange process isn't fully automated and is limited to establishing VR participant in-use status and eligibility for agency cost reimbursement. An interface with the Department of Commerce, Division of Employment Security (DES) provides quarterly State unemployment insurance wage records and related information to establish whether a former VR participant is working at the level of substantial gainful activity for agency cost-reimbursement under the Ticket-to-Work program.

Most recently, an interface was developed between BEAM and NC Tracks, the new multi-payer Medicaid Management Information System for NC DHHS. This interface includes the pricing logic for VR medical service claims submitted by healthcare providers and facilitates accurate medical claims processing.

Starting in 2016, information from the BEAM production environment will be replicated to the NC DHHS Client Services Data Warehouse (CSDW), an enterprise data warehouse that provides historical data for use by county and state staff as well as federal government and third-party users. The NC DHHS CSDW currently compiles data from business applications and systems for a variety of divisions within DHHS, including, but not limited to, the Divisions of Social Services; Medical Assistance; Public Health; Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services; Child Development and Early Education; and Aging and Adult Services. The NC DHHS CSDW supports various enterprise reporting and program administration functions. The data warehouse will be utilized for the creation of specific county, state and federal reports that are not available "out of the box" in BEAM. It will also provide a means for meeting end-user ad hoc reporting requirements through the use of tools available as part of the DHHS CSDW. The DHHS CSDW will also house data for statistical analysis for

consumption by both the department and external entities such as the University of North Carolina, the NC Department of Public Instruction, the Common Follow-up System, state and federal quality control monitoring entities, advocates, and other state and federal oversight agencies.

### North Carolina Common Follow-up System

There is an increasing need and demand for information regarding the effectiveness of programs in preparing North Carolina's workforce. Chapter 96 of the North Carolina General Statute requires the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) to develop, implement and maintain a common follow-up information management system (CFS) for tracking performance measures related to current and former participants in State job training, education and placement programs. LEAD is also charged with evaluating the effectiveness of programs and determining if specific program goals and objectives are attained, determining placement rates for each program and with making recommendations regarding programs evaluated.

The Common Follow-up System provides the mechanism for carrying out longitudinal analyses that can be utilized to develop measures of program performance. These measures can provide critical information that can be used in the assessment of program effectiveness. As part of its responsibility for evaluating programs contained in the CFS, the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) undertook a series of analyses that focused on assessing the educational and employment outcomes of individuals participating in several of North Carolina's public education, employment and training programs. The goal was to develop key evaluative performance indicators related to employment and wage outcomes as well as measures related to further participation in education and employment programs. It is intended that these measures can be utilized in concert with other programmatic information to aid in the assessment of program effectiveness. During the 2012 Session, the North Carolina Legislature enacted Session Law 2012-131. The law required the Department of Commerce to improve and strengthen the Common Follow up System and to further utilize data from the system in the development of performance measures for North Carolina's Workforce Development System. As part of its efforts to improve and strengthen the CFS, the North Carolina Department of Commerce has been undertaking several initiatives. These include enhancing the technology processes for system processing and storage, enhancing data integrity, updating system documentation regarding agency and programmatic information, enhancing system outputs and collaborating with the participating agencies and stakeholders.

The Labor and Economic Analysis Division's efforts towards improving system outputs has focused in several key areas. This has included the collaboration with the NCWorks Commission in the development of performance measures for the Workforce

Development System. This work resulted in the development and publication of two reports completed by the NCWorks Commission. Further efforts have included the development of the North Carolina Tool for Online Workforce and Education Reporting NCTOWER.com a web-based tool for the delivery and display of program performance information. The Labor and Economic Analysis Division worked in collaboration with the North Carolina Community College System, the University of North Carolina General Administration and the Office of Information Technology Services on the development of the NC TOWER. The web site currently contains 10 years of post-completion employment and wage information for all Curriculum Programs offered through the

North Carolina Community College System and degree programs through the University of North Carolina system. Available information includes outcomes by college/university, degree and major. This new data delivery tool facilitates the use and delivery of information from CFS and helps in achieving the goal of enhanced system outputs. As part of the enhancement efforts LEAD staff is currently working to expand the data coverage within CFS. This includes working with existing agencies to expand their data submissions and to also include agencies and programs not currently participating in CFS. Data expansion efforts also include expanding access to out of state employment and wage data through the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) and the Wage Record Interchange System 2 (WRIS 2) as well as accessing federal employment related data through the Federal Employment Data Exchange System (FEDES). LEAD anticipates that these additional sources of employment and wage data should be available for use over the next several months.

Further evaluative efforts that are underway include the analysis of the additional agencies and programs contained in the CFS. This includes information from the University of North Carolina system and Department of Public Safety. In addition the Labor and Economic Analysis Division will continue to build on the analysis carried out in support of this report to provide additional outcome information for each program by sub-geographical areas and institutions as well as the analysis of information from additional programs not included in this report.

In addition to these efforts, Session Law 2014-100 required the Department of Commerce to develop a plan for the transfer of the information and capabilities of the CFS to the Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC) within the Office of Information Technology Services. The Department of Commerce is currently working with the GDAC staff to transfer the technology and capabilities into the GDAC environment. It is intended that this effort will assist in developing enhanced technological and analytical capacity which will help to further enhance the capabilities of the CFS to meet research, performance, evaluative and reporting efforts. Furthermore, the technological, analytical and data access within the GDAC will facilitate additional matching and analytics that will help to address some of the data limitations including matching that has previously been limited to the use of SSNs.

## **(2) Implementation of State strategies - Policies**

North Carolina will continue to review and evaluate statewide policies to support implementation of the state's strategies. First, the NCWorks initiative will spearhead coordination, collaboration and alignment among core partners and all workforce programs in order to connect talent to jobs. The NCWorks system will be representative of the cohesive, unified workforce system demanded by today's changing economic and labor trends.

Throughout the NCWorks system, Governor McCrory's policy directive to reach the goal of 67 percent of working adults having education and training beyond a high school diploma will serve as a unifying call to action for partners across the state.

Further, the NCWorks Commission will continue to establish fully representative sub-committees to develop and oversee strategic plans consistent with the mandates of the Opportunity Act. Already, such strategic planning elements have resulted in integrated service delivery between Title 1 and Title 3 of the Opportunity Act and agency cross-training initiatives are underway to expand the scope of such integration.

In the NCWorks Strategic Action Plan, one Action Step calls for the State to "Initiate the process of interfacing NCWorks Online with North Carolina's array of workforce development case management systems.

The NCWorks Commission is currently pursuing a Memorandum of Understanding to formalize cooperation and collaboration among North Carolina's workforce delivery system partners regarding the use of NCWorks Online. The agreement sets forth each partner agency's willingness (listed below) to encourage all program participants of North Carolina's workforce programs to enroll in NCWorks Online.

- NCWorks Commission
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Health and Human Services
- Community College System
- Department of Public Instruction
- Department of Administration

The agencies above agree to ensure collaboration of their program staff at the local and regional levels to universally enroll the students, jobseekers, and businesses they serve in NCWorks Online.

North Carolina's workforce development partners are committed to preparing students to enter the workforce, helping job seekers find good jobs, and helping employers find a talented workforce. By promoting and encouraging workforce program participants to be registered or enrolled in NCWorks Online, the job-matching system will be more robust and offer employers a larger and more varied pool of candidates to choose from.

In addition, with the understanding that each agency has federal policies and requirements to adhere to, a policy group of the NCWorks Commission has discussed possible procedures and protocols that could be improved upon to further support alignment and collaboration.

- Common intake or pre-application process for all customers. In the absence of one common data and/or case management system for all workforce customers, a uniform intake method (i.e., 5 questions on a home screen) could at least be used when enrolling customers.
- Common referral process for all agencies. One process used by all workforce partners when referring customers throughout the system.

DRAFT



### **(3) State Program and State Board Overview**

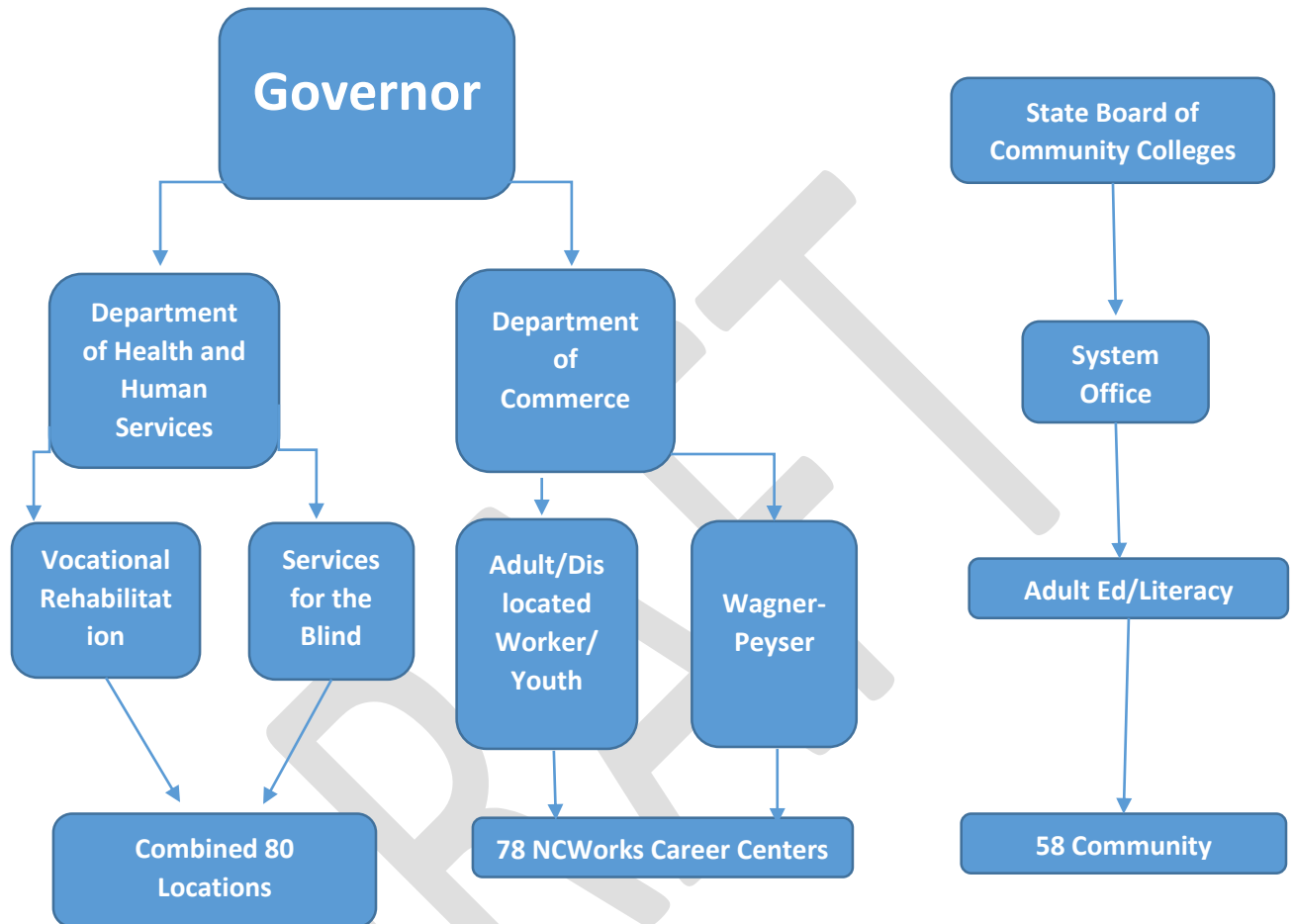
#### *State Agency Organization*

The NCWorks Commission guides the workforce development system in North Carolina. At the state level, the commission coordinates 20 programs administered by five agencies. The agencies include Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Community College System, Department of Public Instruction, and the Department of Administration. 23 local workforce development boards across eight Prosperity Zones provide guidance to promote an innovative, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system within their region. Local workforce boards convene and engage local workforce development stakeholders and oversee the NCWorks Career Center system in conjunction with the NCWorks Commission.

The six WIOA core workforce programs are provided to job seekers and employers via NC Works Career Centers (North Carolina's one stop system). Approximately 80 career centers are located throughout the state, serving as frontline touch points to provide job seekers, training seekers, and employers' access to a variety of employment and training services all under one roof. In addition, there are approximately another 20 or so staffed career center outposts across the state.

In addition to career centers, Rehabilitation Act services are offered through a network of 100 county social services offices, and 58 community colleges provide the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program. Staff at NCWorks Career Centers, Community Colleges, and County Social Services offices all maintain good referral processes among each other when serving customers.

## North Carolina Workforce Development System Organizational Chart



*Membership Roster (In Process of Updating)*

### *Board Activities*

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is supported by staff. The chairs of each committee, along with the commission chair compose the Executive Committee.

For 2014-2016, strategies fall into four key subcommittees: System Alignment and Transformation, Strengthen Customer Services, Career Pathways and Accountability. The commission's strategic action steps and additional duties are listed below.

## **NCWORKS COMMISSION 20 STRATEGIC ACTION STEPS AND ADDITIONAL DUTIES**

### **System Alignment and Transformation**

- Establish a committee of state-level agency representatives to coordinate and align policy.
- Create councils in each of the Prosperity Zones that include education, workforce, economic development, and industry leaders.
- Launch the NCWorks brand that all workforce development system programs will use to help customers recognize the value of the system.
- Create the NCWorks Promise that establishes value and trust with customers interacting with the system.
- Develop and implement a system-wide and consistent outreach strategy.
- Annually review and evaluate other agency workforce development plans.
- Assist the Governor in the development of the State Unified Plan as required under the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act.

### **Strengthen Customer Services**

- Develop a consistent menu of services and activities highlighting business and industry engagement opportunities.
- Identify and launch a customer relationship management tool that all workforce development partners are required to use.
- Investigate how work-based learning activities could be incorporated into agreements with companies receiving state economic development incentives.
- Expand the number of NCWorks Certified Work-Ready Communities.
- Create a framework for ensuring cross-trained, qualified staff have the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to support the local delivery system.
- Initiate the process of interfacing NCWorks Online with North Carolina's array of workforce development case management systems.
- Provide ongoing oversight of NCWorks Career Centers, including center certification and continuous improvement of the system.

### **Career Pathways**

- Develop accessible and consistent NCWorks Career Pathways for critical industry clusters with multiple entry/exit points.
- Require workforce development partners use the career pathways to target resources towards helping individuals gain the skills and experience needed for in-demand occupations.

- Establish a memorandum of understanding with all statewide education and workforce development entities to get all workforce system participants enrolled in NCWorks Online.
- Develop a single portal for career information.
- Connect Small Business Centers to workforce delivery access points to increase entrepreneurship locally.
- Develop and implement strategies around the No Adult Left Behind state legislation.

### **Accountability**

- Develop an annual workforce development system report card with universal success metrics.
- Create metrics based on consistently collected feedback from customers to strengthen the workforce development system.
- Modify North Carolina's wage records to require the collection of employee occupation codes to better assess the outcomes of those individuals who participate in the workforce development system.
- Pilot consumer reporting that provides industry-recognized credentials to better assess the outcomes of those individuals who participate in the workforce.
- Develop performance accountability measures for local workforce development boards.
- Develop a method for tracking the 20 action steps of the 2014-2016 Strategic Plan.

The NCWorks Commission is working to align the agencies responsible for the six core programs in a manner that supports a comprehensive and streamlined workforce development system in North Carolina. Specifically, the System Alignment and Transformation Committee of the commission has assembled a group of agency leaders to help coordinate and integrate workforce programs across agencies. This State-Agency Sub-Committee is working on policy alignment, a unified branding and outreach strategy, a unified business services strategy, and creating regional teams for North Carolina's eight Prosperity Zones to ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach to workforce development in each zone. By establishing a unified brand identity and clearly communicating this brand to customers, the system can sharpen its focus, avoid system fragmentation, and eliminate costly duplication.

The commission is also working to improve customer service to job seekers and businesses to ensure that all customers have access to relevant workforce development activities in a timely and effective manner. Specifically, the Strengthen Customer Service Committee of the commission has launched a Customer Relationship Management tool to local workforce development boards who are currently testing the system. This tool helps business service professionals ensure a seamless system through shared information on business needs, smooth coordination between programs, and follow-up on delivery of services. The Strengthen Customer Service Committee also is working with partners to create a comprehensive menu of services for businesses, expand NCWorks Certified Work-Ready Communities, develop cross-training strategies to improve local delivery, and explore ways to integrate North Carolina's case management systems to better serve job seekers.

Additionally, the commission is developing strategies to support the use of career pathways to provide individuals, including low-skilled adults, youth and individuals with barriers to employment, with workforce investment activities, education, and supportive services to enter or retain employment. Specifically, the Career Pathways Committee of the commission has created an interagency team that has developed a framework for defining, developing and implementing clear, concise and comprehensive career pathways. NCWorks Certified Career Pathways criteria and an application have been established, and the endorsement process is underway. In addition, multiple promotional events are underway to promote the development of certified career pathways. A state-wide Career Pathways Conference was conducted in September 2015 with over 200 attendees.

The Career Pathways Committee is also working with an integrated group of partners, including the N.C. Community College System, to develop a single portal for career information. A single portal will provide job seekers and student's one place to access appropriate career information which will reduce confusion and frustration. This portal will also help ensure that workforce development professionals across agencies provide consistent information and guidance.

Through the efforts of the Accountability Committee, the commission guides the continuous improvement of the workforce development system using data-driven strategies. Session Law 2012-131 and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act require the commission to develop, continuously improve, and report on system-wide performance measures assessing the effectiveness of the entire workforce development system. The commission responded by convening an inter-agency work group that developed a set of common measures to track and analyze performance.

The commission released its first annual performance report titled, "Measuring the Performance of North Carolina's Workforce Development System: A First Look" in January 2014 which contained aggregate data on 17 of North Carolina's workforce programs. Data was provided from the North Carolina Common Follow-up System (CFS) and analyzed by the Department of Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD). CFS contains a rich longitudinal repository of information from a variety of education and workforce programs as well as employment, wage, claims, and benefit payment information from the unemployment insurance system.

The Accountability Committee continues to work with LEAD to develop annual reports on the workforce development system as well as continuously improve performance measures. As a next step, the committee will develop an online dashboard to display information in an "easy-to-understand" format. The Accountability Committee has also developed performance accountability measures for local workforce development boards and is investigating options for a system-wide customer satisfaction survey to collect feedback to strengthen workforce development programs.

#### **(4) Assessment of Programs and One-Stop Program Partners**

North Carolina will conduct vigorous, objective and thorough assessments of Opportunity Act core programs as part of the overarching NCWorks system. Plans for this multi-faceted assessment process include:

- Collective quarterly review by cross-agency core program management team of enrollment, expenditure, outcome and customer input (individuals and employers) data
- Annual evaluation by NCWorks Commission of efficiency and effectiveness of core programs and NCWorks Career Center system
- Engagement of outside consultation for third-party review, analysis, evaluation and recommendations for continuous improvement of services and resulting outcomes. Connection with North Carolina's excellent public and private universities' research capabilities is anticipated.

Program assessments conducted during the final two years of the Workforce Investment Act by the NCWorks Commission were reviewed and considered in formulating North Carolina's Unified Plan. Performance from the first two years of the Opportunity Act will be used as the baseline for future assessments of the effectiveness of core programs and NCWorks Career Center system under the Opportunity Act.

In 2014, the NCWorks Commission completed a review of 20 workforce development program plans, policies and services across five agencies in North Carolina. This review included an analysis of core programs as well as other one-stop delivery system partners. The commission reviewed workforce program funding levels and sources, service provision types, special populations served and business outreach initiatives. The following table summarizes the information obtained during this review (next page):



					Individual Services					Employer Services	
	Federal Funds Received	State Funds Received	Other Funds Received	# of Counties where Services Available	Skills Development & Training	Employment Services	Subsidized Employment	Support Services	Adults (A), Youth (Y) Served	Employment Services	Training Programs
<b>Department of Administration</b>											
American Indian Workforce Development Program	.			59	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
<b>Department of Commerce</b>											
Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth Programs (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I)	.			100	.	.	.	.	AY	.	.
Wagner-Peyser (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title III)	.			100	.	.	.	.	AY	.	.
Trade Adjustment Assistance	.			100	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
Veterans' Program	.			100	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
Apprenticeship	.	.	.	100	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
<b>NC Community College System</b>											
BioNetwork		.		100	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
Customized Training		.		100	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
Small Business Center Network		.		100	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
Adult Education and Family Literacy, Basic Skills (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title II)	.	.		100	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
Occupational Continuing Education		.	.	100	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
Postsecondary Career Technical and Vocational Education	.	.	.	100	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
<b>Department of Health &amp; Human Services</b>											

					Individual Services					Employer Services	
	Federal Funds Received	State Funds Received	Other Funds Received	# of Counties where Services Available	Skills Development & Training	Employment Services	Subsidized Employment	Support Services	Adults (A), Youth (Y) Served	Employment Services	Training Programs
Community Services Block Grant	.			100	.	.	.	.	A,Y	.	.
Food and Nutrition Services	.	.	.	100	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
Temporary Assistance to Needy Families	.	.	.	100	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
Employment Services, Vocational Rehabilitation (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title IV)	.	.	.	100	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
Employment Services, Services for the Blind (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title IV)	.	.		100	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
Long-term, Vocational Support Services	.	.		100	.	.	.	.	A,Y	.	.
Senior Community Service Employment	.	.	.	100	.	.	.	.	A	.	.
<b>Department of Public Instruction</b>											
Career & Technical Education	.	.		100	.	.	.	.	Y	.	.

Through its assessment of the workforce development system, the NCWorks Commission found North Carolina's programs to be service-driven with a focus on mission and target populations. Overall, the programs prioritize employment, career counseling and assessments for the adult population. In addition, the commission found that while many programs provide service to employers, these efforts were not a focus of the programs.

As illustrated in the above table, the majority of North Carolina's workforce development programs offer some type of skill development and employment service for adults. Although programs provide similar services like skill development, training and employment services, the programs serve very different target populations. Below is a summary of the main activities of core programs, mandatory one-stop delivery system partners, and additional workforce partners, as well as the populations they serve.

As illustrated in the above table, the majority of North Carolina's workforce development programs offer some type of skill development and employment service for adults. Although programs provide similar services like skill development, training and employment services, the programs serve very different target populations. Below is a summary of the main activities of core programs, mandatory one-stop delivery system partners, and additional workforce partners, as well as the populations they serve.

With regard to the State's Vocational Rehabilitation programs, performance monitoring is administered at multiple levels. At the level of the designated state agency, NC DHHS, a shared performance system, DHHS Open Window, captures important information on all DHHS services, programs and the contracts that support those services. Open Window also contains key planning and performance information for DHHS as well as for our divisions and offices. Through Open Window, decision-makers can view what services, programs and contracts are provided, how they are funded; and whether performance is producing results for program participants. At the level of the designated state units, the NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Division of Services for the Blind, active performance monitoring and program evaluation are an ongoing effort that includes monitoring performance on various performance metrics, participant feedback on satisfaction surveys, and comprehensive statewide needs assessments regarding the vocational rehabilitation needs of North Carolinians with disabilities and those of employers.

### System-wide Performance Measures

The NCWorks Commission guides the continuous improvement of the workforce development system using data-driven strategies. The State will assess the overall effectiveness of the workforce investment system in relation to the strategic vision and

goals stated above in sections (b)(1), (2), and (3) through multiple sources of information and service participant feedback, and use the results to make continuous or quality improvements.

As one example, in response to North Carolina Session Law 2012-131 and continuing under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, the commission develops, continuously improves, and reports on system-wide performance measures assessing the effectiveness of the entire workforce development system. When first initiated, the commission convened an inter-agency work group to address common measures to track and analyze performance.

The workforce development system agencies worked collaboratively to design and implement universal performance measures. The commission which oversaw these efforts, recognized that by using common metrics and applying them across a wide range of workforce programs, the performance measures offer a comprehensive program-by-program look at North Carolina's workforce system.

The first assessment, "Measuring the Performance of North Carolina's Workforce Development System: A First Look" (January 2014) contained aggregate data on 17 of North Carolina's workforce programs. Data was provided from the North Carolina Common Follow-up System (CFS) and analyzed by the Department of Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD). CFS contains a rich longitudinal repository of information from a variety of education and workforce programs as well as employment, wage, claims, and benefit payment information from the unemployment insurance system.

The Accountability Committee continues to work with LEAD to develop annual reports on the workforce development system as well as continuously improve performance measures. As a next step, the committee will develop an online dashboard to display information in an "easy-to-understand" format. The Accountability Committee has also developed performance accountability measures for local workforce development boards and is investigating options for a system-wide customer satisfaction survey to collect feedback to strengthen workforce development programs.

North Carolina's Community College System has relatively decentralized processes for data collection and reporting. The 58 community colleges collect data for their students, and the NC Community College System uses an LEIS data file extraction process to collect data from colleges quarterly. (LEIS is the Literacy Education Information System.) The LEIS captures enrollment data, functioning levels, testing, etc. Reports are submitted to the federal government annually, at the end of the Calendar Year for the past Program Year ending June 30.

The NC Department of Commerce (Labor and Economic Analysis Division – a sister division to the Division of Workforce Solutions that administers WIOA Title I services) captures Adult Education and Literacy (Basic Skills) enrollments in the state's Common Follow-up System. Any case management systems and communication systems are developed and managed at the individual community college level.

### Non-core program services

Beyond Adult Education and Literacy activities, community colleges play a large role in the workforce development system in terms of the education (Curriculum) and training (Workforce Continuing Education) they offer to WIOA customers.

As with Basic Skills (Adult Education and Literacy) data, the NC Community College System Office extracts data from the 58 community colleges for Curriculum and Continuing Education students.

- CRPFA file (Curriculum Registration Progress and Financial Aid) for Curriculum students
  - Student demographics
  - Course enrollment
  - Grades
  - Graduation information
- CERF file (Continuing Education Registration File) for training programs and education that do not lead to an academic credential
  - Student demographics
  - Course enrollment

File extraction occurs on a semester basis (3X a year). As with Basic Skills data, Social Security numbers are used to feed the student information into the North Carolina Common Follow-up System. The Common Follow-up System, established in the early 1990s, is a longitudinal database that enables the State to track individuals over time, evaluate programs, and understand the interplay between different workforce programs.

In 2014, the Labor and Economic Analysis Division of Commerce developed a customer-facing system that shows the public the workforce (employment and wage) outcomes of individuals that graduate from specific North Carolina community college and university programs. The system is known as NC TOWER – North Carolina’s Tool for Online Workforce and Education Reporting – and can be viewed at [www.nctower.com](http://www.nctower.com). The Community College System is currently exploring ways to better capture Continuing Education data to ultimately be able to present similar information in NC TOWER for the state’s job training programs.

### Use of data to improve programs

- Performance Partnership Program (peer mentoring, Performance Partnership Summit which will be biennial)
- System Conference and program conferences
- Incentive funding for colleges

- Adult Ed/Literacy Specific efforts (Adult Educators Conference, Basic Skills conference...)
- Professional development

The Workforce Innovations and Opportunities Act Title I funding paid to Eligible Training Providers for education/training for Adults and Dislocated Workers was for community college education or training.

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- Incentive funding for colleges

- Adult Ed/Literacy Specific efforts (Adult Educators Conference, Basic Skills conference...)
- Professional development

### Customer Satisfaction Surveys

The workforce development system must be continuously responsive to its customers. Each workforce development agency has historically been responsible for measuring the overall satisfaction of its clients. Measuring this level of satisfaction is program specific and improvements.

The workforce development system requires universal customer satisfaction metrics based on a uniform and consistent feedback loop. The analysis of the feedback will be used to strengthen the system. With so many programs delivering services to job seekers and businesses, the NCWorks Commission needs to work with workforce development agencies to establish a continuous improvement process that canvases all customers regardless of access point, seeks to understand their challenges, and provides a mechanism for strengthening the system based on that understanding. This data will be used to create customer satisfaction metrics aimed at continuously improving the system.

A consistent set of customer satisfaction measures provides a simple way to determine if programs are meeting the needs of clients. Using customer feedback to strengthen programs helps the system stay relevant.

## **(5) Distribution of Funds for Core Programs**

### Title I: Youth, Adult, and Dislocated Worker

In April or early May of each year, the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) of the Federal Department of Labor (DOL) releases a Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) that provides the program allotment amounts and specifics on the formulas states should use to determine the allocation amount for each Workforce Development Board (WDB). Out of each program's total allocation amount, an administrative holdback amount to be used for statewide workforce investment activities is deducted from the total. The percentage can vary year to year and program to program. In addition, the Dislocated Worker program also has a percentage of its allocation deducted, to be used for statewide rapid response activities. For the most recent program year for which allocations have been calculated, PY 2015, the percentages deducted were as follows:

Adult	10% administrative holdback
Youth	10% administrative holdback
Dislocated Worker	10% administrative holdback
	25% statewide rapid response holdback

Also included in the TEGL, is the ratio of July to October funding for the Adult and Dislocated Worker programs. Youth funds are not divided into two distributions. Once the Local Area allocation amounts have been calculated, this ratio is then used to determine what amount is available for July and what is available for October. For PY 2015, that ratio was:

<b>Program</b>	<b>July Percentage</b>	<b>October Percentage</b>
Adult	8.3574%	91.6426%
Dislocated Worker	15.3575%	84.6425%

Once the total allocation amounts for each program are known, the DOL-provided formulas are then used to calculate the Local Area allocation amounts. Both the Adult and Youth programs have a minimum allocation amount in effect (the Dislocated Worker program will also have this in effect for PY 2016), defined as follows:



The local area shall not receive an allocation percentage that is less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage of the local area for the 2 preceding fiscal years. Amounts necessary for increasing such allocations to local areas to comply with this requirement are to be obtained by ratably reducing the allocations of the other local areas.

The formulas used for each program, as well as the definitions of some important terms within those formulas, are included below, sourced from TEGl 29-14.

**WIOA Adult and Youth Activities**

**Formula:**

- 1/3: State relative share of total unemployed in areas of substantial unemployment (ASU) (average 12 months ending 6/30)
- 1/3: State relative share of excess unemployed (average 12 months ending 6/30)
- 1/3: State relative share of economically disadvantaged youth (American Community Survey 2006-2010)

**WIOA Dislocated Workers**

**Formula:**

- 1/3: State relative share of total unemployed (average 12 months ending 09/30)
- 1/3: State relative share of excess unemployed (average 12 months ending 09/30)
- 1/3: State relative share of long-term unemployed (average 12 months ending 09/30)

**Formula Data Factor Definitions**

**WIOA Youth and Adults Programs**

ASU: contiguous areas with unemployment rate of 6.5 percent or more excess unemployed. Higher of:  
 (1) excess unemployed (unemployment in excess of 4.5 percent) in ASU's; or  
 (2) excess unemployed (unemployment in excess of 4.5 percent) in all areas

Economically disadvantaged adults: individuals, age 22-72, meeting (or member of family meeting):  
 OMB poverty level or

70 percent of lower living standard income level (LLSIL).

Economically disadvantaged youth: individuals, age 16-21, meeting (or member of family meeting):  
 OMB poverty level or

70 percent of lower living standard income level (LLSIL).

**WIOA Dislocated Workers Program**

Excess unemployed: unemployment in excess of 4.5 percent

Long-term unemployed: number unemployed 15 or more weeks

## Title II: Adult Education and Family Literacy Act

Using the provisions set forth in Section 232 of WIOA, each eligible provider desiring a grant or contract must submit an application packet to the North Carolina Community College System Office which is the designated lead agency WIOA Title II-Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) federal funds. The application packet will be referred to as the WIOA-AEFLA Local Plan. Eligible providers will submit an application for one for the following designations:

### Comprehensive Program

- Provides academic instruction for all of the following areas: Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, and English Language Acquisition.
- Provides academic instruction for all one or more of the following: Workplace Literacy, Family Literacy, or Correctional Education.
- Provider is an approved test administration of an NCCCS-approved high school equivalency assessment.

### Literacy Services Only

- Provides academic instruction for all one or more of the following areas: Adult Basic Education, Adult Secondary Education, English Language Acquisition or Family Literacy

To be eligible for funding, eligible providers will describe their organization structure and give assurance that they meet the definition of an eligible provider and the mission of their organization is in alignment with the strategic mission and vision statements contained in North Carolina's Unified State Plan. Eligible providers must demonstrate past effectiveness by submitting documentation that: 1) Provides performance data on its record of improving the skills of eligible individuals and 2) Provides information regarding its outcomes for participants related to employment, high school completion, and transition to postsecondary education and training.

The funding allocation used to allocate funding will be based on their designation.

### Comprehensive Programs

Comprehensive programs receive both federal and state funds and are referred to as the Basic Skills Block Grant. Per NC General Statute 115D-31(b1), Basic Skills Block Grant funds must be used only for adult education and literacy activities and may not be transferred to any other program areas of the eligible provider. Up to 5% of the federal portion of the block grant may be used for support of administrative functions (such as Director of Basic Skills programs, clerical, etc.). Up to five percent of the block grant may be used to procure instructional technology including computers for student use in the college's literacy lab, instructional software and software licenses, scanners for testing, and classroom projection equipment. No other equipment or capital items can be purchased with Basic Skills funds. In cases where the 5% limitation is too

restrictive to allow for adequate planning, administration, personnel development, and interagency coordination, the provider may request that the System Office to review its situation in order to determine an adequate level of funds to be used for non-instructional purposes.

The funding allocation is based on three components:

- (a) FTE Allocation. This allocation is supported through a combination of Federal and State funds. NCCCS has four funding Tier rates for allocations based on FTE. Basic Skills FTE's are funded at the Tier 2 rate.
2. Basic Skills Performance-Based Funding Allocation. This allocation is based on college performance on one measure: Progress of Basic Skills Students
3. GED®/AHS Performance Incentive allocation. After providing the FTE and PBF allocations, the remaining State funds are allocated among colleges based on their pro-rata share of the number of GEDs® and Adult High School (AHS) diplomas awarded. In FY 2015-16, colleges receive an additional \$823.64 per GED® /AHS diploma awarded.

#### Literacy Instruction Only

Programs under this category only receive funding for the federal WIOA-AEFLA allocation. The funding formula for has three components:

- Base Funding. The Base funding is set at \$6.00 per student contact hour. For each hour of instruction credited to the program through the LACES system, as pulled from the "NRS Table 4", the program is awarded \$6.00.
- Average Contact Hour. The first performance-based component is an allocation of 10% of the base amount if the program average 40 contact hours per student for the program year.
- Educational Functioning Level Gains. The second performance-based component is an allocation of \$100 for each student obtaining an EFL gain during the program year. The programs are only credited for a given student one time for a given program year. Students earning multiple EFL gains will not generate additional funding through this component.

There will be a "hold harmless" cap of 10% such that programs could not gain or lose more than 10% of their budget from the previous program year.

Per Section 231 (c), NCCCS will ensure that all eligible providers will has direct and equitable access to seeking grants or funds to deliver adult education and family literacy activities in North Carolina. There will be one application for all WIOA-AEFLA funding sources. Eligible providers will complete the sections/questions that are applicable to their request. The grant or contract announcement will also be the same for all eligible providers. Below is a chart that outlines the timelines for the Request for Application (RFA).

State Plan Program Year		Implementation Type	Open RFA	RFA Release Date	RFA Due Date	Award Announce ment
1	2016- 2017	WIA to WIOA Transition	No	2/15/20 16	3/30/20 16	5/2/2016
2	2017- 2018	WIOA-Full Implementation	Yes	1/2/201 7	2/10/20 17	5/1/2017
3	2018- 2019	WIOA-Full Implementation - Continuation	No	1/2/201 8	2/10/20 18	5/1/2018
4	2019- 2020	WIOA-Full Implementation - Continuation	No	1/2/201 9	2/10/20 19	5/1/2019

#### Title IV: Vocational Rehabilitation Programs

Funds distribution between the Divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Division of Services for the Blind was recently changed between the two agencies so that it more accurately reflect spending levels. Distribution calculations are based on previous years' expenditure levels for each agency while allowing for sufficient carry forward to maintain on-going operations in the event of a disruption of federal funding.

## **(6) Program Data**

**A. Data Alignment and Integration.** *Describe the plans of the lead State agencies with responsibility for the administration of the core programs, along with the State Board, to align and integrate available workforce and education data systems for the core programs, unemployment insurance programs, and education through postsecondary education, and to the extent possible, the Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan. The description of the State's plan for integrating data systems should include the State's goals for achieving integration and any progress to date.*

In NC there are three state agencies responsible for the primary parts of the WIOA grant. Each agency currently has MIS systems to capture Participant and Financial information in place but we will look for ways to interface any common data. All Education and Workforce agencies submit a list of all the data they collect to be part of the NC Common Follow-up System. The purpose of the Common Follow-up System is to provide information on the educational and employment outcomes of participants in publicly supported educational, employment and training programs for use in planning, policymaking, program evaluation, resource allocation and career planning. This data will be submitted to the NC Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC) based on requirements from NC State Legislature.

There are three state agencies in North Carolina that have administrative responsibility for the WIOA core programs. These include the North Carolina Department of Commerce, the North Carolina Community College System and the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. While each of these entities maintain separate participant and financial information systems, the agencies have worked and continue to work collaboratively to integrate data across North Carolina's Workforce system. As the final WIOA operational and reporting policies and regulations are released, North Carolina's workforce agencies will continue to work and explore mechanisms by which further data integration can be achieved across entities to achieve the data integration and reporting goals of WIOA.

In addition to the administrative data functions that are completed in separate information systems, each of the WIOA core program agencies along with several other education and workforce entities are participants in a longitudinal workforce system called the North Carolina Common Follow-up System. The North Carolina Common Follow-up System (CFS) is a state mandated longitudinal system that is utilized to provide information on the educational and employment outcomes of participants in publicly supported educational, employment and training programs for use in planning, policymaking, program evaluation, resource allocation and career planning. The participating entities include the Department of Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions; North Carolina Community College System; the University of North Carolina

System; the Department of Public Instruction; the Department of Public Safety's Division of Adult Correction; the Department of Health and Human Services Division of Social Services, Division of Services for the Blind and Division of Social Services.

Each year participating agencies provide data extracts to the CFS. These extracts include record level data files that include participant demographic information and program related information. These extracts are loaded to historical longitudinal data files housed within the CFS. In addition to the education and workforce data submissions, the CFS also receives data from the Division of Employment Security from the state's unemployment insurance system and employer related information from the Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD). UI related information includes detailed UI claims and benefit payment information as well as quarterly unemployment insurance wage data. At the present time the CFS contains over 148 million program participant records on over 9 million individuals, over 15 years of monthly UI claims and benefit payment information, over 17 years (over 396 million records) of quarterly UI wage and over 14 years of quarterly employer information including industry classification and employer size.

North Carolina received a Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grant from the U.S. DOL's Employment and Training Administration in 2013. WDQI resources are being utilized to enhance and expand the capacity of CFS as a longitudinal workforce system. This enhancement effort includes the migration of historical data into relational data structures, the expansion of data submittals as well as the enhancement of the systems technology infrastructure. The data expansion efforts included the addition of additional participating entities including additional workforce programs as well as the expansion of data submittals from existing participating agencies. The technology infrastructure enhancement includes the development of new data loading, storing, processing, analytics as well as enhancing system outputs. While the Department of Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division is charged with operation of the CFS, the new enhanced CFS is being developed in collaboration with the North Carolina Department of Information Technology's Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC). The enhanced CFS is being housed and developed within GDAC's technology infrastructure.

*i. Describe the State's plans to make the management information systems for the core programs interoperable to maximize the efficient exchange of common data elements to support assessment and evaluation.*

The three core WIOA agencies will look for instances where we can electronically exchange data automatically between existing systems to enhance the capabilities.

As previously stated the while each of the core WIOA agencies maintain separate participant and financial information systems, the agencies have worked and continue to work collaboratively to integrate data across North Carolina's Workforce system. As

the final WIOA operational and reporting regulations are released, North Carolina's workforce agencies will continue to work and explore mechanisms by which further data integration can be achieved across entities to achieve the data integration and reporting goals of WIOA. This includes automation of electronic data exchanges across existing systems. In addition, the state can leverage resources through the Common Follow-up System to help support assessment and evaluation of the core WIOA programs as well as other workforce and educational programs.

*ii. Describe the State's plans to integrate data systems to facilitate streamlined intake and service delivery to track participation across all programs included in this plan.*

The three core WIOA will investigate the interfaces to streamline intake and service delivery across multiple system. The existing MIS systems for each agency track the necessary fields needed for the management of their own program.

While each of the core WIOA program agencies maintain separate participant and financial information systems, the agencies will continue to work and explore mechanisms by which further data integration can be achieved across entities to achieve the integration of participant intake information, service delivery information and reporting requirements of WIOA. This includes automation of electronic data exchanges across existing systems. In addition, the state can leverage resources through the Common Follow-up System to help support participant tracking, assessment and evaluation.

*iii. Explain how the State board will assist the governor in aligning technology and data systems across mandatory one-stop partner programs (including design and implementation of common intake, data collection, etc.) and how such alignment will improve service delivery to individuals, including unemployed individuals.*

The state board can encourage each agency to look for opportunities to interface data to other three core WIOA partners.

North Carolina's state board will assist the governor by supporting and encouraging North Carolina's mandatory one-stop partner programs to align technology and data systems to help to streamline services to all workforce system participants including unemployed individuals. This includes facilitating the use of the NC Works online system in North Carolina's NC Works Career Centers and through the internet as well as exploring automated data exchanges across other partner programs. In addition, the Department of Commerce plans to continue its collaboration across the Division of Workforce Solutions and the Division of Employment Security to facilitate the provision of workforce services to Unemployment Insurance claimants.

*iv. Describe the State's plans to develop and produce the reports required under section 116, performance accountability system. (WIOA section116(d)(2)).*

Each core WIOA agency will be responsible for submitting their version of the Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) data and Yearly and Quarterly reports.

As previously stated, while each of the core WIOA agencies maintain separate participant and financial information systems, the agencies have worked and continue to work collaboratively to integrate data across North Carolina's Workforce system. As the final WIOA operational and reporting regulations are released, North Carolina's workforce agencies will continue to work and explore mechanisms by which further data integration can be achieved across entities to achieve the data integration and reporting goals of WIOA. This includes automation of electronic data exchanges across existing participant systems and to leverage the state's resources available through the Common Follow-up System. Through these efforts North Carolina's WIOA core programs anticipate that they will be able to produce the proposed Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) files as well as produce the proposed WIOA Yearly and Quarterly reports.

Planning Note: States should be aware that Section 116(i)(1) requires the core programs, local boards, and chief elected officials to establish and operate a fiscal and management accountability information system based on guidelines established by the Secretaries of Labor and Education. Separately, the Departments of Labor and Education anticipate working with States to inform future guidance and possible information collection(s) on these accountability systems. States should begin laying the groundwork for these fiscal and management accountability requirements, recognizing that adjustments to meet the elements above may provide opportunity or have impact on such a fiscal and management accountability system.

**B. Assessment of Participants' Post-Program Success.** *Describe how lead State agencies will use the workforce development system to assess the progress of participants who are exiting from core programs in entering, persisting in, and completing postsecondary education, or entering or remaining in employment. States may choose to set additional indicators of performance.*

Performance results will be reported back to the NCWorks Commission for the partner agencies to evaluate and work on continuous improvement plans.

**Awaiting Core Partners' (DWS/DHHS/NCCCS) Paragraphs what each currently does with performance data**

The three core agencies all participate in a state level longitudinal data collection system used in NC along with other Education and Workforce Systems. This Common Follow Up System (CFS) allows NC to leverage its existing data collection systems and report our individual requirements needed but to have a common view of data and to show the effectiveness of all programs working together.



The system currently contains over 17 years of quarterly unemployment insurance wage data and over 15 years of education and workforce participation and completion data. At the present time, the CFS system is currently undergoing a technology enhancement effort that is focused on expanding the data and program coverage, enhancing the technology infrastructure and increasing the analytical capacity of the CFS. North Carolina is currently utilizing resources provided through a U.S. DOL Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grant to help support this enhancement effort. Through its work on the CFS, North Carolina has already produced several informational resources that demonstrate the state's ability to assess the progress of participants who are entering, persisting in and completing postsecondary education and/or entering or remaining in employment. These informational resources include the NC Works Commission's workforce report 'Measuring the Performance of North Carolina's Workforce Development System, The Common Follow-up System Evaluation Report and the North Carolina Tool for Online Workforce and Education Reporting "NC TOWER". These informational products focus on the assessment of Workforce Development and Educational program participants including analysis and display of longitudinal education, employment and wage performance outcomes as well as measures of further participation in education and workforce programs. Each of the core WIOA programs participate in the CFS and it is anticipated that through the leveraging of the CFS infrastructure along with the existing core program participant and financial systems that North Carolina will be able to assess participant progress and outcomes needed to comply with the requirements of WIOA.

**C. Use of Unemployment Insurance (UI) Wage Record Data.** *Explain how the State will meet the requirements to utilize quarterly UI wage records for performance accountability, evaluations, and as a source for workforce and labor market information, consistent with Federal and State law. (This Operational Planning element applies to core programs.)*

The core WIOA agencies have different ways to have access to the UI wage data including direct access to data to allow immediate reports. We also use UI wage data as part of our Common Follow-up Reports and can obtain reports out of this system.

North Carolina has a long history and wealth of experience in the analyses and use of Unemployment Insurance wage data to meet both state and federal reporting and evaluation requirements. Through the North Carolina Common Follow-up System, the state has a longitudinal repository of Unemployment Insurance data with over 17 years of historical quarterly wage records. In addition, the state is currently participating in both the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) as well as the Wage Record Interchange System 2 (WRIS2). In addition, the state is working to finalize its agreement in the Federal Employment Data Exchange System (FEDES). Each of the core WIOA programs have access to the State's Unemployment Insurance wage data

either through direct access or through the return of matched data files through the Common Follow up System. Access to UI wage records are completed under signed Memoranda of Understanding which outline data sharing and confidentiality laws and requirements.

**D. Privacy Safeguards.** *Describe the privacy safeguards incorporated in the State's workforce development system, including safeguards required by section 444 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g) and other applicable Federal laws.*

The core WIOA agencies use secure servers to access and share data.

Programs administered through the Division of Workforce Solutions employ specific measures for privacy safeguarding by creating a unique identifier for the individual's Social Security information when registered for services. Unique identifiers are used to eliminate exposure of sensitive information through the case management and referrals processes.

Programs administered through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services are regulated by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) and conform to all privacy safeguards therein as well as obtaining a signed release from individuals seeking services.

Workforce programs administered by the NC Community College System are regulated by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and conform to all privacy safeguards therein.

North Carolina will continue investigating unified data management systems for statewide application and will make privacy considerations a priority in all initiatives.

## **(7) Priority Services for Veterans**

North Carolina's public workforce development system offers programs designed to improve employment opportunities for all customers. Services include assessments, training programs, staff-assisted services, and self-service online programs. In addition to serving people with various levels of education and work experience, some specialized programs provide customized services to special populations, especially veterans. North Carolina is home to seven military installations and over 775,000 of its citizens are veterans. Staff at NCWorks Career Centers are committed to helping veterans and other individuals with barriers to employment navigate the employment process beginning with assessment and continuing throughout the job-search and culminating in suitable employment.

On November 7, 2002, the Jobs for Veterans Act (JVA), Public Law 107-288 was signed into law. One provision of the JVA, codified at 38 U.S.C. 4215, establishes a priority of service requirement for "covered persons" (veterans and certain spouses of veterans, as defined by 38 U.S.C. 4215(a) (1) (A-B), in qualified job training programs. Qualified job training programs include all workforce programs funded directly, in whole or in part, by the US Department of Labor (USDOL), such as WIOA Title I and Title III (Wagner Peyser) employment services and other job training programs offered through competitive grants. The final rule implementing the priority of service requirement took effect on January 19, 2009, and can be found at 20 CFR 1010. Additionally, USDOL has provided policy guidance to the workforce investment system regarding the implementation of the priority of service. In brief, priority of service means that veterans and eligible spouses are given priority over non-covered persons for the receipt of employment, training, and placement services provided under a qualified job training program. A veteran or an eligible spouse either receives access to a service earlier in time than a non-covered person, or, if the resource is limited, the veteran or eligible spouse receives access to the services instead of or before the non-covered person.

It is important to note, however, that the priority of service requirements are not affected by this guidance; direct recipients of USDOL funding remain subject to the priority of service guidance and regulations. Additionally, the priority of services requirements should not be interpreted to limit veterans and eligible spouses to receiving services only from veterans' program staff. Procedures or policies that restrict a veteran's access to WIOA Title I or Title III services, even if such restrictions are intended to provide the veteran with specialized services, are contrary to the priority of service requirement.

Priority of service provisions for veterans are monitored on a regular basis through field checks and by generating reports from NCWorks Online, the state's labor exchange portal. Additionally, North Carolina statute requires annually that a report be a report

that the in accordance with the requirements of the Jobs for Veterans Act, codified at section 4215 of 38 U.S.C., which applies to all employment and training programs funded in whole or in part by the Department of Labor, states should also describe the referral process for veterans determined to have a significant barriers to employment to receive services from the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist.

Many US military veterans complete service only to discover they cannot find jobs when they return home. Although service members develop a wide range of skills through military education, training and experience, they often find it difficult to translate these skills into civilian jobs, perhaps because technical skills, education and experience differ between military and civilian sectors. This is especially true for veterans with medical training such as combat medics and corpsmen.

The Department of Commerce provides a Veteran Services Program across the state to assist veterans with employment. The Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPs) assist veterans with overcoming barriers through intensive, targeted services. Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVERs) reach out to employers to advocate for hiring Veterans. Recent changes to the federal policies concerning the roles of these staff that serve veterans have been made to ensure that eligible veterans and eligible spouses receive the best combination of services, according to their needs. The agency determined that to accomplish this refocusing, Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists will serve only those veterans and eligible spouses most in need of the intensive services to address significant barriers to employment. As a result, DVOP specialists will serve fewer veterans and eligible spouses, but will be able to provide more intensive services.

The current referral process is to have the veteran complete a questionnaire upon their arrival in the NCWorks Center. They are asked to check if they have any of the following (barriers):

- Disabilities
- Homelessness
- Unemployed for at least 27 weeks
- Criminal background (released within the last 12 months)
- No high school diploma or GED
- Low income
- Between 18-24 years old

Veterans with any of these barriers are then referred to a DVOP, or in the limited locations without a DVOP, the veteran will be given a priority of service and will be assisted by another Career Center staff.

Another manifestation of the priority of service policy is in the NCWorks Online job order process. This means that all registered veterans have an opportunity to view the job opening before non-veterans. To accomplish this, a 24-hour business day hold plus overnight update is placed on each job order before it is released to the general public.

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## **(8) Addressing the Accessibility of the One-Stop Delivery System**

### **II. Accessibility of the One-Stop Delivery System – NCWorks Career Center**

Both physical and programmatic accessibility are essential for all individuals to participate in services offered by the NCWorks Career Centers and the collaborating community partners. With employment as the ultimate objective, accessibility to facilities and programs offered as legislated by the Americans with Disabilities Act is essential to support individuals with significant barriers to employment to achieve employment.

The physical accessibility of facilities is systematically addressed across the state. The State maintains a Methods of Administration which details how compliance with WIOA Section 188 will be maintained. The Methods of Administration is a “living” document which ensures current federal regulations and directives are implemented at the state and local level as quickly as possible. NCWorks Career Centers also utilize the North Carolina Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions ADA Compliance Review Checklist to maintain access to the entire range of services at each location. As a part of the certification process to become an NCWorks Career Center, each site is required to obtain a letter of ADA compliance from the host agency. ADA compliance is monitored and reviewed on an annual basis by the NC Department of Commerce and the host agency. Sites are required to maintain and update accessibility as ADA regulations are revised and NCWorks Career Center Certifications are renewed.

In partnership with local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), the NCWorks Commission in May 2013, established minimum certification criteria for NCWorks Career Centers to ensure consistency in quality service delivery throughout the state. Presently, 76 Career Centers are certified.

Certification criteria emphasize staff cross-training and partnerships to provide excellent service to customers. The certification process involves three steps:

1. Local workforce office submits an application demonstrating how certification criteria have been met.
2. A Quality Improvement team from the Division of Workforce Solutions visits the office to observe and evaluate operations.
3. The local office receives certification upon successful evaluation.

Career Center Certification Accessibility Criteria:

1. Adequate handicapped parking with compliant curb ramp(s) connected to the accessibility route into the Center(s). Handicapped parking must be clearly marked.

2. Entrance and exit must be accessible and free of obstacles with appropriate signage.
3. Pedestrian routes inside the host agency facility must be accessible and free of obstacles.
4. Entrance and exit doors are required to be equipped with hardware that is usable with one hand without tight grasping, pinching or twisting of the wrist.
5. Furniture inside the Center must be arranged to allow wheelchair access.
6. Computer and desk workstations must be wheelchair accessible.
7. Restrooms must be appropriately accessible.
8. Auxiliary aids and services must be available upon request as are interpreter services for ESL customers.
9. Emergency drills are to be conducted annually and staff is to be provided with host agency procedures.

Career Centers are monitored and reviewed every 2 years for continued compliance with certification standards. If a center is found out of compliance, a Corrective Action plan is required and a follow-up monitoring visit is conducted. Centers must begin immediate corrective action to achieve compliance, depending on the nature of the finding.

Per federal law, each local workforce board must appoint a local Equal Opportunity Officer who is responsible for ensuring local WIOA Section 188 compliance. Local Equal Opportunity Officers are responsible for informing senior staff of applicable federal regulations and ensuring all programs and activities are implemented in compliance. Additionally, local Equal Opportunity Officers collect and resolve local grievances and complaints as needed. They also serve as liaisons with the state's Title I-B Equal Opportunity Officer and USDOL's Civil Rights Center to remain current on regulatory updates and guidance. They are then responsible for circulating new information locally and ensuring it is properly implemented.

While training has occurred in the past, in early spring, Career Center staff will receive training to follow established procedures to ensure inclusion and programmatic accessibility to Center services. This training, comprised of eight half-day sessions across the state, will allow staff to better understand the different types of disabilities, how to handle issues of disclosure and disability identification with sensitivity at program intake, and how to determine the most effective mix of services and referrals to make when a disability is identified. These trainings will be presented by subject matter experts and include such topics as: federal, state, and local disability policies; identifying barriers/hidden disabilities; disability awareness and etiquette; website

accessibility; providing reasonable accommodations; assistive technology accommodations and resources; Section 503 for federal contractors; and simulation training.

#### **IV. Coordination with Combined Plan Programs**

Not applicable



## V. Common Assurances

<b>North Carolina has met each of the following assurances and has supporting documentation per Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requirements.</b>	
1.	The State has established a policy identifying circumstances that may present a conflict of interest for a State Board or local board member, or the entity or class of officials that the member represents, and procedures to resolve such conflicts;
2.	The State has established a policy to provide to the public (including individuals with disabilities) access to meetings of State Boards and local boards, and information regarding activities of State Boards and local boards, such as data on board membership and minutes;
3.	The lead State agencies with responsibility for the administration of core programs reviewed and commented on the appropriate operational planning elements of the Unified or Combined State Plan, and approved the elements as serving the needs of the populations served by such programs;
4.	<p>(a) The State obtained input into the development of the Unified or Combined State Plan and provided an opportunity for comment on the plan by representatives of local boards and chief elected officials, businesses, labor organizations, institutions of higher education, the entities responsible for planning or administering the core programs and the other Combined Plan programs (if included in the State Plan), other primary stakeholders, and the general public, and that the Unified or Combined State Plan is available and accessible to the general public;</p> <p>(b) The State provided an opportunity for review and comment on the plan by the State Board, including State agency official(s) for the Unemployment Insurance Agency if such official(s) is a member of the State Board;</p>
6.	The State has established, in accordance with WIOA section 116(i), fiscal control and fund accounting procedures that may be necessary to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for, funds paid to the State through allotments made for adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs to carry out workforce investment activities under chapters 2 and 3 of subtitle B;
7.	The State has taken the appropriate action to be in compliance with WIOA section 188, as applicable;
8.	The Federal funds received to carry out a core program will not be expended for any purpose other than for activities authorized with respect to such funds under that core program;
9.	The State will pay an appropriate share (as defined by the State board) of the costs of carrying out section 116, from funds made available through each of the core programs;
10.	The State has a one-stop certification policy that ensures the physical and programmatic accessibility of all one-stop centers with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA);
11.	Service providers have a referral process in place for directing Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) to DVOP services, when appropriate; and
12.	The State will conduct evaluations and research projects on activities under WIOA core programs; that such projects will be coordinated with, and designed in conjunction with, State and local boards and with State agencies responsible for the administration of all respective core programs; and, further, that the projects will be coordinated with the evaluations provided for by the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Education under WIOA.

## **VI. Program-Specific Requirements for Core State Plan Programs**

### **Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Activities**

#### **General Requirements**

##### **(1) Regions and Local Workforce Development Areas**

*(A) Identify the regions and local workforce development areas designated in the State.*

North Carolina's 23 local workforce development areas are provided as Attachment XX including a current listing and map. The overlay of North Carolina's eight economic development prosperity zones shown on the map are the basis for designation of regions. The current 23 boards meet the performance and fiscal accountability criteria of the Opportunity Act and were accordingly re-designated for the initial two year period. North Carolina began a regional approach to planning and service delivery under the Workforce Investment Act and established eight regions that most closely aligned the geography of the local workforce development areas and the Prosperity Zones without dividing local areas. These regions are consistent with labor market areas and will be the initial regions under the Opportunity Act subject to review at the end of two years. The regions with their constituent local workforce development areas are:

- Western Region: *Southwestern and Mountain Area WDBs;*
- Northwest Region: *High Country, Western Piedmont, and Region C WDBs;*
- Piedmont Triad Region: *Northwest Piedmont, Guilford County, DavidsonWorks, and Regional Partnership WDBs;*
- Southwest Region: *Centralina, Charlotte/Mecklenburg, and Gaston County WDBs;*
- North Central Region: *Kerr-Tar, Durham, and Capital Area WDBs;*
- Sandhills Region: *Lumber River, Cumberland County, and Triangle South WDBs;*
- Northeast Region: *Region Q, Northeastern, and Turning Point WDBs;* and
- Southeast Region: *Eastern Carolina and Cape Fear WDBs.*

*(B) Describe the process used for designating local areas, including procedures for determining whether the local area met the criteria for "performed successfully" and "sustained fiscal Integrity" in accordance with 106(b) (2) and (3) of WIOA.*

The process for the initial designation of local workforce development areas in North Carolina originates from a letter of request to the Governor from the local Chief Elected Official of each potential workforce development area. The letter of request must contain the official local area name as well as the county(ies) that comprise the area. Upon receipt of the request by the Governor and review, it will be determined if the local area meets the criteria for performed successfully and sustained fiscal integrity.

*Describe the process used for identifying regions and planning regions under section 106(a) of WIOA. This must include a description of how the State consulted with the local boards and chief elected officials in identifying the regions.*

North Carolina's workforce system includes businesses, organizations, agencies, employed and unemployed persons, training and educational institutions, adults and youth. To enhance service to all these constituents, aligning workforce development planning and services with regional labor markets is both efficient and productive. Communities and regions recognize that to have successful economic development it must go hand-in-hand with a well-functioning workforce development system. North Carolina has built on several years of emphasizing the value of regional efforts and worked with local workforce development boards and local elected officials to establish and enhance identification of appropriate regions and the working relationships that have been developed.

*(C) Provide the appeals process referred to in section 106(b) (5) of WIOA relating to designation of local area.*

At the conclusion of the initial two year designation, North Carolina will conduct an official subsequent designation process per Section 106(b)(3) of WIOA. At that time, should a requesting area not be granted designation, the state's appeal process will be followed. North Carolina's process is under development and will follow the WIOA and relevant regulations.

*(D) Provide the appeals process referred to in section 121(h) (2) (E) of WIOA relating to determinations of infrastructure funding.*

North Carolina's appeal process related to determinations of infrastructure funding is under development and will follow WIOA and relevant regulations.

(2) **Statewide Activities**

\*\*\*In Process

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## **Adult and Dislocated Worker Program Requirements**

### **(1) Alternative Training Models**

The NCWorks Incumbent Worker Training Grant (IW Grant) is a competitive training grant through which qualifying businesses can address employees' skills gaps and impact company stability. These skills gaps can be a result of a worker's changing responsibilities/requirements in her/his job, or for a worker whose job may potentially be eliminated and skill upgrading is needed to accept new responsibilities. The NCWorks IW training should result in increased knowledge and skill, and will increase the competitiveness of the employee and employer stability.

Local Workforce Board staff guide candidate businesses in the application process, ensuring that quality training is selected to address the employees' identified skills gaps, and fits within the WIOA and state-level parameters for the IW Grant. The application process includes validation of the trainer and asks the company to describe how the requested training will address the identified skills gaps, improve employee retention, impact company stability, and increase the competitiveness of the employee and employer. A final report, completed by the company, is required and addresses the training outcomes and the business' satisfaction with both the training and the IW Grant process.

### **(2) Registered Apprenticeship**

North Carolina is utilizing public/private partnerships to grow its apprenticeship programs, focusing on youth apprenticeship with sector strategies. Several of these partnerships are growing apprenticeships in advanced manufacturing; specifically, tool and die, machining and mechatronics. There is also a growing number of apprentices in the maintenance fields. Another sector strategy is in the area of IT apprenticeships. There are approximately 10,000 unfilled IT jobs in the state and there are public/private partnerships working to form a solid and sustainable youth apprenticeship program.

Additionally, because the US Military is the second largest employer in the state, Ft. Bragg allows our staff to register soldiers in 72 apprentice occupations. There is also a Pipe welder Apprenticeship program at Camp Lejeune, NC's Marine Corps based. It is our intent to grow these programs so that our transitioning veterans exit the military with a nationally recognized credential.

NC is also working with several large electrical, plumbing, carpentry and masonry companies to recruit youth into these technical trade skilled careers where there are massive shortages of trained workers.

Additionally, our apprenticeship staff is being integrated into our Business Services teams, NC Works Career Centers and Community Colleges in order to collaborate and work as an Integrated Service Delivery Team that holistically serves all of the needs of our businesses.

### **(3) Training Provider Eligibility Procedures**

The NCWorks Online system allows the individual providers the ability to login and apply to be considered to be on the ETPL. Once they have completed their application, the local WDB that is closest to the primary location will review the application and take the necessary steps to determine if this provider is one that should be on the state list of approved providers. Once a provider is approved, they must then key in all the programs they offer that will again have to be reviewed and approved by a local WDB. Once a provider has been approved for WIOA training, every WDB in the state has the option to certify that this provider can be available in their area. With the two year review process, they would have to be approved again based on current standards.

The Apprenticeship providers could go thru the same process if they choose to be on the ETPL. The way I read the law was that they had to be given the opportunity to be on the list but could choose not to be. Depending on how they are offering training, it is possibly done by a community College that would probably be approved.

## **Youth Program Requirements**

### **(1) Criteria for Awarding Grants**

The NCWorks Commission supports cost-efficient, collaborative efforts that result in comprehensive and innovative services that lead youth to academic improvement, high school graduation or High School Equivalency attainment, employment, military services, advanced or apprenticeship training, paid and unpaid internships, and/or post-secondary education. Local programs must link academic and occupational learning and develop measures of successful outcomes. Effective programs require the involvement of local groups providing input on the proposed program design, and coordinating the delivery of the youth services with local employers, NCWorks Career Centers and other youth services already available in the community.

Local programs have the discretion to determine what specific program services will be provided to a youth participant, based on each participant's objective assessment and individual service strategy. Critical to the success is integrating a youth development strategy that focuses on a young person's assets, provides a variety of interventions and supports allowing the youth to grow, learn and mature—successfully transitioning to careers and productive adulthood. Youth development activities include leadership development opportunities that encourage responsibility, employability, and other positive social behaviors. It is expected that each youth will participate in more than one of the fourteen program elements required as part of any local youth program. The overall goal of the youth program is to help youth complete a high school diploma or equivalent and to prepare for a career pathway that will transition into skilled employment and/or postsecondary education.

Youth program outcomes should prepare youth for post-secondary educational opportunities, provide better linkages between academic and occupational learning, prepare youth for employment; and offer effective connections to intermediary organizations that provide strong links to the job market and employers. All youth must receive some form of follow-up services for a minimum period of 12 months, following the completion of participation in the program.

Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDB) will follow the procurement procedures set forth in their own local plan as established by each local area to ensure proper competition and transparency. Procurement of WIOA funded Youth Services requires the selection of youth providers through a competitive selection process. Each LWDB, with recommendations from its designated youth committee and in accordance with criteria outlined in the local WIOA Strategic Plan, is afforded the opportunity to identify providers of youth services that effectively address the needs of local youth.

Local Youth Committees who serve as a sub-committee to the board play a significant role in developing programs and services for youth. Their responsibilities include developing portions of the local plan related to eligible youth and making recommendations to the local workforce board regarding youth service providers. As part of their local plan, each local area will develop written criteria to identify effective youth

activities and providers. The local boards will fund youth providers based on performance and program cost data provided by potential providers and based on criteria that may include those youth activities and providers that:

- Develop relationships between youth and caring adults
- Involve family members
- Build youth responsibility
- Develop youth citizenship and leadership skills
- Place high expectations on youth and staff
- Provide appropriate services based on age and needs of each youth
- Demonstrate involvement of the business/employer community
- Provide accessible facilities and provide accommodations for special needs populations, including individuals with disabilities
- Demonstrate prior successes in providing employment and training services to youth
- Prepare youth for success in employment
- Advocate for the youth perspective
- Demonstrate the connection between work and learning
- Provide comprehensive guidance and counseling

The criteria to solicit competitive proposals for the operation of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) Title I, Public Law 113-128, will ensure that Youth Programs are competitively procured and solicited for comprehensive year-round Youth Programs for out-of-school youth between the ages 16-24, and in-school youth between the ages of 14 and 21. Local Areas' youth program design must offer a unique opportunity to provide creative and innovative mix of services designed to address the academic, vocational, and employment needs of at-risk youth.

Targeted activities include:

1. Tutoring, study skills training, instruction, and evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies that lead to completion of the requirements for a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (including a recognized certificate of attendance or similar document for individuals with disabilities) or for a recognized postsecondary credential;
2. Alternative secondary school services, or dropout recovery services, as appropriate;
3. Paid and unpaid work experiences that have as a component, academic and occupational education, which may include:
  - a. summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year;
  - b. pre-apprenticeship programs;
  - c. internships and job shadowing; and



- d. on-the-job training opportunities;
4. Occupational skill training, which shall include priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials that are aligned with in demand industry sectors or occupations in the local area involved, if the local board determines that the programs meet the quality criteria described in section 123;
5. Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
6. Leadership development opportunities, which may include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors, as appropriate;
7. Supportive services;
8. Adult mentoring for the period of participation and a subsequent period, for a total of not less than 12 months;
9. Follow-up services for not less than 12 months after the completion of participation, as appropriate;
10. Comprehensive guidance and counseling, which may include drug and alcohol abuse counseling and referral, as appropriate;
11. Financial literacy education;
12. Entrepreneurial skills training;
13. Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services; and
14. Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to postsecondary education and training.

Local Boards must follow a procurement process that ensures compliance with the prescribed rules and regulations. At a minimum, the procurement process must ensure:

1. Solicitation methods that promote fair and open competition;
2. A written code of conduct that includes specific conflict of interest provisions to ensure that those who develop or issue a proposal are separate and distinct from those who are involved in the selection process;
3. A clear and accurate description of the services being procured; and
4. A specific contract time frame with the option to extend the contract for a specified period based on a provider's compliance with the terms of the contract.

In addition, each LWDB must use the following criteria in awarding contracts for youth services:

1. Ability to measure and attain youth-related core performance levels; participant and employer (customer) satisfaction levels (Note: the State calculates and tracks official Workforce Development Board standards and performance.)
2. Coordination with local secondary and post-secondary institutions;
3. Prior experience working with disadvantaged, special populations, and in operating education, training, and employment programs;
4. Leveraging funds with other funding sources;
5. Fiscal accountability; and
6. Program design that includes the following components:
  - a. An objective assessment for each participant;
  - b. Individual Service Strategies (ISS); and
  - c. Services that prepare youth for post-secondary education opportunities, link academic and occupational learning, prepare youth for employment, and provide connections to intermediary organizations linked to the job market and employers.

WIOA has established core performance indicators (See Table 1 on Next Page) to ensure that Federal investments in employment and training programs are accountable to job seekers, employers, customers, and taxpayers. There is a renewed system which will ensure access for all individuals, of every skill level, the opportunity to pursue the skills, training, and education they need to obtain employment that will lead to financial stability and economic security for themselves and their families. Employers will also have the assurance that trained and qualified workers will be available to fill their current and future openings.

<b>Table 1</b> <b>State WIOA Performance Indicators</b>		
<b>Category</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Adults/ Dislocated Workers</b>	<b>Entered Employment Rate</b>	The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit.
	<b>Employment Retention Rate</b>	The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the 4 <sup>th</sup> quarter after exit.
	<b>Median Earnings</b>	The median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit.
	<b>Credential Rate</b>	The percentage of participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation or within 1 year after exit.
	<b>Measureable Skills Gain</b>	The percentage of participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measureable skill gains toward such a credential or employment.
<b>Youth</b>	<b>Placement in Employment / Education/Training</b>	The percentage of participants who are in education or training services, or in unsubsidized employment during the 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit.
	<b>Retention in Employment/ Education/Training</b>	The percentage of participants who are in education or training services, or in unsubsidized employment during the 4 <sup>th</sup> quarter after exit.
	<b>Earnings</b>	The median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit.
	<b>Credential Rate</b>	The percentage of participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation or within 1 year after exit.
	<b>In-Program Skills Gain</b>	The percentage of participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measureable skill gains toward such a credential or employment.
<b>Employers</b>	<b>Indicators of effectiveness</b>	To Be Determined

## **(2) Youth Program Elements**

Through administrative oversight and monitoring of the 23 local Workforce Development Boards, the state ensures local area program design incorporates the availability of all Youth Program elements. The state has all 23 local Workforce Development Boards identify through Local and Regional Plan questions how the Program Elements will be made available. Once identified, as a required strategy of the individual's service strategy, whether it is by WIOA formula funds and/or through partnership, Local Workforce Development Boards must also identify the partnerships providing the service. Local areas may use WIOA youth funds to carry out the fourteen program elements either directly, in partnership, or by referral, that will assist youth in improving their educational attainment and employment opportunities.

Along with Core Partners and a variety of interested stakeholders, North Carolina plans a more cohesive partnership with the school systems' Career & Technical Education Departments, the university and community college systems & enhance involvement with employers to address/provide employment opportunities. It is strongly encouraged that local WIOA youth program operators have a presence within the NCWorks Career Centers as they house various partners (i.e., Vocational Rehabilitation, local Departments of Social Services, Community Colleges, and many others to include community based organizations.) These partners may prove beneficial in addressing persons with identified and unidentified disabilities, high school equivalency credentials, leadership development and supportive service needs.

Career Pathways for youth will be of importance in regards to occupational skills training. North Carolina will provide training through Career Pathways and Work Based Learning opportunities so that staff/partners/schools have a clear understanding of these elements and how they apply to youth. North Carolina will provide resources/training on how to assist youth to become career ready.

## **(3) Definition – Additional Assistance**

North Carolina Local Workforce Development Boards are to use the following definitions when determining youth eligibility. In North Carolina, "requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment" is defined as all youth, including youth with a disability, who meet the criteria in either 1 or 2 below:

1. In- School Youth and
  - a) Has poor attendance patterns in an educational program during the last 12 calendar months; or
  - b) Has been expelled from school within the last 12 calendar months; or
  - c) Has been suspended from school at least within the last 12 calendar months; or
  - d) Has below average grades; or
  - e) Has previously been placed in out-of-home care (foster care, group home, or

- kinship care) for more than 6 months between the ages of 14-21; or  
f) Has a currently incarcerated parent(s)/guardian.

2. Out-of-School Youth and

- a) Has dropped out of a post-secondary educational program during the past 12 calendar months; or
- b) Has a poor work history, to include no work history, or has been fired from a job in the last 6 calendar months; or
- c) Has previously been placed in out-of-home care (foster care, group home, or kinship care) for more than 6 months between the ages of 16-21; or
- d) Currently has an incarcerated parent(s)/guardian.

Furthermore, North Carolina understands and provides guidance that in each local area, not more than 5% of the In-school Youth assisted may be made eligible using WIOA Section 129(a)(1)(C)(iv)(VII) as follows: (VII) An individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment.

The 5% "Limitation" is calculated based on all In-School Youth served in the WIOA local youth program in a given Program Year. For example, if you serve a total of 40 In-School Youth, only 2 may be eligible using clause (VII) "requires additional assistance" ( $40 \times .05 = 2$ ).

**(4) Alternative Program**

North Carolina's alternative education is defined by N.C. Legislative Statute 115C-105.45 and 48. An alternative program is established in affiliation with an existing school. The information that is generated by the participants of the program becomes a part of the history and documentation of the associated school. A program may be housed within a school, on the same site, or at a different location within the district. The second type of alternative education setting is an alternative school. An alternative school has a school number. An official school number is the primary factor that distinguishes an alternative school from an alternative program. Alternative Learning Programs must followed established criteria.

**(5) Definition of Not Attending School and Attending School**

North Carolina has the following law for attending school:

*§ 115C-378. Children required to attend.*

Every parent, guardian or other person in this State having charge or control of a child between the ages of seven and 16 years shall cause such child to attend school continuously for a period equal to the time which the public school to which the child is assigned shall be in session. Every parent, guardian, or other person in this State having charge or control of a child under age seven who is enrolled in a public school in grades kindergarten through two shall also cause such child to attend school continuously for a

period equal to the time which the public school to which the child is assigned shall be in session unless the child has withdrawn from school.

In North Carolina, schools also include home schooling, charter schools, alternative schools and private schools.

Also, with secondary school-age children, North Carolina defines a dropout as an individual who:

- was enrolled in school at some time during the reporting year;
- was not enrolled on day 20 of the current year;
- has not graduated from high school or completed a state or district approved educational program; and does not meet any of the following reporting exclusions:
  1. transferred to another public school district, private school, home school or state/district approved educational program,
  2. temporarily absent due to suspension or school approved illness, or
  3. death.

While the definitions above address secondary school attendance policies, North Carolina continues to focus its expanded scope beyond secondary education. As it relates to the definitions of WIOA Youth Attending and Not Attending School, North Carolina does consider attending school to be beyond and in addition to the scope of secondary education. Therefore, individuals enrolled in or attending colleges, universities (private or public), or other credential or degree skills training programs are to be considered Youth Attending school or In-School Youth for WIOA purposes except as where mentioned otherwise by WIOA.

However, North Carolina will following the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking clause, 681.230, for purposes of WIOA, the Department does not consider providers of Adult Education under title II of WIOA, YouthBuild programs, and Job Corps programs to be schools. Therefore, WIOA youth programs may consider a youth to be out-of-school youth for purposes of WIOA youth program eligibility if they are attending Adult Education provided under title II of WIOA, YouthBuild, or Job Corps, until otherwise notified by USDOL.

**(6) Definition of Basic Skills Deficient**

As included in WIOA Section 3(5)(B):

- (5) *BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT.*—The term "basic skills deficient" means, with respect to an individual—
- (A) *who is a youth, that the individual has English reading, writing, or computing skills at or below the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level on a generally accepted standardized test; or*
  - (B) *who is a youth or adult, that the individual is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English, at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual's family, or in society.*

North Carolina has no additional specific definition for WIOA 3(5)(B). North Carolina does recognize the WIOA Title II definitions of English Language Learner (WIOA Section 203(7)), and promotes a positive and cooperative understanding of the importance of language access to federally assisted programs for limited English proficiency individuals.

## **Single-area State Requirements**

Not applicable to North Carolina

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## **Waiver Requests**

### **(1) Statutory Requirements**

To better meet the workforce demands and challenges facing the state, North Carolina requests a waiver from the U.S. Department of Labor of WIOA Sections 128(c)(2) and 133(c)(2) to allow flexibility in the recapture and redistribution of funds while encouraging efficient and effective use of funds during the first year allotment of funds.

At the end of the first Program Year (July through June) of allotment, Local Workforce Development Areas' unspent formula program funds in excess of up to 70% of their Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth formula funds will be subject to recapture. Local Areas will continue to have a second year to expend the allowed carryover which shall be no lower than 30%. Funds in excess of the allowed carryover will be recaptured by the NC Division of Workforce Solutions and made available for redistribution to other North Carolina local areas according to established procedures. Recaptured funds would retain their identity; Youth funds would remain Youth funds, Adult funds would remain Adult funds and Dislocated Worker funds would remain as Dislocated Worker funds. In addition, Youth funds will continue to require the 75% expenditure for Out of School Youth and 20% work experience expenditure requirement.

The recapture and redistribution waiver allows evaluation of expenditures as a reliable indicator of program need and incorporates a process for more timely redistribution of funds. Recapture and redistribution serves WIOA customers by positively affecting the opportunity to respond to North Carolina individuals and businesses. Additionally, Local Workforce Development Boards will have timely access to additional resources to meet identified unmet needs.

### **(2) Actions to Remove Barriers**

North Carolina provides to all local areas quarterly expenditure reports showing each local Workforce Development Board's expenditures by fund code to include Administrative, Adult, Dislocated, and Youth funds. Funds reflect any transfers made within the local Workforce Development Board. In addition, local Workforce Development Boards have real time access to their own fund reports.

As needed, the Division holds in-person meetings with local Workforce Development Board directors and staff to discuss expenditure rates. All local areas receive written communications throughout the year relative to expenditures.

### **(3) Goals of Waivers**

The goals of the waiver and the expected programmatic outcomes if the request is granted;

- To continue to enhance North Carolina's capability to redirect resources to areas of greatest need.
- Allow local Workforce Development Boards with greater needs to respond accordingly complying with the redistribution process
- Respond to variance in immediate economic/workforce conditions and address national direction.
- Flexibility will continue to enable North Carolina, in partnership with Local Workforce Development Boards, to assist citizens and businesses and strengthen both local areas and the state workforce system.

### **(4) Alignment with Priorities**

North Carolina's program designs and Unified Plan aligns with all the U.S. Department of Labor's policy priorities to include employer engagement, connecting education and training strategies, supporting work-based learning, and improving job and career results. Redirecting funds in a timely manner to local Workforce Development Boards will allow a more effective response to locally identified needs; needs which are identified through the local Regional Plans and current events.

### **(5) Impact**

North Carolina includes citizens with multiple barriers to employment as a priority for WIOA services. This responds to the first purpose of WIOA. By redistributing funds, as requested, among local Workforce Development Boards who have the need and capacity to serve greater numbers, North Carolina will be doing a service to individuals including special populations and employers.

### **(6) Processes**

#### **(A) Monitor the progress in implementing the waiver;**

The Division provides expenditure reports on a quarterly basis that display all local Workforce Development Boards expenditures. In addition, all local Workforce Development Boards have access to real-time review of their own expenditures. These reports allow Division staff and local Workforce Development Boards to review the data. Monthly calls with local Workforce Development Boards offer a platform for any reminders or discussions of expenditures to take place in addition, to one-on-one sessions between the local Workforce Development Board Director, appropriate Division staff, and their assigned Division planning staff

person. Annual official monitoring visits by Division of Workforce Solutions program and financial monitors will include progress of the waiver.

**(B) Provide notice to any local board affected by the waiver;**

Concurrent with the submission of this waiver request, the state will notify local Workforce Development Board directors of the state's intent of this request. For veteran local directors, they are familiar with a similar effective waiver North Carolina had in place under the Workforce Investment Act. For newer local directors, state staff is reviewing the implications should the waiver be approved.

Upon approval of the waiver, North Carolina will issue a Policy Statement notifying all local Workforce Development Boards that this practice will be implemented effective July 1, 2016.

At the end of Program Year 2016 (July 2016 through June 2017), Local Workforce Development Areas' unspent formula program funds in excess of up to 70% of their Workforce Investment Act Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth funds will be subject to recapture.

The final Program Year Monthly Financial Report reflecting expenditures through June 30<sup>th</sup> will determine the unexpended funds to be recaptured.

Local Workforce Development Board directors will be notified in writing in September of each year of the upcoming action to recapture excess funds from their Local Workforce Development Area. Within two weeks of this notification, the Division will issue a Notice of Fund Availability (NFA) removing identified funds from the Local Workforce Development Area. Concurrently, the Division will send a statement letter to the Local Area Chief Elected Official, with a copy to the Workforce Development Board Chair and Director, listing the recapture amount(s).

**(C) Provide any local board affected by the waiver an opportunity to comment on the request;**

Local Workforce Development Boards will be able to contact the Division of Workforce Solutions prior to submission of the State Unified WIOA Plan to discuss and have input on the waiver request. All local boards will also have access to the draft Unified Plan and opportunity to comment during the public review and comment period.

**(D) Ensure meaningful public comment, including comment by business and organized labor, on the waiver.**

This waiver request will be included in the Unified Plan submission and subject to public comment within Plan guidelines and the WIOA requirements.

**(E) Collect and report information about waiver outcomes in the State's WIOA Annual Report.**

North Carolina will collect and report information about waiver outcomes in the State's WIOA Annual Report

(7) **Outcomes of Existing Waivers**

Not applicable.

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## Title I-B Assurances

The State Plan must include assurances that:	
1.	The State has implemented a policy to ensure Adult program funds provide a priority in the delivery of career and training services to individuals who are low income, public assistance recipients or basic skills deficient;
2.	The State has implemented a policy to ensure local areas have a process in place for referring veterans with significant barriers to employment to career services provided by the JVSG program's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist;
3.	The State established a written policy and procedure that set forth criteria to be used by chief elected officials for the appointment of local workforce investment board members;
4.	The State established written policy and procedures to ensure local workforce investment boards are certified by the governor every two years in accordance with WIOA section 107(c)(2);
5.	Where an alternative entity takes the place of a State Board, the State has written policy and procedures to ensure the alternative entity meets the definition under WIOA section 101(e) and the legal requirements for membership;
6.	The State established a written policy and procedure for how the individuals and entities represented on the State Workforce Development Board help to determine the methods and factors of distribution, and how the State consults with chief elected officials in local areas throughout the State in determining the distributions;
7.	The State will not use funds received under WIOA Title I to assist, promote, or deter union organizing in accordance with WIOA section 181(b)(7);
8.	The State distributes adult and youth funds received under WIOA equitably throughout the State, and no local area suffers significant shifts in funding from year-to-year during the period covered by this plan;
9.	If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I;
10.	Priority of Service for covered persons is provided for each of the Title I programs; and
11.	The State agrees to report on the impact and outcomes of its approved waivers in its WIOA Annual Report.
12.	The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 2900, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance under section WIOA 184(a)(3);

## **Wagner-Peyser Act Program**

### **Employment Service Professional Staff Development**

DWS will utilize professional development activities for Employment Service staff using the NCWorks Training Center whose primary mission is to provide high-quality, affordable, easily accessible training and professional development services for North Carolina's workforce system.

The NCWorks Training Center achieves its mission by providing a variety of training options tailored to meet the dynamic needs of the Division of Workforce Solutions, NCWorks Career Center staff, the state's 23 local Workforce Development Boards and staff of partner agencies. These efforts and services help ensure all staff and partners are well-trained with current skills and knowledge relevant to workforce trends. This is accomplished through workshops by professional, peer and in-house trainers in both face-to-face sessions and online webinars and tutorials. The NCWorks Training Center also provides a vast list of supportive services including: meeting and conference preparation, and planning and other customized event services as requested.

The NCWorks Training Center is located in a self-contained facility and boasts two well-equipped classrooms. A recent addition of 24 laptop computers has allowed either room to function as a computer lab, affording more versatility for students and visitors of the Center. The NCWorks Training Center team is comprised of five diverse and highly skilled staff members who continually strive to stay current on workforce trends and issues, at the state and national levels, and to use this knowledge to design, coordinate, plan, and facilitate training.

Records of these events are retained and managed through the Training Registration and Information Network (TRAIN). This comprehensive system is managed by Training Center and Division staff and collects and retains client records, maintains data for easy reporting, stores student transcripts, and manages event and training registration.

The NCWorks Training Center was readily available with logistical planning of events, registration, data collection, supportive services, and training delivery and successfully increased and improved its online presence and accessibility of training through 79 live and recorded webinars on a variety of on demand topics. The NCWorks Training Center continues to provide workforce development professionals a globally recognized credentialing opportunity through the Career Development Facilitator (CDF) course. This 120-hour course uses the National Career Development Association's curriculum and standardizes the knowledge and experience of workforce development professionals and others in career development services. The instructional format blends traditional classroom, web-based distance learning, and independent project completion. This course provides a unique opportunity for workforce professionals from varied perspectives of the career field to network, share ideas and resources, and develop new partnerships to benefit the public.

Each year, the NCWorks Training Center staff host the *NCWorks Partnership Conference*. This event offers opportunities for attendees to participate in more than 65 workshops provided by professional trainers from around the country and peers from around the state. Attendees included frontline staff of NCWorks Career Centers, Workforce Board Directors and staff, private sector business representatives, staff and management of government agencies, and non-profit organizations.

DWS also used the train-the-trainer model with ten Regional Representatives across the state who are subject matter experts in Employment Service and Unemployment Insurance policy. As appropriate, training is developed and distributed to NCWorks Career Center staff in a manner that is efficient and consistent across the state.

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## **Assistance to Unemployment Insurance Claimants**

The Division of Workforce Solutions and the Division of Employment Security continue to collaborate on ways to provide significant assistance to individuals requesting help in filing for unemployment insurance compensation. State office staff from both Divisions meet quarterly to discuss unemployment insurance policy, keep abreast of program changes and discuss concerns. Changes or corrections to unemployment insurance procedures is distributed to NCWorks Career Center staff electronically via statewide Bulletins. Individuals are instructed on how to file a claim by way of the Internet ([www.ncesc.com](http://www.ncesc.com)) or by calling the Customer Call Center (1-888-737-0259). Individuals are able to access the computers and telephones in the NCWorks Career Resource Center, with or without assistance from NCWorks Career Center staff, to file a claim.

Guidance and information is provided using the "Getting Answers About Unemployment Insurance" form which includes information such as:

- How to File a Claim
- Where to call concerning claim questions
- Filing a Weekly Certification
- What to do if my weekly payment does not arrive
- What to do if my debit card does not arrive or is lost
- Where to call if I have questions regarding your appeal
- What to do if I am notified of an overpayment on my claim

## **Reemployment Assistance**

The Division of Workforce Solutions adheres to the philosophy that all persons receiving unemployment insurance should return to work as quickly as possible. Every claimant within four weeks of receiving unemployment insurance compensation, if they have not returned back to work is required to report to an NCWorks Career Center for intensive reemployment assistance through the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) or the Employability Assessment Interview (EAI) program. These reemployment programs are designed to ensure the claimant is fully registered for work in the NCWorks Online system, and is available and actively looking for work. Assistance with job search, job referrals, and referral to training is provided as appropriate.

## **Support Services for Unemployment Insurance Claimants**

Labor exchange services are provided to unemployment insurance claimants when they report for their reemployment appointment. Each claimant is notified by mail of a specific mandatory reemployment appointment and to report to their nearest NCWorks Career Center. During this appointment claimants receive an orientation of employment services to provide an awareness of service offered. This is essential in allowing the claimant to take advantage of services he/she views as beneficial. Labor



exchange services are also extended to claimants through the mandatory registration in NCWorks Online. This ensures that claimants are registered for work. Through the job matching system, assistance is provided to find employment. Employers registered in NCWorks Online have access to the claimants resume and qualifications.

During the reemployment visit, the NCWorks Career Center staff determines if claimants are meeting the work test requirements. The requirements include: 1) the claimant is out of work due to no fault of their own; 2) the claimant has not returned back to work; and 3) the claimant is able, available and actively seeking employment. If appropriate during this visit, staff discusses job referrals, Job Development Contacts (JDCs), referral to workshops (e.g. resume writing, job seeking skills, keeping a job, etc.) and look for opportunities to make referrals for applicable training programs.

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## Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP)

### (1) Assessment of Need

Crop Activities	Month(s)	Agricultural Reporting Area	MSFW Labor Force CY2015	MSFW Labor Force CY2016 Projections
Tobacco Transplanting	April, May	Northeast Southeast Piedmont Western	2000 1500 2100 300	1900 1200 1900 200
Sweet Potato Transplanting	May, June	Northeast Southeast	1200 2200	1400 2200
Pickle Cucumber Harvest	June, July, Sept, Oct.	Northeast Southeast	1900 1000	1700 900
Blueberry Harvest	May, June, July	Northeast Southeast	600 5000	500 5500
Cabbage Harvest	June, July, Oct, Nov, Dec	Northeast Southeast	1500 400	1300 400
Tobacco Suckering & Topping	June, July, Aug	Northeast Southeast Piedmont Western	2500 1800 2100 300	2400 1800 1900 200
Squash Harvest	May, June, July, Sept, Oct	Southeast	500	500
Long Green Cucumber Harvest	June, July, Sept, Oct	Northeast Southeast	500 1000	500 1000
Pepper Harvest	June, July, Sept, Oct	Northeast Southeast	200 1200	200 120
Tobacco Harvest	July, Aug, Sept, Oct	Northeast Southeast Piedmont Western	4500 3500 4000 900	4400 3500 3500 800
Eggplant Harvest	July, August	Southeast	300	300
String Bean Harvest	June, July	Northeast Southeast	250 200	200 100
Peach Harvest	July, August	Piedmont Western	230 100	230 100
Tomato Harvest	July, Aug, Sept, Oct	Piedmont Western	200 1000	200 1000
Apple Harvest	Sept, Oct, Nov	Western	2000	2000
Sweet Potato Harvest	Aug, Sept, Oct, Nov	Northeast Southeast Piedmont	3400 4100 100	3600 4100 100
White Potato Harvest	June, July	Northeast Southeast	1100 200	1000 200
Christmas Tree Harvest	Nov, Dec	Western	2800	2800
Horticultural Activities	Jan thru Oct	Northeast Southeast Piedmont Western	3200 2500 4500 2500	3400 2500 4500 2500

## **(2) Outreach Activities**

### Outreach Plan

The Agricultural Employment Services staff of the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions will continue to promote an aggressive outreach program. Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFW) will be contacted throughout the State and offered a full range of employment and supportive services to the extent that staff funding will allow.

Services to the farm worker community will continue to be delivered with particular outreach priority in local office areas with high concentrations of migrant workers. The following offices have been designated as MSFW significant: Battleboro, Clayton, Clinton, Kenansville, Lumberton, and Wilkesboro.

The outreach efforts to be undertaken by staff in each of these local offices, as required by 20 CFR 653.107 (b) (2), are described below.

Office	Employment Dates		Number of Weeks
	Start	End	
<b>Battleboro</b>	May 16	August 29	15
<b>Clayton</b>	May 30	September 12	15
<b>Clinton</b>	May 16	August 29	15
<b>Kenansville</b>	May 16	August 29	15
<b>Lumberton</b>	May 2	August 15	15
<b>Wilkesboro</b>	September 5	December 16	15

All of the offices selected to receive outreach workers have been designated as bilingual. Supervisors of these positions will be encouraged to recruit and employ Outreach Workers who speak fluent Spanish and have a migrant or seasonal farm worker background to provide outreach services on an intermittent basis. Qualified candidates are being identified.

Additionally, we have approximately 43 permanent employees who speak Spanish fluently. These employees are strategically located to serve all Division of Workforce Solutions offices, especially those offices that have been designated by the U.S. Department of Labor as significant in serving MSFW clients. An up-to-date listing of interpreters is available through our Limited English Proficiency Coordinator. Our Agency also has pamphlets concerning employment services and the "Department of Labor's Protection for Farmworkers" printed in Spanish and English.

North Carolina is a farm labor demand state primarily for the period from April through November. N.C. Workforce Offices are committed to serving the agricultural industry in the state by recruiting North Carolinians for agricultural job openings, with the goal of full utilization of all local and intrastate (within North Carolina) workers whom desire

agricultural employment. As needed, interstate or migrant farm workers and H-2A temporary foreign guest workers are brought in to supplement the existing workforce in agriculture.

Local seasonal and year round farm workers are permanent customers with who DWS staff serves throughout the year. Migrant and H-2A workers will be in North Carolina in varying numbers much of the year, primarily for harvest operations. Additionally, migrant and H-2A workers are brought in to supplement local workers in transplanting operations. H-2A workers should comprise a larger percentage of the agricultural workforce during the next four years due to an increased number of Farm Labor Contractors (FLC's) using the program.

The Division of Workforce Solutions will continue working with other service providers and adhering to the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Wagner-Peyser Act at sections 20 CFR, parts 651, 652, 653, 655, and 658. As such, MSFWs will be offered and provided the full array of employment and training services equitably and quantitatively comparable to that offered and provided to non-MSFWs. Outreach activity will be conducted statewide by 16 Agricultural Employment Consultants as well as 6 temporarily funded MSFW Outreach staff. All six temporarily funded MSFW Outreach staff members hired in 2016 will be bi-lingual English/Spanish speaking staff. The six MSFW Outreach staff will be co-funded through an ongoing and very successful Cooperative Outreach Services Agreement between Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions and the North Carolina Telamon Corporation.

#### Assessment of Available Resources

Outreach plans will be accomplished using six temporary outreach positions during the harvest season (for a total of three full-time equivalent positions to be funded from Wagner-Peyser resources) to supplement 16 permanent Agricultural Employment Consultants who conduct outreach year-round. The four Agricultural Field Supervisors, who are the supervisors of the outreach program, will train temporary outreach staff and will provide technical support to all staff involved in outreach activity. All temporary positions will be filled with individuals who have MSFW backgrounds and/or who are ethnically representative of the MSFWs in the local office area and/or who speak Spanish fluently.

The total of three full-time equivalent positions will direct \$274,596 of Wagner-Peyser funds to outreach activities for MSFWs. These positions will be funded in accordance with the following from 7(a) and 7(b) Wagner-Peyser resources.

	<u>W-P 90%(2050)</u>	<u>W-P 10%(1930)</u>	<u>Total</u>
	7(a)	7(b)	
Full-Time Equivalent (FTE)	2.7	0.3	3
Personal Services	\$123,884	\$15,000	\$138,884
Personnel Benefits	\$42,946	\$5,000	\$47,946
Non-Personal Services	\$63,472	\$5,000	\$68,472
Indirect (AS&T)	\$19,294	*0	\$19,294
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$249,596</b>	<b>\$25,000</b>	<b>\$274,596</b>

\*The amount is based on the temporary workers charging their time to WP, 10% which will have no indirect expense.

If the need should arise for additional services to meet immediate needs of MSFWs, the situation will be addressed and additional resources will be made available if at all possible.

Telamon Corporation and the Division of Workforce Solutions have worked together in earnest for many years to provide quality services to our MSFW clients. To continue this good working relationship, improve services to MSFW's and minimize duplication of services, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been established between our organizations in 2015.

As a partner in the state's WIA One-Stop Workforce system, Telamon Corporation, the National Farmworkers Jobs Program (NFJP) operator, provides/offers basic core services to the greater population and a wide variety of education and job training programs that are developed for migrant and seasonal farmworkers, adults and youth according to their needs, interests and experience. Telamon Corporation provides WIA employment and training services to eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers, adults and youth. All Telamon staff are co-located in the State Workforce Offices in the service areas. This collaboration ensures the universal access for farmworkers to the workforce system. Being a partner with Telamon allows local DWS Workforce Office, including all other local partnering service providers, the opportunities for enhancing core services of recruitment, referrals, and job placements. Equally important; the bilingual English/Spanish speaking abilities and expertise of full time co-located Telamon staff in seven of the DWS Workforce Offices is essential to providing an array of intensive services. In particular at least 3,000 MSFWs and their families in our state benefit annually from the following multiple areas of expertise afforded by Telamon staff, credentialed professionals, through career counseling, work experience, classroom training with needs related and financial assistance, on the job training, job search, and placement assistance, case management, emergency assistance and supportive services, English as a Second Language, financial literacy, leadership development, youth development, building skills, and institutional capacity, translation and interpretation services, and follow-up services.

## Numerical Goals

Each year, DWS staff serves approximately 8,000 individual MSFWs, although providing 35,000 total MSFW outreach contacts. Approximately 15,000 of the 35,000 total MSFW outreach contacts will be accomplished by DWS Workforce Offices through the six co-located MSFW Outreach staff that is co-funded annually through the Cooperative Agreement with Telamon Corporation. These same 15,000 MSFWs contacted through outreach staff are offered the full range of employment and training and supportive services including being apprised of employment-related law protections and the right to file apparent violations and complaints with DWS Career Center staff. In PY2014 ending June 30, 2015, the 35,000 MSFW Outreach contacts performed by DWS Workforce Offices resulted with 6,794 total MSFW job placements statewide.

The following Workforce Offices has been designated as MSFW Significant Offices for PY 2015-2016: Battleboro, Clayton, Clinton, Kenansville, Lumberton and Wilkesboro. Two of these offices currently have permanent bi-lingual English/Spanish Ag. Employment Consultants. Throughout North Carolina MSFWs generally live in rural isolated areas of the state. They have several barriers to employment to include transportation, childcare, limited English speaking abilities, limited education, and job training problems. All of these barriers are major reasons for their lack of economic mobility. The State's estimated 100,000 farm workers during peak harvest season reveals that approximately 95% are of Hispanic/Latino origin and many are primarily monolingual in Spanish. Division of Workforce Solutions and Telamon plan to continue assisting farm workers and their families by consolidating outreach programs that provide crucially needed core and intensive services in mostly rural areas where the majority of farm workers live and work.

<b>Outreach Program</b>	<b>Registrations</b>
Battleboro	400
Clayton	300
Clinton	600
Kenansville	300
Lumberton	1,800
Wilkesboro	800
Mountain Region (excluding Wilkesboro)	1,200
Piedmont Region (excluding Clayton)	800
Coastal Plains Region (Excluding Battleboro, Clinton, Lumberton, Kenansville)	1,800
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,000</b>

*NOTE: The planned level of activity represents the number of MSFWs that will be served through the use of Wagner-Peyser resources only.*

## Proposed Outreach Activities

Outreach workers will report to the Ag. Field Supervisors who will have primary responsibility for ensuring accomplishment of outreach goals. Through improved reporting practices, better local office coordination of time and more flexibility by management in assignment of outreach duties, an achievement of an average of 16 contacts per staff day will be planned.

Agricultural Employment Consultants (AECs) will perform outreach intermittently with employer relations and placement duties. Cost effectiveness will therefore be maximized through staff travel and time savings. Other local office staff will perform outreach primarily during periods of migrant entry into the local office area and during peak placement periods for AEC staff.

Valid statistical data will be maintained by applying the proper interpretation of the outreach contact definition and by entering all MSFW contacts and services in the daily outreach log. Also, each staff person assigned outreach duties will be identified by a station and desk number for DWS reporting so that management may monitor activity to ensure that outreach responsibilities are being performed.

In compliance with Federal Regulations 20 CFR 653.107, 653.113, 655 Subpart B and 658 Subpart B, training for outreach worker activities will be provided by the following Wagner-Peyser funded staff: Agricultural Field Supervisors, Ag. Employment Consultants, and the State Monitor Advocate. Training will consist of basic orientation to the full range of employment services, application and order-taking, recruitment and referral procedures, complaint processing procedures, recognition of apparent violations, farm worker's rights, supportive services, coordination of outreach efforts with other community-based organizations, completion of outreach logs and reports, and MSFW outreach contacts. Outreach staff will also receive training in PC usage so that they will be able to access DWS automated services via desktop or notebook computers. The Monitor Advocate will perform a general review of the training provided, with special emphasis on the portion of the training that deals with processing complaints and apparent violations.

Each Agricultural Field Supervisor will attend all local migrant council meetings in their administrative area. They will participate in the recruitment and selection of AECs and outreach workers. They will also be involved in continuous recruitment efforts for local, interstate and intrastate farmworkers. These staff members will also closely monitor the movement of farmworkers to prevent underemployment and unemployment. They will monitor the activities of the Agricultural Outreach Specialists and AECs to assist in resolving worker complaints/violations to ensure that all outreach activities conform to the requirements as specified in 20 CFR, 653.107 of the Federal Register.

Outreach will be conducted through personal contact. State laws and ETA policy on right of access will be adhered to in making contacts. Outreach workers as well as other staff will visit living areas, work sites, and local labor centers to explain the full range of services provided by the Division of Workforce Solutions and other agencies. Unemployed and underemployed farmworkers will be advised of agricultural and non-agricultural job opportunities. Outreach workers will meet migrant crews upon arrival in the area to prepare crew manifests and to escort them to assigned camps. Outreach workers will also provide information on and refer MSFWs to supportive services, as well as assist in securing aid such as food stamps, clothing, blankets, health supplies, and migrant shelter when needed.

All media, including Hispanic radio, TV, and newspapers, will be utilized - as funds allow - to ensure positive recruitment of agricultural workers and to ensure enhanced outreach services. Pamphlets will be distributed in Spanish and English at churches and other public gathering places.

The Division of Workforce Solutions will work closely with other agencies concerned with the needs of MSFWs to coordinate the provision of referral services to these agencies. Copies of the Agricultural Plan will be provided, upon request to agencies concerned with the needs of MSFWs

#### Wagner-Peyser Act Services Provided to MSFWs through the One-Stop Delivery System

##### Plan Data for the Upcoming Years

During the next 4 years, Agricultural Employment Consultants (AECs) will place more emphasis on contacting community-based organizations and other service providers who can help MSFWs obtain supportive services such as classes in English as a second language, school programs for children, etc. AECs are encouraged to attend area migrant council meetings and where a council with other service providers does not exist, attempt to create one.

All Workforce Offices provide core, intensive and training services. Staff will determine the service needs of the MSFW customers and either provide those services or direct these customers to staff who can provide the needed services.

Continued emphasis on integrated services via electronic access will enable DWS staff and partners to more efficiently and effectively provide services within North Carolina's workforce system. Robust technology through a new integrated service delivery system on the ground and electronically will facilitate more readily available service to workers, including MSFW customers. This new system of integrated technology and service delivery will result in seamless service delivery and lead to increased outcomes for jobseeker customers and employers in North Carolina.



Federal Regulations at 20 CFR 653.112 require the establishment of performance indicators reflecting equity and the measurement of minimum levels of service. In North Carolina, we do not anticipate any difficulty in achieving compliance levels for equity indicators, minimum service levels, or planned levels of activity for the current Program Year. Our intention is to achieve compliance with the equity factors and performance indicator levels during the current Program Year and the planning period. Monthly monitoring by AECs, the Ag. Field Supervisors, the Monitor Advocate, and local office corrective actions through the self-appraisal process should help ensure attainment of these goals.

#### Significant MSFW Local Office Affirmative Action Plans

Since North Carolina is not designed as an Affirmative Action Plan State, no affirmative action plan is required.

#### Wagner-Peyser Act Services Provided to Agricultural Employers through the One-Stop Delivery System

Agricultural Employment Consultants and temporary Agricultural Outreach Specialists will be strategically assigned to Division of Workforce Solutions system of local offices for the purpose of providing labor exchange services to agricultural employers. Collectively, this staff reaches out to agricultural employers and workers in rural areas throughout North Carolina, assisting employers in their pursuit of agricultural workers and helping workers in their search for jobs.

Agricultural employers who are expected to utilize MSFWs will be identified through coordination with various providers of workforce development services, Agricultural Soil Conservation Service offices, Agricultural Extension Service offices, the North Carolina Farm Bureau, and various growers' associations. Services to these employers will be marketed by performing the following activities: (a) approximately 5,000 employer visits, (b) promotional telephone contacts, and (c) staff participation in grower's meetings and training seminars. Staff will continue to organize Farm Labor Contractor Workshops in association with the US DOL Wage and Hour Division and the North Carolina Department of Labor to educate, train and assist Farm Labor Contractors on compliance with various state and federal regulations.

Over the next four years, North Carolina H-2A employers will make over 17,000 worker requests annually for foreign labor certifications. The Division of Workforce Solutions will continue to increase efforts to recruit and refer US workers each year. These extensive, positive recruitment efforts include: (a) providing annual H-2A training of local office staff, (b) posting farm work available posters in English and Spanish, (c) performing local office file searches and call-ins, (d) listing jobs in newspapers and on the radio where applicable, (e) and performing outreach.

Emphasis continues to be placed on the Agricultural Services staff to conduct local area field checks in accordance with the specific regulation sections at 20 CFR 653.503.

Records of these field checks are kept for at least one year in the local office file, and copies sent to the DWS Agricultural Services Program Supervisor. These random, unannounced field checks are conducted on 100 percent of the H-2a work sites to which U.S. workers have been referred and placed through the intrastate or interstate clearance system. This is above the USDOL requirement that field checks be conducted on at least 25 percent of all clearance orders to which U.S. workers are referred and placed through the clearance system. These field check follow ups allow for us to verify placement activity and ensure that the conditions and guarantees in the job orders are being met.

The following data analysis provides information on program year Agricultural Activity and Interstate Clearance Activity. Also included are projected Agricultural Activity and projected Interstate Clearance Activity for Program year 2016.

<b>Prior Year Agricultural Activity</b>	<b>PY2014 July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015</b>
Job Orders Received	470
Job Openings Received	25,215
Job Referrals	7,162
Job Openings Filled	6,794
<b>Fill Rate*</b>	27%

\* North Carolina does not collect data on job orders filled. Information provided concerning the fill rate is based on job openings received and filled.

<b>Prior Year Interstate Clearance Activity</b>	<b>PY 2014 July 1, 2014 through June 30, 2015</b>
H-2a Job Orders Received	213
H-2a Job Openings	17,496
H-2a Employers	1,583
H-2a Referrals	505
Field Checks Conducted	60

<b>Projected Program Year Agricultural Activity</b>	<b>PY2015-2016</b>
Job Orders Expected to be Received	500
Job Openings Expected to be Filled	8,000

<b>Projected Interstate Clearance Activity</b>	
H-2a Job Orders Expected to be Received	225

*NOTE: The prior year accomplishments and the projected level of agricultural activity represents activity funded through the use of Wagner-Peyser resources only.*

Job openings received during the budget year will approximate the following, by percentage, in each of the three broad geographic areas of North Carolina.

Mountain	10%
Piedmont	10%
Coastal Plain	80%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Agricultural Plan Development, Clearance and Submittal

### Input From Agricultural Agencies

Comments, feedback, and suggestions will be requested from the following agencies:

N.C. Department of Labor Agricultural Safety and Health Bureau  
N.C. Migrant Education  
167 Grantee (Telamon Corporation)  
Farm Bureau Federation of N.C.  
N.C. Rural Economic Development Center  
Governor's Council for Hispanic/Latino Affairs  
N.C. Cooperative Extension Services  
Legal Services of N.C., Farmworker Unit  
Farmworker Advocacy Network (FAN)  
N.C. Agromedicine institute  
US Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division  
N.C. Department of Agriculture

### Input from the Monitor Advocate

The North Carolina Monitor Advocate submits his recommendations concerning the North Carolina Department of Commerce's "DWS "2016 Agricultural Outreach Plan " in accordance with federal regulation section 20 CFR 653.107 (c) (1) (v).

DWS' Agricultural Field Services staff, DWS'/ MSFW Outreach staff, including statewide NC Works Management and Partnering staff, who may be deemed appropriate by DWS Upper Management, should be provided the below listed "MSFW and Agricultural Employer /Best Practices Training/ Resource References".

Our SWA's successful implementation of Wagner Peyser and WIOA regulations depends on all involved fulfilling concurrent responsibilities. Specifically, these concurrent responsibilities are multiple Employment and Training Services being offered to and provided for MSFWs, former MSFWs, and North Carolina employers who intend to hire both U.S. and legally authorized foreign nationals. The DWS Monitor Advocate is available to provide daily ongoing clarification, advisement, and training by contacting me either by e-mail, office phone 919-814-0448, or cell 252-230-7205.

Note:

1. See the Attached DWS and N.C. Telamon "MOU"
2. <http://www.telamon.org/nfjp.aspx>
3. <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/198hkw13u9yo5s6/AABBD0on-AJF1KcYcDgl9JvRa?oref=e&n=466402049>

## **Wagner-Peyser Assurances**

<b>The State Plan must include assurances that:</b>	
1.	The Wagner-Peyser Employment Service is co-located with one-stop centers or a plan and timeline has been developed to comply with this requirement within a reasonable amount of time. (sec 121(e)(3));
2.	The State agency is complying with the requirements under 20 CFR 653.111 (State agency staffing requirements) if the State has significant MSFW one-stop centers;
3.	If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I; and
4.	State agency merit-based public employees provide Wagner-Peyser Act-funded labor exchange activities in accordance with Department of Labor regulations.

## **Adult Basic Education and Literacy Programs**

### **Alignment of Content Standards**

North Carolina has aligned its content standards for adult education with NC Department of Public Instructions' state-adopted content standards.

North Carolina Adult Education Content Standards (NCAECS) represent a proactive effort by North Carolina adult educators to ensure rigor and consistency in program content and student outcomes for adult learners throughout the state. In developing these content standards, teams of state and local Adult Basic Skills (ABS) educators worked to write world-class standards customized for adult learners. NCAECS reflect sensible criteria for usefulness, intelligibility, rigor, and measurability. They focus on academics, contain a mix of skills and content, and represent a reasonable pattern of cumulative learning that is manageable. Also, NCAECS support instructors in developing learning opportunities that prepare adult learners for successful transition to higher education, vocational and career development, and effective involvement in their communities as individuals, parents, workers, and citizens.

The fundamental goal of statewide standards is to ensure high levels of achievement for all adult learners in North Carolina. The standards provide consistent content and performance measures for implementation in all programs funded by the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS). The standards are valuable to the future of adult education throughout the nation. The value of statewide Adult Education Standards includes:

The process of developing these standards was highly participatory and encompassed active involvement and input from many adult educators across the state. The standards project began in 2007 with statewide implementation in 2011. The Appalachian State University Adult Basic Skills Professional Development Project (ABSPD) facilitated the development.

**Phase 1, 2007:** Teams of adult educators met to write the first draft of the reading and writing content standards and then continued to provide review, feedback, and comments for improvement. These teams consulted a variety of resources from other states and the standards were informed by those states' existing standards. The writing teams included local and state Adult Basic Skills educators from a variety of disciplines.

**Phase 2, 2008-2009:** Forums were held at three sites across the state for review and feedback. Each reviewer was given review forms and a draft copy of the standards document so that adult educators from their program could also complete reviews and mail them to ABSPD. The edits and suggestions received during this phase were integrated into a third draft. Additionally, teams of adult educators met to write the first draft of the mathematics and technology content standards. These team members

continued to provide review, feedback and comments for improvement. In 2009, ABS educators reviewed the mathematics and technology content standards and provided feedback via an online survey.

**Phase 3, 2010:** Development of teaching activities to correspond to each benchmark was begun in January 2010. All Adult Basic Skills program and Community-based Literacy organization directors were invited to send a Certified Resource Specialist to Advance Institute in May to begin the piloting process for the NC ABE Reading and Writing Content Standards. The Certified Resource Specialists developed additional real-life applications and an implementation plan for their programs. Professional development for trainers was held in Fall 2010. Revisions were made and online and face-to-face training was designed.

**Phase 4, 2011:** Statewide implementation training began across the state. Instructor training continues through the *Applying Content Standards: GPS for Success* training offered by the North Carolina Community College System College and Career Readiness Department and the Adult Basic Skills Professional Development Project at Appalachian State University.

**Phase 5, 2013-2014:** The standards were revised and given a new name, *North Carolina Community College System Adult Education Standards, Part 1*. The standards are now aligned with College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education released by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE), US Department of Education in April 2013. Subject matter experts examined the Common Core from the perspective of adult education and distilled the “core of the core” that is most important for our adult students. The CCR Standards’ goal is to help successfully prepare students for the demands of postsecondary education and workforce entry.

The North Carolina Adult Education Content Standards document now includes standards for grade level equivalencies from beginning level through adult secondary education. The standards are housed on the Adult Basic Skills Professional Development (ABSPD) website: <http://www.abspd.appstate.edu>. Implementation training, *Applying Content Standards: GPS for Success*, continues to be offered throughout the year by ABSPD staff.

The NCAECS denotes two distinctive strands (1) Adult Basic Education (ABE) and (2) Adult Secondary Education (ASE). The NCAECS are defined statements of the knowledge, skills, and other understandings that guide curriculum in order for students to achieve high levels of competency in reading, writing, speaking & listening, technology, and math. NCAECS do not dictate andragogy or teaching styles, nor prescribe class lessons or assignments. As students master skills to reach one benchmark, they may also reach benchmarks in other content areas. Below is an overview of the standards.

The ABE Content Standards grade levels 0.0-8.0

- Reading Content Standards: Adult Basic Education (ABE) Levels 1-4  
The Reading Content Standards contain skills necessary to interpret printed material, such as books, magazines, and correspondence as well as charts, graphs, schedules, and environmental print. Skills include symbol mastery, phonological awareness, decoding, word recognition, word analysis, comprehension, fluency and reading information text and literature. These standards also emphasize logical reasoning and critical thinking skills which are necessary to excel in postsecondary education and the workforce.
- Writing Content Standards: ABE Levels 1-4  
The Writing Content Standards include all skills necessary to communicate in writing for a variety of purposes. These skills include readability and accuracy; composition; capitalization, punctuation, spelling, grammatical concepts, sentence structure, parts of speech and verb tense. The Writing Standards cultivate the development of three common writing abilities: crafting arguments, writing to inform, and explain forming narratives about real or imagined experiences.
- Speaking & Listening: ABE Levels 1-4  
The Speaking & Listening Content Standards focus on the skills necessary for adult learners to develop a wide range of useful oral communication interpersonal skills. Through collaborative experiences, students learn to work together, express and listen to ideas, integrate information from oral, visual, quantitative, and media sources. Adult learners will also evaluate what they hear, use media and visual displays strategically to help achieve communicative purposes, and adapt speech to context and task.
- Technology: ABE Levels 1-4  
The Technology Content Standards identify the knowledge and skills necessary for all students to be active, lifelong learners in a technology intensive environment. Students will progress through six specific areas: (1) technology & society, (2) database management, (3) spreadsheets, (4) desktop publishing, (5) multimedia, and (6) internet telecommunications. Benchmarks include essential skills with technology application reinforcement through education and work, personal safety, and ethical use of resources and information.
- Math: ABE Levels 1-4  
The Mathematics Content Standards emphasize mathematical communication and connections using real world problem-solving, algebraic reasoning, and calculator skills; these skills are essential for college and the workforce. They include the skills necessary to support the development of mathematical understanding, to solve problems, and to prepare adult learners for the workplace or future study. Skills include number sense and operations, algebraic thinking, geometry, measurement, data analysis, statistics and probability. Beginning levels focus on counting,

cardinality, number sense, and base-ten operations. This includes developing a solid understanding of whole number relationships and two-digit place value, as well as addition and subtraction. This provides a foundation for algebra while introducing the concept of equations, variables, and the meaning of equalities. Some attention is also given to describing and reasoning of geometric shapes for the understanding of congruence, similarity, symmetry, and developing a solid base of linear measurement.

### The ASE Content Standards Grade Levels 9.0-12.9

The Languages Arts and Math Standards are based on the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education which were released by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education in April 2013. These standards recognize that adult learners need a manageable set of standards which are more in line with the learning needs of nontraditional students.

- Language Arts Standards: Level 5  
These standards encompass speaking and listening, reading, writing, and language. Students are expected to read complex texts and gain the ability to evaluate arguments while understanding challenging texts. Writing standards guide students as they learn to create arguments and write informative, explanatory, and narrative texts. These standards also provide rules for written and spoken English as well as for acquiring new vocabulary. These are divided into four sections: 1) Production of Writing: How to write informative and narrative texts; 2) Using Research in Writing Endeavors: How to conduct research, evaluate sources and create argument based writing; 3) Understanding and Analyzing Literature: How to analyze and understand literature including poetry and prose; 4) Understanding and Analyzing Informational Texts: How to analyze and understand informative texts.
- Math Standards: Level 5  
These standards encompass the mathematical skills of application and computation needed to obtain a high school credential, success in higher education, and to enter the workforce. These are divided into four sections: 1) Algebraic Concepts and Expressions: How to understand and solve radical expressions along with performing operations on polynomial and rational expressions; 2) Algebraic Equations and Inequalities: How to create, represent, explain, and solve algebraic equations and inequalities; 3) Algebraic Functions and Models: How to interpret and evaluate functions and model mathematical expressions in various forms; and 4) Geometry, Probability and Statistics: How to interpret and solve problems in geometry, probability and statistics.



The Science and Social Studies Standards are based on the North Carolina Essential Standards and the Next Generation Science Standards. The Essential Standards Guide of Secondary Instruction for North Carolina high school students was developed by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The Science and Social Studies Standards are both divided into four sections:

- Science Standards: Level 5

1) Living Organisms and Ecosystems: How to understand various life forms as they interact with each other across the Earth; 2) Genetics, Molecular Biology, and Evolution: How genetic material and molecules function on Earth; 3) Physical Science: How to conduct scientific inquiry while understanding the physical principles and chemistry of the natural world; and 4) Environmental, Earth and Space Science: How the atmosphere, hydrosphere, oceans, and biosphere work together on Earth and other planets.

- Social Studies Standards: Level 5

1) US History (Colonial Period to 1877): How to understand, see the relevance of, and think about the major events in United States history from early exploration through Reconstruction; 2) Modern US History (1877 to the present): How to understand, see the relevance of, and think about the major events in the United States from Reconstruction through recent events; 3) Civics and Economics: How to understand and apply fundamental concepts in civics and economics including personal finance applications; 4) World History: How to understand, see the relevance of, and think about the major events in world history from the mid-1500s through recent events.

## **Local Adult Education and Literacy Activities**

Per NC General Statute 115D-1, the North Carolina Community Colleges System (NCCCS) Office is designated as the primary lead agency for delivering workforce development training, adult literacy training, and adult education programs in the State. The mission of the North Carolina Community College System is to open the door to high-quality, accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to postsecondary education, maximize student success, develop a globally and multi-culturally competent workforce, and improve the lives and well-being of individuals by providing:

- Education, training and retraining for the workforce including basic skills and literacy education, occupational and pre-baccalaureate programs.
- Support for economic development through services to and in partnership with business and industry and in collaboration with the University of North Carolina System and private colleges and universities.
- Services to communities and individuals which improve the quality of life.

The North Carolina Community College System is composed of 58 local community colleges and is governed by the State Board of Community Colleges. The State Board has designated the College and Career Readiness section of the Programs and Student Services Division to administer the federal and state grant funds under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Title II-Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA). The College and Career Readiness section provides leadership, oversight, professional development, policy guidance, monitoring, and evaluation of local community colleges and community-based organizations who receive funds from WIOA-AEFLA grant program. Annually, the North Carolina Community College System Office receives over \$54 million dollars in state funds and \$17 million dollars in federal funds for adult education and literacy activities in the state. The College and Career Readiness Section works closely with the System Office Finance and Operations Division to allocate these funds in accordance to federal and state laws.

In North Carolina, the WIOA-AEFLA program will provide adult education and literacy activities to individuals who meet one of the following definitions as describe in Section 203 of WIOA:

- **Eligible Individual**

The term "eligible individual" means an individual— (A) who has attained 16 years of age; (B) who is not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under State law; and (C) who-- (i) is basic skills deficient; (ii) does not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and has not achieved an equivalent level of education; or (iii) is an English language learner. (*Section 203(4)*)

- Basic Skills Deficient

An individual— (A) who is a youth, that the individual has English reading, writing, or computing skills at or below the 8th grade level on a generally accepted standardized test; or (B) who is a youth or adult, that the individual is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English, at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual's family, or in society. (*Section 3(5)*)

- English Language Learner

The term "English language learner" when used with respect to an eligible individual means an eligible individual who has limited ability in reading, writing, speaking, or comprehending the English language, and- (A) whose native language is a language other than English; or (B) who lives in a family or community environment where a language other than English is the dominant language. *Section 203(7)*

Per Section 231(d), no funds will be made available to any local agency for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are not individuals described in subparagraphs (A) and (B) of Section 203 (1) of Title II of the Workforce Investment Act unless the programs, services, or activities are related to family literacy. Before providing services under this special rule, an eligible provider must attempt to coordinate with programs and services that are not assisted under this subtitle. If it is not possible to find collaborative partners who will provide programs, services, or activities for children, then programs may use adult education funds for this purpose.

## **Description of Adult Education and Literacy Activities**

Per Section 202 of WIOA, North Carolina will provide funding to eligible providers to offer the following adult education and literacy activities:

### Academic Instruction and Education Services

- Adult Basic Education (ABE) is a program of instruction designed to assist adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and economic self-sufficiency.
- Adult Secondary Education (ASE) is a program of instruction designed to assist adults in attaining a secondary school diploma and in the transition to postsecondary education and training. Adult Secondary Education includes the Adult High School (AHS) Diploma program and the High School Equivalency (HSE) Diploma program.
- English Language Acquisition (ELA) is a program of instruction assist immigrants and other individuals who are English language learners in-- (A) improving their-- (i) reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension skills in English; and (ii)

mathematics skills; and (B) acquiring an understanding of the American system of Government, individual freedom, and the responsibilities of citizenship.

- Workplace Adult Education and Literacy Activities are offered in collaboration with an employer or employee organization at a workplace or an off-site location that are designed to provide adult education and literacy activities to improve the productivity of the workforce.
- Family Literacy programs provide activities that are of sufficient intensity and quality, to make sustainable improvements in the economic prospects for a family and that better enable parents or family members to support their children's learning needs, and that integrate all of the following activities: (a) Parent or family adult education and literacy activities that lead to readiness for postsecondary education or training, career advancement, and economic self-sufficiency; (b) Interactive literacy activities between parents or family members and their children; (c) Training for parents or family members regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children; and (d) An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.
- Basic Skills Plus is a program that provides workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster to students concurrently enrolled in an Adult High School or High School Equivalency program. The framework includes strategies for contextualized and accelerated instruction designed to reduce the amount of time a Basic Skills Plus student is enrolled in an eligible instructional program while providing the student with the skills necessary for successful transition into and completion of postsecondary education or training, or employment.
- Correctional Education programs offer education services to criminal offenders in correctional institutions and for other institutionalized individuals. Allowable programming includes adult education and literacy activities; integrated education and training; career pathways; and transition to re-entry initiatives and other post-release services with the goal of reducing recidivism. Priority of services will be given to individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within 5 years of participation in the program.

### Career Pathways and Transition Models

North Carolina will build on a solid foundation of current programming to develop career pathways and transition models to address the three new requirements included in the definition of Adult Education and Literacy activities--- 1) Integrated Education and Training, 2) Workforce Preparation Activities, and 3) Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education.

Per Section 203 of WIOA, below is a description of these requirements:

- Integrated Education and Training provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement.
- Workplace Preparation Activities are designed to help an individual acquire a combination of basic academic skills, critical thinking skills, digital literacy skills, and self-management skills, including competencies in utilizing resources, using information, working with others, understanding systems, and obtaining skills necessary for successful transition into and completion of postsecondary education or training, or employment.
- Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education means education services provided to English language learners who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries that enable such adults to achieve competency in the English language and acquire the basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens in the United States. Such services shall include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation, and may include workforce training.

In order to meet the requirement that the adult education and literacy activities, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training be integrated, services must be provided concurrently and contextually such that the overall scope of instruction is balanced proportionally across the three components, particularly with respect to improving reading, writing, mathematics, and English proficiency of eligible individuals; occur simultaneously; and use occupationally relevant instructional materials. The integrated education and training program has a single set of learning objectives that identifies specific adult education content, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training competencies, and the program activities are organized to function cooperatively. A provider meets the requirement that the integrated education and training program provided is for the purpose of educational and career advancement if the adult education component of the program is aligned with the State's content standards for adult education as described in the State's Unified State Plan; and the integrated education and training program is part of a career pathway.

Below are some of the proposed activities to implement the new requirements:

- Expand the Framework of Basic Skills Plus. Basic Skills Plus is a program that provides workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster to students concurrently enrolled in an Adult High School or High School Equivalency program. A study of this program will be conducted to expand it to all students enrolled in Basic Skills programs.
- Develop Career Pathways and Transition Models. System Office staff will identify current curriculum resources and materials used to teach workforce preparation

activities. This information will be used to develop a series of technical assistance workshops. Additional career pathway curriculum relative to serving students with intellectual disabilities will be produced through partnerships with local providers and WIOA Core Partners. NCCCS will set aside a portion of state leadership funding to develop local career pathway models.

- Disseminate Best Practices. Innovative models previously funded will be disseminated to all providers through regional trainings and periodic webinars. These models are in the following categories: Innovations in Transitions, Pathways to Employment, Project IDEAL (distance learning), Comprehensive Family Literacy, and Contextualized Family Literacy. System Office staff will work with these providers to disseminate best practices, project deliverables, and curriculum materials to other providers.
- Enhance Partnership with NCCCS Human Resources Development Program. North Carolina has a unique program administered at all 58 community colleges called Human Resources Development. The purpose of this program is to provide skill assessment services, employability skills training, and career development counseling to unemployed and underemployed adults. These courses address six core components: 1) assessment of an individual's assets and limitations; 2) development of a positive self-concept; 3) development of employability skills; 4) development of communication skills; 5) development of problem-solving skills; and 6) awareness of the impact of information technology in the workplace. Providers will use this resource as a means of providing employability skills to students enrolled in a basic skills program. Providers will also partner with the programs and services available at local NCWorks Career Centers (one-stops).
- Increase Services to Youth. Emphasize the need for more opportunities to get real world experience. Provide more transition programs between public school and community colleges that allow for this bridge. Identify and collaborate with new or existing youth service contract operators in order to increase services to disconnected, out-of-school youth and reconnect youth to education and jobs. States and local programs should coordinate to identify productive approaches for reaching and serving out-of-school youth and develop plans to strengthen educational services to them through partner programs.
- Engage Employers. Work with employers as well as in partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation and NCWorks Centers to provide work-based learning, apprenticeships, and internships. Adult educators will work to create stronger linkages with employers in partnership with other core programs.
- Enhance Accountability. Continue to document and monitor progress toward Educational Functioning Level (EFL) in order to encourage continuous improvement toward academic gains. WIOA-Title II providers will collect and

report the common performance outcomes related to employment as part of the integrated data system shared by CORE programs.

### Service Delivery

Per Section 231(b) of WIOA, NCCCS will require that each eligible provider receiving a grant or contract will utilize the WIOA Title II-AEFLA funding to establish or operate programs in accordance to North Carolina's Unified State Plan. Per Section 203(5) of WIOA, and eligible provider is an organization that has demonstrated effectiveness in providing adult education and literacy activities that may include--

- (A) a local educational agency;
- (B) a community-based organization or faith-based organization;
- (C) a volunteer literacy organization;
- (D) an institution of higher education;
- (E) a public or private nonprofit agency;
- (F) a library;
- (G) a public housing authority;
- (H) a nonprofit institution that is not described in any of subparagraphs (A) through (G) and has the ability to provide adult education and literacy activities to eligible individuals;
- (I) a consortium or coalition of the agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries, or authorities described in any of subparagraphs (A) through (H); and
- (J) a partnership between an employer and an entity described in any of subparagraphs (A) through (I).

Currently, there are 77 providers--- 58 community colleges and 19 community-based organizations. Additionally, there are 33 providers offering English Language and Civics Education.

## WIOA-AEFLA Local Plan

Using the provisions set forth in section 232 of WIOA, each eligible provider desiring a grant or contract must submit an application packet to the North Carolina Community College System Office which is the designated lead agency to administer WIOA Title II-Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) federal funds. The application packet will be referred to as the WIOA-AEFLA Local Plan.

Eligible providers may submit an application for one for the following designations: 1) Comprehensive Program or 2) Literacy Services Only. Below are the criteria for these programs:

Designation	Program Content/ Minimum Programming	Enrollment
Comprehensive Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Academic Instruction in ABE, ASE, and ELA</li><li>• One or more of the following: Workplace Literacy, Family Literacy, or Correctional Education</li><li>• Approved test administration of an NCCCS-approved high school equivalency assessment.</li></ul>	TBD
Literacy Services Only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Academic Instruction and/or tutoring services in ABE, ASE, ELA, or Family Literacy</li></ul>	TBD

There will be one application for all WIOA-AEFLA funding sources. Eligible providers will complete the sections/questions that are applicable to their request. Below are descriptions of the sections in the WIOA-AEFLA Local Plan application packet.

Section	Topics	Description/Instructions
<b>1</b>	<b>Program Management</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Organization Structure</li></ul>	Providers will describe their organization structure and give assurance that they meet the definition of an eligible provider and the mission of their organization is in alignment with the strategic mission and vision statements contained in North Carolina's Unified State Plan.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrative Effectiveness</li></ul>	Providers will demonstrate past effectiveness by submitting documentation that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provides performance data on its record of improving the skills of eligible individuals.</li><li>• Provides information regarding its outcomes for participants related to employment, high school completion, and transition to postsecondary education and training.</li></ul>
<b>2</b>	<b>Teaching and Learning (<i>Considerations: #1, #2, #3, #5, #6, #7, #8, #9, and #11</i>)</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adult Education and Literacy Activities</li></ul>	Providers will describe their proposed adult education and literacy activities.  Permissible Activities: ABE, ASE, ELA, Family Literacy, Workplace Literacy, and Corrections.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Instructional Operations</li></ul>	Providers will describe their plan for delivering high-quality instruction that is of sufficient intensity and quality and based on the most rigorous or scientifically valid research available so that participants achieve substantial learning gains. Narrative will include supporting documents related to instructional delivery, course section management (scheduling, duration, and logistics), instructor



Section	Topics	Description/Instructions
		qualifications, and curriculum development activities. Narrative should also include how the provider will integrate the North Carolina Adult Education Content Standards in the curriculum design and lesson planning for their course offerings.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Other Local Programming</li> </ul>	This section will include a description of other programming that is customized locally. This includes, but not limited to the following: Basic Skills Plus, Adult High School, Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education grant-support.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learners Most in Need</li> </ul>	Providers will describe their approach to serving eligible individuals in their local area identified as most in need of adult education and literacy activities including individuals who have low literacy skills or who are English language learners.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WIOA New Requirements</li> </ul>	Providers will describe their strategies for developing career pathways and transition models that are aligned with the definition of integrated education and training.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Technology</li> </ul>	Providers will describe their plan to leverage technology to improve teaching and learning. Narrative should include how the provider will 1) integrate technology (devices, software, social media) into the classroom, 2) integrate digital literacy skills into their teaching and learning activities; 3) provide high-quality distance education offerings; and 4) identify, use or adapt, and assess with appropriate and high-quality open education resources.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student Engagement</li> </ul>	Providers will describe the workflow for the following touch points with students: 1) Outreach and Recruitment, 2) Assessment and Placement, 3) Advising & Goal Setting, 4) Orientation & Intake, 5) Enrollment Management, 6) Student Support Services, 7) Student Retention, and 8) Transition Planning. Narrative should include strategies that address student access, policy development, collaboration with internal/external partners, and elimination of barriers for students.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adult Learners with Disabilities</li> </ul>	Providers will describe their strategic and operational plan for providing instruction and educational services for individuals with disabilities. Strategies must ensure students have access to education by leveraging and developing MOUs with WIOA core partners, social service, and community agencies to provide wrap-around services and remove barriers to success. Instructional services must be aligned to North Carolina Adult Education Content Standards.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff Development</li> </ul>	Providers will describe their plan for providing staff development opportunities for all staff. Narrative should include plans for staff to participate in required NCCCS-hosted professional and technical assistance events. Providers will be required to designate a portion of their WIOA-AEFLA funds to support staff development.
<b>3</b>	<b>Core Program Alignment (<i>Considerations: #1, #4 and #10</i>)</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Economic and Workforce Development Analysis</li> </ul>	Providers will submit documentation of their involvement with local and regional discussions on the economic and workforce development needs in their area.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alignment Plan</li> </ul>	Providers will describe 1) how they will provide services in alignment with core programs, 2) how they will integrate the unified strategic vision and goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, and 3) how the provider will fulfill one-stop partner responsibilities.

Section	Topics	Description/Instructions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collaborations</li> </ul>	Providers will provide supporting documentation of any cooperative arrangements with other agencies, institutions, or organizations for the delivery of adult education and literacy services.
<b>4</b>	<b>Performance Accountability (<i>Considerations: #1 and #12</i>)</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compliance</li> </ul>	Providers will be required to sign various assurances that address federal and state regulations related to program monitoring and evaluation.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance Measures</li> </ul>	Providers will describe their plan for how they will meet the performance measures listed below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ WIOA Performance Measures (federal)</li> <li>▪ NRS Performance Targets (federal)</li> <li>▪ NCCCS Performance Measures (state)</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reporting Requirements</li> </ul>	Providers will be required to submit a Mid-Year Report and Annual Report. NCCCS will use the information to evaluate progress towards meeting the proposed strategies set forth in their WIOA-AEFLA plan.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication Plan</li> </ul>	Providers will develop a communication plan that addresses methods and strategies for information dissemination of program activities, required reporting, and transparency of performance outcomes to the public. For Current Provider's Only. Providers will develop a communication plan that will guide their transition from WIA to WIOA.
<b>5</b>	<b>Financial Consideration</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Budget</li> </ul>	Providers will describe how funds awarded under WIOA-AEFLA will be spent consistent with the requirements of North Carolina's Unified State Plan.

Per Section 231(e) of WIOA, below are the 13 considerations for awarding grants and contracts:

- (1) the degree to which the eligible provider would be responsive to-- (A) regional needs as identified in the local plan under section 108; and (B) serving individuals in the community who were identified in such plan as most in need of adult education and literacy activities, including individuals-- (i) who have low levels of literacy skills; or (ii) who are English language learners;
- (2) the ability of the eligible provider to serve eligible individuals with disabilities, including eligible individuals with learning disabilities;
- (3) past effectiveness of the eligible provider in improving the literacy of eligible individuals, to meet State-adjusted levels of performance for the primary indicators of performance described in section 116, especially with respect to eligible individuals who have low levels of literacy;
- (4) the extent to which the eligible provider demonstrates alignment between proposed activities and services and the strategy and goals of the local plan under section 108, as well as the activities and services of the one-stop partners;
- (5) whether the eligible provider's program-- (A) is of sufficient intensity and quality, and based on the most rigorous research available so that participants

achieve substantial learning gains; and (B) uses instructional practices that include the essential components of reading instruction;

- (6) whether the eligible provider's activities, including whether reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, and English language acquisition instruction delivered by the eligible provider, are based on the best practices derived from the most rigorous research available and appropriate, including scientifically valid research and effective educational practice;
- (7) whether the eligible provider's activities effectively use technology, services, and delivery systems, including distance education in a manner sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning and how such technology, services, and systems lead to improved performance;
- (8) whether the eligible provider's activities provide learning in context, including through integrated education and training, so that an individual acquires the skills needed to transition to and complete postsecondary education and training programs, obtain and advance in employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship;
- (9) whether the eligible provider's activities are delivered by well-trained instructors, counselors, and administrators who meet any minimum qualifications established by the State, where applicable, and who have access to high quality development, including through electronic means;
- (10) whether the eligible provider's activities coordinate with other available education, training, and social service resources in the community, such as by establishing strong links with elementary schools and secondary schools, postsecondary educational institutions, institutions of higher education, local workforce investment boards, one-stop centers, job training programs, and social service agencies, business, industry, labor organizations, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and intermediaries, for the development of career pathways;
- (11) whether the eligible provider's activities offer flexible schedules and coordination with Federal, State, and local support services (such as child care, mental health services, and career planning) that are necessary to enable individuals, including individuals with disabilities or other special needs, to attend and complete programs;
- (12) whether the eligible provider maintains a high-quality information management system that has the capacity to report measurable participant outcomes (consistent with section 116) and to monitor program performance; and

- (13) whether the local areas in which the eligible provider is located have a demonstrated need for additional English language acquisition programs and civics education programs.

### Timeline and Submission Instructions

The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) Office will make available competitive, multiyear grants or contracts to eligible providers within the State to develop, implement, and improve adult education and literacy activities in North Carolina. The same grant or contract announcement and application processes are used for all eligible providers. Below is a chart that outlines the timelines for the Request for Application (RFA).

State Plan Program Year		Implementation Type	Open RFA	RFA Release Date	RFA Due Date	Award Announcement
Year 1	2016-2017	WIA to WIOA Transition	No	2/1/2016	3/18/2016	5/2/2016
Year 2	2017-2018	WIOA-Full Implementation	Yes	1/2/2017	2/10/2017	5/1/2017
Year 3	2018-2019	WIOA-Full Implementation - Continuation	No	1/2/2018	2/10/2018	5/1/2018
Year 4	2019-2020	WIOA-Full Implementation - Continuation	No	1/2/2019	2/10/2019	5/1/2019

Eligible providers applying for funds under WIOA-AEFLA must submit their application packet to its applicable local Workforce Development Boards prior to submission to NCCCS. This process requires eligible providers to— (1) Submit the application to the Local Board for its review for consistency with the local plan within the appropriate timeframe; and (2) Provide an opportunity for the Local Board to make recommendations to the eligible agency to promote alignment with the local plan. NCCCS will consider the results of the review by the local Board in determining the extent to which the application addresses the North Carolina's Unified State Plan. NCCCS will provide a standard template for this process.

### Review and Award Process

Applications will be reviewed by representatives from state and local core partners and evaluated based on the criteria detailed in the Request for Application template. To be recommended for funding, applications must earn a score of 80 or above on the evaluation criteria. Applications receiving 0 points on two or more criteria will not be considered regardless of their total points. Final recommendations for funding will be submitted to the State Board of Community Colleges for final approval.

## **Corrections Education**

The North Carolina Community College System's correctional education program, called the Prisoner Education Program (PEP), is a statewide collaboration to provide education and training to selected inmates at Department of Adult Correction prisons, federal prisons, and local jails. The overarching goal is to reduce recidivism by increasing an inmate's chances of obtaining a job upon release. In addition, the PEP is designed to address the following: state workforce development needs, public safety needs, prison management needs, and inmate re-entry needs. To date, there is a Prison Education Program in all of the state's 56 facilities.

In 2015, NC's prisons admitted 38,000+ offenders. Slightly more than half of the offenders claimed to have a high school diploma or GED. When tested, however, inmates typically scored well below their claimed education levels. In addition, nearly half of all prison admissions for FY 2015, reported being unemployed prior to admission, with the typical inmate claiming to have been unemployed for 24 months prior to admission. A criminal conviction creates an additional barrier to employment and sometimes completely disqualifies an individual from employment in certain environments. In a society where technology and competition require employers to continuously reinvent the way they do business, employers need workers who know how to learn. Inmates comprise a large human capital pool, and it is imperative that this population be engaged or re-engaged in education and training. Prison education is the mechanism for accomplishing this before inmates return to the community.

In 2010, the Prisoner Education Program (PEP) went through a comprehensive legislative review. Given limited funding for PEP, the Department of Adult Correction was asked to develop a list, in priority order, of educational programming for PEP. Here is the list: 1) Basic Skills courses that enhance fundamental reading and writing skills; 2) Vocational training/re-entry preparation courses that provide vocational training that supports prison work assignments and provide offenders with specific marketable skills; and 3) Functional knowledge and skills courses that provide life skills related to community reintegration, family relationships, and workplace success. Based on this list, the Prisoner Education Program currently offers courses and programs in the area of adult education, high school equivalency, construction trades, employability skills, agriculture/natural resources, and business technology. Inmates also participate in specialized programming, such as Cognitive Behavioral Interventions (CBI), Department of Labor Apprenticeship, and Career Readiness Certificate (CRC). In addition, PEP programming provides important pre-employment training for Correction Enterprises, inmate construction crews, and prison work assignments such as cosmetology/barbering, food service, and custodial cleaning, leading to cost savings for the State.

Based on the priority list, WIOA-AEFLA funds will support the following programming: adult education and literacy activities (ABE, ASE, ELA, and family literacy), career pathways models, and transitions to re-entry initiatives and other post-release services

with the goal of reducing recidivism. Eligible providers must meet the definition of a WIOA-AEFLA comprehensive program. Priority for services must be inmates likely to leave the correctional institution within 5 years of participation in the program. NCCCS is required to annually prepare and submit to the federal Department of Education, a report on the progress of students served with WIOA-AEFLA funding. As such, providers will be asked to submit a narrative report related to the programs and activities in there the Prisoner Education Program.

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## **Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Program**

***Describe how the State will establish and operate Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education programs under Section 243 of WIOA, for English language learners who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries.***

North Carolina recognizes that foreign-educated professionals come with talents that are substantially underutilized and potentially offer the state in-demand skills in healthcare, IT, and STEM to name a few. Many challenges of these immigrant professionals include linguistic, civic, and economic barriers. The proper recognition of immigrant skills and credentials is of vital importance to our economy. North Carolina will promote targeted and effective interventions that can help educated immigrants find pathways to success. North Carolina will:

- Revise the current Literacy Education Information System (LEIS) form as well as create additional advising documents to capture important information about previous education and credentials as well as about their work experience.
- Develop a system of consultations and an inclusive planning process with appropriate and effective advisors/counselors who can address the immigrant students' immediate and long-term goals so that students can prepare for any training that may lead to employment.
- Develop a series of formative assessments that are linked to coursework that gauge student readiness and language competence.
- Create a systematic process that gauges student readiness to take college placement tests or enter into college level coursework.

***Describe how the State will fund, in accordance with the requirements of title II, subtitle C, an Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program and how the funds will be used for the program.***

The North Carolina Community College System will award two-year grants on a competitive basis to eligible providers to prepare adults who are English language learners for, and place such adults in, unsubsidized employment in high demand industries and occupations that lead to self-sufficiency. Eligible providers will submit an application and a plan that: 1) outlines and describes the measurable goals and objectives, 2) describes the steps and activities to carry out the plan, 3) describes how the action plan will be evaluated for program implications and for goal outcomes, and 4) describes how and for what the funds will be expended.

The importance of English language proficiency for immigrants cannot be overstated. Acquiring a level of English proficiency and communicative competence to function successfully in the workplace requires the use of a contextualized curriculum. The

instructional practices for the delivery of well-constructed, integrated contextualized instruction require a skilled and well-trained workforce.

In order to carry out the language training services and employment-related services needed for adult English language learners, providers must designate a percentage of the awarded funds for professional development of the full-time and part-time instructional staff delivering civics education instruction to English language learners. The activities designated for this purpose include, but are not limited to, the state level teacher training courses as the EL Civics Institute, Adult ESOL Specialty Certificate, Integrating Career Awareness (ICA) Training, My United States Training, Core Certificate, Adult Secondary Education Specialty Certificate, and any of the individual courses within the certificates, especially on topics of civics education, citizenship preparation, contextualized instruction, communicative competence (including basic interpersonal communication and cognitive academic language proficiency), standardized assessment, formative assessment, assessment of the four language skills, mathematics, digital literacy, financial literacy, using technology in the classroom, employability skills, bridge programming, career pathways, teaching standards, and content standards.

***Describe how the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program will be delivered in combination with integrated education and training activities.***

The North Carolina Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program includes both literacy and English language instruction integrated with civics instruction along with the development of bridge programming that is aligned to career pathways. The purpose of bridge instructional programming is to help adult English Language Learners with the first steps onto career pathways and job training. The Integrated Career Awareness curriculum is an instructional tool for adult learners to explore their interests and abilities so they can research and select careers in high demand industries for their county or region. Eligible providers will counsel with students and use the new student profile in order to develop a career pathway plan of action for individual adult English language learners. This consultation process will offer support for the students from the beginning and throughout the coursework so that students can monitor their own success and seek consultation on potential challenges. Eligible providers will design lesson plans that introduce adult English language learners to campus resources, such as student services and human resource development services, so as to assist learners in the navigation of local campus services. Bridge programming is a critical component of the career pathway for adult English language learners. Bridge programs are needed to 'bridge' the language and cultural gap as well as the skill building gap needed for entry into career-path employment and training. The career pathway plan of action will



include appropriate bridge programming that aligns with the career and job training skills and knowledge for the successful transition into postsecondary education or training. Eligible providers will develop bridge programs that assist learners in obtaining the necessary academic, employability, and work skills through contextualized instruction. Academic instruction is contextualized to a particular career cluster or career pathway so as to be more relevant to the learner's career objective. Course development will include content on various career areas and the contextual delivery of instruction will be required for lesson preparation and any extension coursework, including internships, technical skills programs, or any job-specific training. The instructional materials are occupationally relevant materials for classroom instruction. Bridge programs can accelerate the learning format and offer opportunities for targeted staff support, particularly with the content or occupational area. A new instructional area for adult English language learners includes instruction in mathematics and employability skills so as to help the learner acquire a combination of basic academic skills and self-management skills that include competencies in working with others, understanding systems, and using information and resources. Eligible providers will provide any other employability skills that increase the adult English language learner's preparation for the workforce.

***Describe how the program is designed to (1) prepare adults who are English language learners for, and place such adults in, unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency and (2) integrate with the local workforce development system and its functions to carry out the activities of the program.***

The North Carolina Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program will prepare adult English language learners through the integration of basic literacy instruction, including mathematics, and English language skill building instruction while delivering the instruction concurrently and contextually. The Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program will provide instruction on coursework, such as, employability skills, completing an online job application, resume writing, interviewing skills, and more. The research-based curriculum, Integrating Career Awareness, will be utilized so as to make learners aware of career pathways, the educational requirements, and any work-based opportunities. Eligible providers will seek out internal and external partners, such as the NC Works Online resources, so as to guide learners to actual job search resources and job training. External partners such as NCWorks help instructors to know about high-growth career areas and help learners gain the skills and experience for high demand occupations. Integrating the adult English language learner requires an array of collaborations and resources. Eligible providers will seek out collaborations with internal and external leadership which include higher education, career and technical staff, workforce development board representatives, local

government officials, community leaders, and more. Employer engagement is also a critical component for career pathways and possibly bridge programming so that learners are guided to relevant, high demand occupations. Engaged employers can identify skills, credentials, and experience needed for the high demand occupations. Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education programs can, in turn, design lessons that address the skill areas and content knowledge for the occupation.

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## State Leadership

Below is a description of how North Carolina will use the funds to carry out the required State Leadership activities under 223 of WIOA.

Currently, there are seven positions supported with State Leadership funds:

- Coordinator of Transitions
- Coordinator of Adult Basic Education
- Coordinator of Adult Secondary Education
- Coordinator of Services for Individuals with Disabilities
- Director of English Language Acquisition Programs
- Best Practices & Information Dissemination Analyst
- Grants Management Technician

Organizationally, these positions are divided into two teams, but they all support the following critical job functions necessary to carry out State Leadership activities (required and permissible).

State Leadership Teams		
Critical Job Functions	Teaching & Learning	Performance Accountability
<b>Core Responsibilities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructional Programs</li> <li>• Integrated Instructional Delivery</li> <li>• Career Pathways   Transition Models</li> <li>• Student Access   Success Strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal and State Compliance</li> <li>• Grants and Contract Management</li> <li>• System Efficiencies</li> <li>• LEIS Records Management</li> </ul>
<b>Unified State Plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Core Program Alignment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State Leadership Accountability</li> <li>• Data Collection and Analysis</li> </ul>
<b>WIOA Alignment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to Services   Co-Enrollment w/ Core Partners &amp; One-Stops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AEFLA-Specific System Policies w/ Commerce Staff</li> </ul>
<b>Align4NCWorks (NCCCS Strategic Plan)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Career Pathways and Awareness (Goal 5)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• System Foundation (Goals 7 &amp; 8)</li> </ul>
<b>Specialized Professional Development Events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructor Credentialing Program</li> <li>• Training Academies &amp; Institutes</li> <li>• SPOT Activities</li> <li>• Special Populations</li> <li>• Student Engagement Resources/Toolkits</li> <li>• DEEP Leadership Training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal Controls – NRS Assessments</li> <li>• Data Quality Matters! Academies</li> <li>• Performance Partnership Summit</li> </ul>
<b>Information Dissemination</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Models and Promising Practices</li> <li>• Instructional Resources/Toolkits</li> <li>• Learning Communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accountability and Internal Controls</li> <li>• Policy Manuals   Guidance Documents</li> <li>• Research Analysis</li> </ul>
<b>Policy Reviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WIOA and NRS</li> </ul>
<b>Use of Technology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructional Delivery</li> <li>• Distance Education</li> <li>• Digital Literacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• System Efficiencies – MIS - Colleague and LACES Training Registration System for Training Events</li> </ul>

<b>Program Monitoring</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 13 Considerations   Local Plans</li> <li>• Local Program Self-Assessments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal Audit Monitoring Template</li> <li>• Local Desktop Monitoring Reports</li> </ul>
<b>Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment to Instruction Strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NRS Placement</li> <li>• Tracking Student Progress</li> <li>• Test Administration – Staff Training</li> </ul>

Below are additional strategies that will be supported to meet the required State Leadership activities under WIOA.

*Requirement #1*

**(A) The alignment of adult education and literacy activities with other core programs and one-stop partners, including eligible providers, to implement the strategy identified in the unified State plan under section 102 or the combined State plan under section 103, including the development of career pathways to provide access to employment and training services for individuals in adult education and literacy activities.**

As one of six core programs under WIOA, the WIOA-AEFLA providers will focus their alignment efforts around providing access to educational services for adult learners with low literacy skills by strengthening their literacy and numeracy skills as the foundation for workforce success. State Leadership funds will be used to provide technical and professional development training activities to providers and workforce partner agencies around the following topics: structured student referral system, integrated service delivery strategies, integrated education and training strategies, common assessment tools, career advising, workforce preparation activities, transition services, career pathways, contextualized instruction that meets industry-specific needs, targeted services for individuals with disabilities, targeted services for English language learners, and strategies for marketing and branding programs and services.

Other alignment activities include, but not limited to the following: state/local workgroups, joint training events, and joint advisory board meetings.

*Requirement #2*

**(B) The establishment or operation of high quality professional development programs to improve the instruction provided pursuant to local activities required under section 231(b), including instruction incorporating the essential components of reading instruction as such components relate to adults, instruction related to the learners, instruction provided by volunteers or by personnel of a State or outlying area, and dissemination of information about models and promising practices related to such programs.**

NCCCS has an established high quality professional development program. The intent or goal of all training activities is to improve student success and program outcomes. This is accomplished by having a highly qualified, cross-functional staff at the state level who carryout critical job functions that support adult education and literacy activities. To assist the state-level staff with staff development, NCCCS formed a partnership with Appalachian State University - the Adult Basic Skills Professional Development Department (ABSPD). This partnership was initiated to provide a university research based platform to provide continual professional development. ABSPD provides a variety of face-to-face workshops and training materials that support North Carolina's Instructor Credentialing program and North Carolina Adult Education Content Standards.

To support professional development activities, NCCCS will also convene current and form new workgroups to develop strategic and operational plans to meet the new State Leadership requirements. The following are the names of these groups: Basic Skills State Leadership Advisory Board (current), Professional Development Advisory Committee (current), Basic Skills Focus Area Team (current), Core Program Alignment Workgroup (new), Integrated Education and Training/Career Pathways Workgroup (new), and Program Accountability Workgroup (new). These groups will meet quarterly and develop annual training needs. For the 2016-17 program year, the following training needs were identified as top priority:

- Career pathways models that target all instructional programs (ABE, ASE, and ELA)
- LEIS and LACES training for all staff
- Targeted training for senior program administrators
- WIOA Performance Measures and NRS Performance Targets
- Assessment and Test Administration
- Alignment strategies with Core Partners

#### NCCCS Training Catalog

Research in adult education confirms that quality instruction has the greatest impact on positive student performance and outcomes. Adult education standards have become more rigorous. Whether providers are teaching an adult basic education class, a high school equivalency course, or providing appropriate ESL instruction, NCCCS prepares instructors for the instructional challenges of providing adult literacy. NCCCS established a credentialing system to train instructors utilizing evidence-based teaching methodologies. Embedded in this framework are the values, delivery, and literacy content that is unique to adult education. Currently, the credentialing system has four certificates.

- CORE Instructional Certificate

This certificate is made up of seven courses which train instructors in research and evidence-based methodologies as well as learning philosophies and the

frameworks which support them. The courses required are: 1) Applying the Content Standards, 2) Assessment to Instruction, 3) Evidence-based Math Instruction, 4) Evidence-based Reading Instruction, 5) Evidence-based Writing Instruction, 6) Keeping it Real at Work: Contextualized Instruction, and 7) Teaching Strategies Integrating Technology.

- Reading Specialty Certificate

STAR-The STAR training (Student Achievement in Reading) is a national-developed professional development program which helps instructors use the key elements of reading instruction to improve the reading skills of intermediate level adult learners.

- Adult Secondary Education Specialty Certificate

This certificate is comprised of courses in math, science, social studies, and language arts to prepare instructors to help students meet the more rigorous requirements for obtaining an Adult High School or High School Equivalency diploma. Each certificate consists of eight, six-hour courses with specialty certifications available in Math/Science, Social Studies/Language Arts, or General which may be customized. The courses offered are:

- |   |                                       |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1) Living Organisms and Ecosystems            | 9) Explanatory and Expository Writing |
| 2) Genetics, Molecular Biology, and Evolution | 10) Argument-based Writing            |
| 3) Physical Science                           | 11) Analyzing Literature              |
| 4) Environmental, Earth, and Space Science    | 12) Analyzing Informational Texts     |
| 5) Algebraic Concepts and Expressions         | 13) US History                        |
| 6) Algebraic Equations and Inequalities       | 14) Modern US History                 |
| 7) Algebraic Functions and Modeling           | 15) Civics and Economics              |
| 8) Geometry, Probability, and Statistics      | 16) World History and Geography       |

- ESOL Specialty Certificate

This certificate is comprised of both online and face-to-face courses which address the knowledge required for second language acquisition, while providing

instructors of adult English language learners with models of effective instruction and the support necessary to apply these skills in their daily practice.

The online courses provided through LINCS are: 1) Second Language Acquisition, 2) Teaching Emergent/Beginning Readers, 3) Formative Assessment, 4) Second Language Teaching/Lesson Planning, 5) ESL Methodology, and 5) Role of Culture in Teaching ELLs.

The face-to-face courses are: 1 ) Second Language Acquisition for Teachers of Adult ELLs, 2) Planning Instruction for ESL Beginners, 3) Formative Assessment for learning in Adult ESL, 4) Effective Lesson Planning for Adult ELLs, 5) Principles and Techniques of ESL Methodology, and 6) Integration of Culture and Language.

In addition to the credentialing program, NCCCS has two other professional training programs in their training catalog.

- SPOT Trainings

This designation indicates a "Strategically Placed Opportunity for Training (SPOT)." These trainings are designed and scheduled in response to a specific request or need identified in the field by a program provider. These trainings may be one of the CEU courses offered as part of a certification, or they may be a workshop dealing with a particular topic such as lesson planning using the content standards.

- D.E.E.P. Leadership Training

NCCCS has developed a leadership program titled Developing Exceptional Educational Professionals (D.E.E.P.) which consists of five face-to-face session modules, various assignments, and is facilitated by state staff and other qualified professionals. The five modules are identified below: 1) Introduction to Deep/Change Leadership, 2) Program Leadership, 3) Program Accountability, 4) Program Management, and 5) Program Development and Improvement. NCCCS utilizes this training to build the capacity of local administrators to effectively lead adult literacy programs across the state. The core intent is to align the critical leadership functions with the changing needs of adult learners and adult education programs. This purpose is accomplished by establishing an effective collaborative environment where new directors can network and focus on positive student and program outcomes.

State Leadership funds will be used to develop one additional instructor credential as well as three to four additional courses to add to the NCCCS Training Catalog.

*Requirement #3*

**(C) The provision of technical assistance to eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities receiving funds under this title, including—**

- (i) the development and dissemination of instructional and programmatic practices based on the most rigorous or scientifically valid research available and appropriate, in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, English language acquisition programs, distance education, and staff training;**
- (ii) the role of eligible providers as a one-stop partner to provide access to employment, education, and training services; and**
- (iii) assistance in the use of technology, including for staff training, to eligible providers, especially the use of technology to improve system efficiencies.**

NCCCS will provide technical assistance to all WIOA-AEFLA providers. Technical assistance will include, but not limited to workshops, webinars, regional meetings, onsite visits, and phone calls. These events will be facilitated by state and local staff. Where appropriate, State Leadership funds will be used to contract with an organization to deliver the training.

System Office staff will conduct a comprehensive needs assessment survey with the results used as the base for developing an annual training calendar.

*Requirement #4*

**(D) The monitoring and evaluation of the quality of, and the improvement in, adult education and literacy activities and the dissemination of information about models and proven or promising practices within the State.**

NCCCS will monitor 20% of programs each year, using the schedule and criteria developed at the beginning of each program year. Funds will be used to support the development of monitoring tools and resources as well as pay the travel expenditures for NCCCS staff. Funds may also be used to support a third-party evaluator.

State Leadership funds will be used to support two permissible activities:



## Serving Individuals with Disabilities

NCCCS is committed to providing effective instruction by well-trained instructors to meet the needs of adult learners with learning disabilities. The foundation of effective instruction consists of research-based instructional strategies and contextualized instruction, while integrating the North Carolina Adult Education Content Standards as the base of instruction. State Leadership funds will be used to support professional development and technical assistance to staff who work with this targeted population.

The goal of serving students with disabilities is to assist the students to become literate, obtain the necessary skills for employment and economic self-sufficiency, and to transition to postsecondary education and training through career pathways. In order to meet these goals, WIOA-AEFLA providers need support in assessment procedures, stakeholder collaboration, and technical assistance on developing career pathways.

The first consideration in the development and implementation of programs and services for students with learning disabilities is to be in compliance with the Federal Laws that govern community colleges in regards to disabilities. Educational programs at community colleges will follow the regulations of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Americans with Disability Act (ADA) of 1990. Section 504 prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities by programs and activities receiving federal funds. ADA requires that people with disabilities not be excluded from participation, or be denied benefits, or be subjected to discrimination. Therefore, qualifying students are eligible to receive reasonable academic accommodations that relate to their disabilities through Disability Services located on each community college campus. State Leadership funds will be used to support local accommodations and assistive technology devices for instructional purposes.

To meet the eligibility requirements of WIOA-AEFLA, students must score a valid placement on either the CASAS or TABE which are both NRS approved assessments. Once students are enrolled in a program, they must demonstrate a level of academic progress. Students with learning disabilities often gain skills at a much slower rate than students without disabilities. Regardless, they should still demonstrate improvement from placement to post-test scores to determine if they are benefiting from the instructional program. State Leadership funds will be used to contract with subject matter experts to help programs better assess, track progress, and develop instructional plans for individuals with disabilities.

To maximize a student's performance gain, instructors need ongoing training on contextualized instruction and research-based interventions for teaching students with learning disabilities. Regional and localized training should be provided to instructors on strategies for teaching students with learning disabilities in reading, math, computers and vocational skills. State Leadership funds will be used to conduct site visits to assess

program offerings, conduct professional development opportunities, and to train staff in effective instruction strategies which target individuals with disabilities.

WIOA-AEFLA providers also need technical assistance in developing employment strategies for students with learning disabilities. NCCCS will facilitate ongoing webinars for directors to showcase their effective programs and share program development procedures with other providers. Current models include Project SEARCH, Transitions Academy, and Career College.

WIOA-AEFLA providers need to engage in conversations on a regular basis on employment needs and outcomes of individuals with disabilities. These conversations should include all key stakeholders such as NCWorks, Vocational Rehabilitation, and employers to examine current and future job or labor markets, identify employment needs, and identify the training and skills needed to gain employment. Once these factors are identified, career pathways, apprenticeship opportunities, and employment exploration should be developed in a way that utilize existing classes or resources on campuses. State Leadership funds will be used to support state, regional, and local partnership meetings.

### Integrated Education and Training Models

State Leadership funds will be used to support the WIOA-AEFLA staff as they participate in the System Office's strategic plan titled Align4NCWorks, NCWorks Commission's Certified Career Pathways System, as well as other state and national models for career pathways. By leveraging the resources and subject matter experts associated with these initiatives, WIOA-AEFLA staff will have the tools and resources necessary to assist WIOA-AEFLA providers in their efforts to develop innovative education and training models, including career pathways. Below is an overview of these initiatives.

#Align4NCWorks focuses on key partnerships among community colleges, business/industry, workforce development boards, public schools and economic development entities. **The overarching aims are:**

- **Alignment** – Develop an integrated seamless system of education and workforce development programs, initiatives and resources. The system should be focused on the integration of business needs and worker preparation and include a comprehensive approach to career exploration, career development, education and job training that begins in middle school and continues throughout an individual's career path.
- **Responsiveness** – Create a workforce system that is responsive to the needs of the economy and that increases North Carolina's competitive advantage by further

developing and enhancing career pathways that provide students the skills to create, make and build things and provide the basis for desirable, thriving careers for North Carolinians.

- **Engagement** – Develop and implement a coordinated and seamless approach to engage business and respond to business needs. Use that engagement to increase the education pipeline, competency-based credentials and work-based learning opportunities in critical career clusters and to better connect people to jobs and jobs to people.
- **Accountability** – Target statewide resources to enhance programs and enrollment in critical career cluster areas that compliment key targeted growth industries; integrate economic, workforce and community development functions; develop measures of success through conducting an annual review of metrics and a benchmarking of competitors; and measure and report on the effectiveness of North Carolina’s workforce development system.

WIOA-AEFLA state and local staff will actively participate on workgroups, facilitate meetings, and take ownership in targeted objectives and action items to achieve the goals set forth in #Align4NCWorks strategic plan:

- Goal 1: Increase and sustain employer engagement as part of an integrated, customer-centered workforce system.
- Goal 2: Connect students to quality careers and employers to quality employees.
- Goal 3: Ensure education and training address and validate skill and competency needs and attainment.
- Goal 4: Expand work-based learning opportunities.
- Goal 5: Improve career awareness and mapping.
- Goal 6: Increase opportunities for college access while keeping education and training affordable.
- Goal 7: Promote demand-driven and data-informed decision making and evaluation to more effectively meet workforce customer needs and enhance system accountability.
- Goal 8: Strengthen the foundations of success for workforce development.

WIOA-AEFLA providers will use the framework of NCWorks Certified Career Pathways criteria to develop and implement career pathways. Because this is a voluntary system, providers will not be required to have their locally developed pathways certified. Below are the criteria for certified pathways:

- Demand-Driven and Data-Informed
- Employer Engagement
- Collaborative Partnerships
- Career Awareness
- Articulation and Coordination
- Work-Based Learning
- Contain Multiple Points of Entry and Exit
- Evaluation

Lastly, State Leadership funds will be used to contract with subject matter experts to provide professional development training activities on state and national models for career pathways.

## Assessing Quality

Using the federal monitoring tool, NCCCS has developed a series of questions to assess the quality of programs.

Module	State Review Protocol
<b>Module 1</b>	<b>Review of NRS Annual Report</b>
1.	Does the proportion of students served in ABE, ASE, and ESL appear reasonably based on the State's needs?
2.	Does the data on student demographics (age, ethnicity, gender) raise any issues, for example lack of services to a particular group?
3.	Does the student outcome data on Table 4 indicate adequate performance compared to North Carolina's NRS targets?
4.	Does the provider have a history of meeting its performance targets?
5.	Is the provider demonstrating continual improvements in its outcomes?
6.	Is the provider obtaining an adequate pre and posttest rate on Table 4B?
7.	Does the average number of instructional hours indicate that the program is of sufficient intensity and duration to produce learning gains?
8.	Are there irregularities in NRS data tables that need to be investigated during the State visit?

<b>Module 2</b>	<b><i>NRS Implementation - Local Questionnaire</i></b>
1.	Has the local provider adopted appropriate data collection policy and procedures to implement NRS?
	a. Are there data collection procedures for demographic, assessment, and attendance data, including pre-enrollment educational attainment and teacher experience (effective 7/1/2012)?
	b. Are there clear descriptions of staff roles and responsibilities for data collection?
	c. Have fiscal resources been budgeted/expended appropriately?
	d. Have data reporting timelines been established?
	e. Have quality control procedures been established?
2.	Does the local provider have appropriate policy and procedures for student intake?
	a. Are staff aware and knowledgeable of 2012 NRS changes to cohort identification?
	b. Is the local program using the LEIS intake form?
	c. Are students informed if program will conduct student follow-up surveys?
	d. Does the local program require a confidentiality release form for goals that require follow-up?
3.	Is the local program following the State assessment policy?
	a. Are they using appropriate assessments?
	b. Is the pre and posttest administered according to State policy?
	c. Are staff who are administering assessments properly trained?
	d. Are appropriate test administration procedures being followed (timing of test, proper forms, use of locators, etc.)?
4.	Does the local provider monitor data quality by:
	a. Database error-checking function (e.g. missing data or out-of-range values)?
	b. Use of standardized intake forms and processes?

Module	State Review Protocol
	c. Policy and procedures on inputting data on a timely and regular schedule?
5.	Has the local program provided the opportunity for staff development and training to support NRS implementation?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What percentage of the local grant is allocated to staff development and training related to the NRS?</li> </ul>
6.	Has all staff involved in data collection been trained in following proper procedures, including the 2012 changes to the NRS?
7.	Are there clear roles and responsibilities outlined for each level of data collection?

Module 3	State Leadership
1.	Is there evidence that local staff participated in a process for communicating professional development needs to the State for the current year? Do locals believe that their input was used in creating professional development programs?
2.	How is staff development financed: State support, local budget, or negotiated administrative rate?
3.	To what extent are teachers and directors able to access State-sponsored training?
4.	Do local personnel believe that State-sponsored activities are positive and helpful?
5.	Can local programs describe changes and improvements that were made as a result of State-sponsored staff development activities?

Module 4	Funding Local Grants
1.	Are the activities observed in the program the same as those contained in the proposal?
2.	Are all the activities observed allowable uses of AEFLA funds?
3.	Is the intensity and duration of instruction offered by the program sufficient to provide meaningful learning gains?

Module 5	Evaluation of Local Programs
1.	How are performance targets established at the local level?
2.	What kind of feedback is provided to staff about their performance?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is technical assistance provided?</li> </ul>
3.	When was the local program last evaluated on site?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the State issue a written report?</li> </ul>
4.	What kind of corrective action, if any, was required?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does the State provide technical assistance?</li> </ul>

Module 6	Financial Consideration
1.	Are activities proposed to be funded:
	a. Necessary and reasonable?
	b. Allowable?
2.	Have all required financial reports been submitted?
	a. If so, were the submissions timely?
	b. If not, what remains outstanding?
	Is an indirect cost charged to the grant over and above the administrative costs?

Module	State Review Protocol
3.	Has the provider met the limitation on corrections spending as a percent of local grant funds? Has the grantee spent at least some AEFLA funds on corrections or institutionalized populations?
4.	If the local program is spending more than five percent for administration, did it negotiate a higher rate with the State?
5.	Are there any outstanding issues from prior monitoring reviews?
6.	What is the provider's staffing pattern for adult education?
	a. How are the positions funded?
	b. Is staffing adequate for the State's current adult education responsibilities?
	c. Does the State keep time and effort charts to account for payment for hours in adult education?
7.	Do local programs charge fees? If so, how do local programs report those fees to the State?
8.	How much program income is being reported and how is it being spent?

Module 7	Organizational Status
1.	What is the provider's organization structure?
	▪ Where does adult education fit in the organization chart?
2.	Has the provider undergone (or is it considering undergoing) a reorganization?
	▪ What opportunities and challenges does it present?
3.	Is the provider's staffing level sufficient to carry out the responsibilities associated with administering the Federal grant?
4.	How are statewide policies developed?
	▪ If an advisory body is used, who serves on it?
5.	How are State policies communicated to the staff?
6.	How is program information communicated to the public?
	▪ How does the provider make performance data available to the public?

Module 8	Collaborations/WIA Partners
1.	Who represents adult education on the local Workforce Development Board?
2.	Is the provider actively involved in local Workforce Development Board activities?
	a. How has this involvement benefited the delivery of adult education services?
	b. Are joint training efforts conducted for NCWorks Career Center partners?
	c. What role did adult education providers play in developing local plans?
3.	Has the provider developed MOUs with WIOA core programs?
	▪ Which partners and for what purpose?
4.	Does the provider have a presence at an NCWorks Career Center?
	▪ Are the services co-located or made available through referral?
5.	If there is a referral process to and from an NCWorks Career Center, does it result in improved services to clients?
	▪ Is it common practice to co-enroll students?

<b>Module 8: English Literacy &amp; Civics Education - Local Questionnaire</b>
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Module	State Review Protocol
1.	Do funded activities provide integrated programs of English language learning and civics education?
2.	Are the activities necessary and reasonable? Are they allowable costs?
3.	Do program operations fully meet the requirements of Section 231, for example, intensity and duration or using research-based practices, and well trained staff?

In addition to this self-assessment tool, NCCCS will use desk monitoring and a program improvement processes for its annual and ongoing evaluation process.

### Desk Monitoring

On an annual and ongoing basis, NCCCS reviews each provider's performance and student outcomes, using data collected through the LEIS. Each provider is responsible for meeting the percentages set by the performance indicators and for meeting enrollment goals, which are a percentage of the target population. At both the state and provider levels, LEIS provides the capacity to analyze program performance, identify program improvement needs, assess the effectiveness of program design and plan appropriate staff development to better serve adult learners. Based on data, NCCCS will link performance to program improvement efforts and funding decisions.

### Program Improvement Process

Using data from LEIS and required program improvement training, providers evaluate their programs and implement needed changes to improve program effectiveness. Recognizing that program improvement is impacted by many factors, NCCCS will support the following activities at the state and local level:

- New Director Orientation – provides new directors with information and resources needed to administer their programs and follow all federal and state guidelines.
- New Instructor Orientation – provides information and resources to new teachers to support their instruction.
- Assessment Trainers – provides a network of trained professionals to ensure the uniform administration and reporting of assessments used for determining federal level gains.
- Basic Skills Conference – a biennial conference where WIOA-AEFLA providers can share successes, learn about new programs and initiatives and network.
- Quality Data Matters – assists WIOA-AEFLA providers in data analysis and determining which program areas are strong and which may need improvement.



- National Reporting System – provides training on the fundamentals of the NRS. Trainings cover topics that include monitoring, data collection and use, types of data and measures, assessments, data quality, and related information. It includes guidance on how to use NRS data to address an evaluation or research topic that will inform practice and improve programs.

DRAFT

- **Certification and Assurances**

## Ault Basic Education and Literacy Programs

<b>States must provide written and signed certifications that:</b>		
1.	The plan is submitted by the State agency that is eligible to submit the plan;	
2.	The State agency has authority under State law to perform the functions of the State under the program;	
3.	The State legally may carry out each provision of the plan;	
4.	All provisions of the plan are consistent with State law;	
5.	A State officer, specified by title in the certification, has authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the plan;	
6.	The State officer who is submitting the plan, specified by the title in the certification, has authority to submit the plan;	
7.	The agency that is submitting the plan has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan; and	
8.	The plan is the basis for State operation and administration of the program;	
<b>The State Plan must include assurances that:</b>		
1.	The eligible agency will expend funds appropriated to carry out title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) only in a manner consistent with fiscal requirements under section 241(a) of WIOA (regarding supplement and not supplant provisions);	
2.	The eligible agency will ensure that there is at least one eligible provider serving each local area, as defined in section 3(32) of WIOA;	
3.	The eligible agency will not use any funds made available under title II of WIOA for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are not "eligible individuals" within the meaning of section 203(4) of WIOA, unless it is providing programs, services or activities related to family literacy activities, as defined in section 203(9) of WIOA; and	
4.	Using funds made available under title II of WIOA to carry out a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution, the eligible agency will give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program.	

## **Vocational Rehabilitation**

### **Section (a): Input of State Rehabilitation Council**

- (a) Input of State Rehabilitation Council. All agencies, except for those that are independent consumer-controlled commissions, must describe the following:
- (1) input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council, including input and recommendations on the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, recommendations from the Council's report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other Council reports that may have been developed as part of the Council's functions;
  - (2) the Designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; and
  - (3) the designated State unit's explanations for rejecting any of the Council's input or recommendations.

### **Input and Recommendations from the North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council**

In North Carolina, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program is authorized under two separate grants, one for the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to the general population of individuals with disabilities, and one for vocational rehabilitation services for the blind and visually impaired. These programs are administered by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) and Services for the Blind (DSB), with each having its own State Rehabilitation Council.

### **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

For the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, members of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) provided input through various venues as follows:

- The Council's Executive Committee addresses State Plan development, implementation, and progress towards both Plan goals and SRC goals within the Goals, Priorities and Strategies section of the State Plan during meetings with the Division's director and staff. During the quarterly meetings, the full council also provides input for the VR portion of the Unified Plan (formerly the State Plan) and the comprehensive statewide needs assessment planning processes.
- The SRC Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee monitor and jointly conduct with DVRS the VR client satisfaction survey. The Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee also plans and conducts two town-hall style public forums per year. The location rotates to ensure statewide coverage and

stakeholder inclusion. For the spring and fall of 2015, forums were respectively held in Elizabeth City and Sylva, North Carolina. Stakeholder input from these and prior-year sessions are incorporated the input into the Council's recommendations.

- The SRC's Policy and Rules Committee reviews and provides feedback on policy drafts regarding client services and other agency policies, including agency policies required for compliance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. DVRS policy changes since the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, July 1, 2014 include: the requirement to develop an individualized plan for employment for a VR client within 90 days of eligibility determination, with certain exceptions; clarification of the request for quote (RFQ) and purchasing process for durable medical equipment and non-medical equipment purchases, and equipment and vehicle repairs; invoice processing and sponsorship of prescription medication; sponsorship of vocational evaluations and community based assessments for work adjustment and supported employment services; client financial need survey requirements; sponsorship of individual placement and supports (IPS) model supported employment; adjustment to the supervisory approval required for case service authorizations of \$500 or less; sponsorship of post-secondary academic training; required verification of client identity and employment eligibility prior to the development of an individualized plan for employment; and revisions to the process for client self-employment evaluation and direction setting.

#### **Other recommendations DVRS received from the North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council:**

Recommendation 1: In support of their strategic plan pertaining to legislative advocacy, the Council recommended again this year for the Division to prepare for their distribution, customized reports for each NC legislative district featuring the beneficial return on investment that the VR program has on consumers and on the economy of each district within NC. The DVRS Planning and Evaluation unit will continue to support this request, revising the customized reports based on input and also added success stories to provide a human element to the data presented. The reports will be prepared and distributed to NC Legislators during the short session.

Recommendation 2: Whereas the Council recognizes that employment options are generally decreasing in rural NC, and since many consumers cannot relocate to more urban areas due to their dependence on natural supports, the Division's self-employment option should remain a well-supported service option within the Division. DVRS supports this recommendation and expects to continue refining its current processes, partnerships and policies during federal fiscal year 2015 to maintain this service as a viable option for individuals who are well-matched to this type of employment as determined through its evaluative processes.

Recommendation 3: The Council recommended for the quarterly full council meetings to contain a standing item for the Client Assistance Program to give an activity update. Further, the council recommended for a standardized set of questions and topic areas to be provided as a standard guideline to be used for regional director and/or a regional unit manager reports during quarterly meetings to allow managers to provide updates for local activities, developments and to express any concerns to the Council. DVRS has incorporated the recommended changes and will continue with these standing topics until the Council recommends further adjustments.

Recommendation 5: The Council recommended to continue to jointly conduct consumer input sessions to be held twice annually collecting input from various communities across the state and to strongly encourage staff attendance at such sessions whenever possible. DVRS will continue to actively support jointly conducted input sessions twice annually canvassing various communities across the state focusing on how the VR program is addressing consumers' vocational rehabilitation needs through its service provision.

Recommendation 6: Whereas the Council is concerned about providing responsive services to consumers and realizes the Division's abilities in this area are impeded when high vacancy rates occur within the Division, the Council recommends that DVRS provide regular updates regarding key vacancies, including direct service positions such as counseling positions, so that the Council may advocate appropriately as included within the Council's current 2014-16 strategic plan. DVRS supports this recommendation and will continue to work with Council members to regularly provide updates through statewide and regional vacancy reports.

Recommendation 7: Whereas the SRC Consumer Input and Public Outreach Committee acknowledged decreasing response rates on client satisfaction self-administered written questionnaires, the Council recommends that DVRS shift half the funds expended on the written questionnaire to expanded use of the telephonic client satisfaction survey. Further, the Council recommends extending the survey to clients in active status and employing a weighted sampling method to maintain costs and better ensure representation across disability types, minority status, age, and gender. The Division supports this recommendation and will adjust its sampling practices, contracts, and purchase orders accordingly.

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

The Division of Services for the Blind State Rehabilitation Council members conducted two focus groups in Winston-Salem NC and in Wilmington, NC. The Council held two public hearings in Raleigh, NC and in Statesville, NC during federal fiscal year 2014 for the collection of information to be used in the development of the federal fiscal year 2015 State Plan. The State Rehabilitation Council met on Thursday, June 12, 2014, and the State Plan was reviewed and approved by the Council for federal fiscal year 2015.

The Council asked for clarification to the transition programs that the Division of Services for the Blind has with the 13 local education agencies and the services being provided to other transition aged consumers being served by Community Rehabilitation Counselors. Agency response: All 100 counties are being served with transition services, but in some locations, there are specific dedicated Rehabilitation Counselors serving this aged population while in other areas, our community Rehabilitation counselors provide these services.

The Council approved the Division's Priorities and Goals for federal fiscal year 2015 without modifications. The Division will finalize the State Plan and submit to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human services for approval and then to the Rehabilitation Services Administration for approval.

The State Rehabilitation Council members conducted two focus groups in Winston-Salem NC and in Wilmington, NC. The Council held two public hearings in Raleigh, NC and in Statesville, NC during federal fiscal year 2014 for the collection of information to be used in the development of the federal fiscal year 2015 State Plan. The State Rehabilitation Council met on Thursday, June 12, 2014, and the State Plan was reviewed and approved by the Council for federal fiscal year 2015.

The Council asked for clarification to the transition programs that DSB has with the 13 local education agencies and the services being provided to other transition aged consumers being served by Community Rehabilitation Counselors. The response from DSB is that all 100 counties are being served with transition services, but in some locations, there are specific dedicated Rehabilitation Counselors serving this aged population while in other areas, our community Rehabilitation counselors provide these services.

The DSB State Rehabilitation Council approved the DSB VR Program's Priorities and Goals for federal fiscal year 2015 without modifications. DSB finalized their VR program's portion of the Plan, which was submitted and approved.

## **Section (b) Request for Waiver of Statewideness**

(b) Request for Waiver of Statewideness. When requesting a waiver of the statewideness requirement, the designated State unit must identify the types of services to be provided by the program on a non-statewide basis. The waiver request must also include written assurances that:

- (1) a local public agency will provide the non-Federal share of costs associated with the services to be provided in accordance with the waiver request;
- (2) the designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and
- (3) requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.

**This attachment will not apply to the North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation Programs for the program years covered under the State Unified Plan.**

**Section (c) Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System**

(c) Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System. Describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system with respect to:

- (1) Federal, State, and local agencies and programs;
- (2) State programs carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;
- (3) Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture;
- (4) Noneducational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and
- (5) State use contracting programs.

## **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

The NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) extensively collaborates with and utilizes the services of federal, state, and local entities to achieve its mission on behalf of NC citizens with disabilities. DVRS routinely pursues improving its overall effectiveness through working relationships, partnerships, contracts and formal or informal agreements with entities at all of these levels. DVRS maintains written cooperative agreements with various federal, state, and local agencies. These include but are not limited to the Social Security Administration; the United States Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs; the North Carolina Division of Medical Assistance; the North Carolina Division of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing; NC Office of Long-Term Services and Supports; North Carolina Division of Social Services; the North Carolina Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse; and numerous local school systems, hospitals, and physical medicine and rehabilitation centers. The Easter Seals / United Cerebral Palsy Society of North Carolina, the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, the American Heart Association, and the North Carolina Arthritis Foundation are examples of consumer and advocacy groups for individuals with disabilities with which the Division has maintained agreements to facilitate the maintenance of the highest feasible level of communication and coordination in the joint development and implementation of operational methods including, where applicable:

- Assisting consumers, their families, and advocates in accessing services from DVRS and from the other agencies and entities;
- Referral of individuals who have disabilities and especially those who have severe disabilities to DVRS for services;
- Referral by DVRS to other agencies or entities for the various supportive services and assistance available;
- Determination of the responsibility of each agency or entity in making referrals, in serving individuals jointly, and in identifying resources;
- Provision of educational information regarding the services, including equipment and assistive technology, available and eligibility criteria of the Division and of the other agency or entity;
- Joint training of staff in areas pertaining to services available and procedures of DVRS and the other agency or entity;
- Shared funding DVRS positions and program costs and the co-location of DVRS staff with staff from the other agency or entity where co-location would be effective and feasible;
- Developing means to promote greater awareness and greater utilization of the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- Provision for the sharing of information between agencies as required by law or upon receipt of client permission and with regard to maintaining confidentiality;



- Establishing an evaluation system to determine levels of competency of paraprofessionals such as interpreters for the deaf who wish to serve as vendors for DVRS;
- Enhancing post-secondary training supports to assist in the transition to employment;
- Improving the public image of the employment capabilities of individuals in various disability groups;
- Assessing the effectiveness of the cooperative agreements;
- Jointly promoting improvement in the quality of life through comprehensive approaches to the improved health of consumers jointly served and through services to family members;
- Jointly promoting ethical research practices to develop improved medical and other disability related interventions;
- Promoting systems change through collaborative projects;
- Expanding services and community resources for unserved and underserved groups;
- Promotion of collaboration at the community office level offices between the Division and other agencies and entities;
- Through joint planning councils, providing joint input from the Division and from other agencies and entities for budgeting, service delivery, and policy changes for block grants, special demonstration projects, and other grants;
- Providing input regarding formulation of vocational services provided by other agencies and entities.

Additionally, DVRS local Vocational Rehabilitation, Independent Living Program and NC Assistive Technology Program staff work with the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in North Carolina to coordinate services for specific individuals and also to address areas of broader systemic impact such as community education/awareness and outreach to various disability groups. The CILs are consumer-controlled, cross-disability, community-based non-residential, private non-profit organizations that provide programs and services for people with all types of disabilities and their families. The goal of CILs is to promote and support opportunities for people with disabilities to fully participate in an integrated community and search for the possibilities to live as they choose. These centers are funded through Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. Information and referral, independent living skills training, advocacy, and peer counseling are the four core services each center provides. In addition to these core services, the centers may provide additional services which are tailored to serve individuals with disabilities in their service area.

The Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) is an independent non-profit council (not an entity within a state agency) that is established under Section 705 of the

Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. The majority of its members are individuals with disabilities. The SILC is responsible for jointly developing and endorsing the State Plan for Independent Living in conjunction with the designated state unit (DVRS and NC Division of Services for the Blind). The duties of the SILC are to monitor, review, and evaluate the implementation of the State Plan for Independent Living. Further, the SILC is mandated to coordinate activities with the State Rehabilitation Council and other councils that address the needs of specific disability populations.

The Division is also actively collaborating with the USDA-funded statewide AgrAbility program whose mission is to educate and assist NC farmers, ranchers, farmworkers and their family members who have disabilities to enable them to remain actively engaged in production agriculture. The collaborative involves NC Agricultural and Technical State University, NC State University Bio and Agricultural Engineering Department, East Carolina University Agromedicine Institute, NC Cooperative Extension, and the NC network of Centers for Independent Living.

Further, the Division's consumer's benefit through the expertise and access to USDA programs, program funding and loans available through the NC Rural Center, which is represented through the Division's Small Business Advisory Committee (SBAC).

At this time, DVRS does not directly engage in formally established state use contracting program, where commodities or service determined to be of use to state agencies are purchased from community-based rehabilitation programs employing and training individuals with significant disabilities. DVRS does sponsor activities through several community rehabilitation programs that provide training services to the Division's consumers through contracts with entities such as the NC Department of Transportation for maintenance of facilities and distribution of safety campaign materials.

## **Division of Services for the Blind**

The North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) has established cooperative and collaborative working relationships with various federal, state and local agencies and organizations in our mission to help blind, visually impaired and deaf-blind citizens of North Carolina receive the most comprehensive and beneficial services and supports available to facilitate their vocational and independent living goals. Many of the agencies and organizations with whom DSB collaborates are carrying out activities under the Statewide Workforce Investment System.

DSB has a cooperative agreement with the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI). The agreement with DPI establishes coordination for the provision of educational and transitional services to students with visual impairments.

DSB has a cooperative agreement with the University of North Carolina System (UNC). DSB partners with UNC's Department of Allied Sciences in support of the university's rehabilitation counseling program. This includes the programs on campuses of UNC-Chapel Hill, Winston-Salem State University, A&T State University, East Carolina University, and North Carolina Central University campuses. The Division provides clinical experiences for students in the program through DSB district offices and the residential rehabilitation facility. DSB and UNC mutually plan and schedule student assignments. The Division provides students training and supervision, mentoring, constructive feedback and formal evaluations. Students are also provided office and work space, use of computers and other office equipment and technology, and exposure to other professions in the field rehabilitation such as, orientation and mobility, low vision, social work and medical eye care. UNC provides DSB staff opportunities to participate in clinical education conferences and meetings. This collaborative relationship also creates potential employment opportunities for students upon the completion of their education.

DSB has informal collaborative relationships with other organizations and consumer and advocacy groups that are not carrying out activities under the Statewide Workforce Investment System such as the Governor Morehead School, NC Association of Blind Students, Governor Morehead School Alumni Association, NC Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, North Carolina Lions Inc., NC Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired and Prevent Blindness NC. DSB and the organizations and groups collaborate in referrals for services and supports, sharing information and resources, sponsorship and participation in trainings and events, outreach and educating the general public about blindness and vision loss and increasing the general public's awareness of the needs and abilities of individuals who have visual disabilities.

DSB is one of the designated state units (DSUs) that serve as a part of the NC Statewide Independent Living Council (NC SILC). NC SILC in collaboration with the DSUs develops three-year State Plans for Independent Living (SPILs). DSB actively engages with the SILC in the development of goals, objectives and measures to help meet the independent living needs of North Carolinians who have disabilities. These entities serve together on various work groups and committees such as governance, community based living, youth leadership forum, evaluation, civil rights and IL services and supports. The work groups and committees address matters and complete the tasks and activities required to achieve the goals and desired outcomes stated in the SPIL. A SILC member serves on the DSB State Rehabilitation Council.

Cooperative and collaborative relationships have been established between NC Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and DSB. Consumers are referred by and to each entity, relevant information is shared, CILs allows DSB the use of facilities for DSB to provide consumers community-based independent living skills training and in return DSB staff provides CIL staff in-service training pertaining to visual disabilities. DSB provides consumers individual advocacy skills training and refers to the CILs for systems change advocacy needs.

## **Section (d) Coordination with Education Officials**

(d) Coordination with Education Officials. Describe:

- (1) The designated State unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students.
- (2) Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to:
  - (A) consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services;
  - (B) transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;
  - (C) roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;
  - (D) procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.

## **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

- (1) The designated State unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students.

The NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation will revise and renew its state level memorandum of agreement (MOA) with NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) upon issuance of the final federal regulations on Title IV of WIOA. The purpose of the MOU is to outline a collaborative partnership between the two agencies to provide state level approval and support for enhanced transition services to students with disabilities. The revised MOA with DPI will also specify the manner in which Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) will be coordinated and provided within NC schools as well as how students with disabilities, including those who are potentially eligible for VR services, will be identified and served in compliance with federal regulations. The Program Specialist for Transition Services compiles an annual report for DPI, as requested according to our MOA, summarizing VR activity for the state fiscal year.

In addition to a state level MOA, the VR unit offices and local education agencies (LEA) customize a local Third Party Cooperative Agreement (TPCA) to outline how the agencies will work together to ensure that vocational rehabilitation services are administered to students with disabilities. The TPCA stipulates administrative funding to support VR staff, outlines procedures for information sharing, and requires a process for referring students with disabilities to VR in order for the Division to carry out the vocational rehabilitation process. DVRS TPCAs with 99 of the 115 LEAs in North Carolina contribute funding towards 202 positions including VR counselors, business relations representatives, vocational evaluators and additional VR support staff including casework assistants and casework technicians available to provide VR transition services in the local community. In areas where a TPCA has not been established, the local manager has designated a VR counselor to directly serve the students with disabilities in the local schools. Since 2003, DVRS has implemented strategies for serve transition-aged youth. Under WIOA and as the Title IV regulations are finalized, DVRS will be enhancing programs and services to transition-aged youth with increased focus on students with disabilities and PETS. New programs are intended to align the Division with federal requirements under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, namely PETS, as well as provide improved transition services to students while they are in high school. DVRS expects that NC public schools will see a value-add for investing in the VR partnership.

### *Plans for Coordination with Education Officials*

DVRS plans to maintain and strengthen its programmatic relationships with school transition services through its continued active participation by the Division's Transition Program Specialist on the State Capacity Building Team for Transition. This team, including NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) leadership, NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, University Center for Development and Learning, Parent/Child Advocacy Agency, Career and Technical Education, and NC Community Colleges System representation was formed in recent years to develop statewide goals and provide better coordinated transition activities for students with disabilities to achieve better results with post-school outcomes, including obtaining employment or attending post-secondary education. Currently, NC's Capacity Building Plan is focused on improving student involvement in the individualized education program (IEP) process so that planning is more meaningful and associated with a student's post-school goals. The state is continuing to work on a Transition Toolkit for teachers and anticipates the development of toolkits for parents, students, and agencies that will be individualized at the local level. DPI consultants are providing transition training to LEAs to promote student-led IEPs, and NC DVR plans to provide training to VR counselors and LEA representatives in the Spring of 2016 to focus on the role of the VR Counselor in the IEP process.

DVRS plans to continue collaboration with DPI leadership on technical assistance grants that focus on improving transition services and employment outcomes for transition-aged youth, including re-submission for the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) Intensive Technical Assistance grant.

### *Description of Policies and Procedures for Coordination with Education Officials*

As the Title IV regulations are finalized, VR plans to increase transition service offerings to students with disabilities through partnerships with NC public schools. Some areas of program development and service enhancement being considered by DVRS are:

- Summer internships for students/youth with disabilities
- Increased utilization of On-the-Job Training (OJT) with students and youth
- Utilizing *Transition Navigators* to identify and serve students with disabilities who are potentially eligible and/or to provide VR PETS services to groups
- Increasing Project Search sites
- Hosting Self-Advocacy summer summits, camps, or school-based workshops
- Enhancing vocational evaluation tools and allocating increased vocational evaluation staff to serve students with disabilities in exploring career options
- Increasing work-based experiences for students with disabilities who require on-the-job supports, such as job coaching, by partnering in innovative ways with community rehabilitation programs.

DVRS plans to re-brand and revise marketing materials and communications about VR services to students with disabilities to highlight PETS offerings to both students and school personnel. This effort will include targeted marketing for youth disability groups whose incidence within DVRS is declining despite remaining steady or increasing within the public schools (e.g., students with learning disabilities). DVRS will revisit policies related to post-secondary training and learning disability eligibility to ensure that the needs of all eligible students with disabilities as well as those students for whom we are mandated to provide PETS are being met in terms of preparing students to obtain competitive integrated employment in such a way to promote advancement and ongoing career development.

By enhancing and incorporating new programs that promote and support work-based experiences, the Division will continue its commitment to students in pursuit of a high school diploma through the Occupational Course of Study (OCS), a pathway established by the NC Board of Education for students with IEPs to achieve a high school diploma by completing occupational coursework and work experiences. DVRS has recently revised policies for In-School Work Adjustment services to students with significant or most significant disabilities. The service is coordinated through school-based agreements to incentivize a student's participation in school-coordinated work experiences by providing guidance and counseling as well as an incentive payment to students for improvements in work behaviors and attitudes. The Division continues to offer internship and OJT services to students, but hopes to increase utilization and improve feasibility for students, schools, and partnering businesses through policy and procedure revisions and collaboration with workforce system partners. Other PETS programs/services under consideration are intended to address students' expectations around pursuing employment and to improve their preparedness for participating in additional rehabilitation services, such as training and placement.

DVRS requires each local VR office with vocational rehabilitation counseling staff serving on a local school transition services team to send an annual report to the school systems with which the Division has a TPCA. This report includes data about services and expenditures for students with disabilities provided by the Division, and addresses how VR staff members worked with school staff in transition planning for students with significant and most significant disabilities.

#### *Development and Approval of Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for Transitioning Students*

The Division's casework policies addressing the provision of transition services defines transition services as a coordinated set of activities for a student designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post- secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult

services, independent living, or community participation. Furthermore, DVRS policy states that the coordinated set of activities must be based upon the individual student's preferences and interests, and must include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. Finally, DVRS casework policies require that transition services must promote or facilitate the achievement of the employment outcome identified in the student's individualized plan for employment. In order to plan effectively for the transition needs of students with disabilities in collaboration with other agencies and organizations, DVRS rehabilitation counselors are expected to be active participants addressing the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting transition issues when possible. Counselors are expected to participate both directly in IEP meetings and indirectly by other means in planning for the needs of VR consumers. A copy of the transition portion of the IEP is required to be maintained in the case record. Prior to developing the IPE, the VR counselor reviews the Individual Transition Plan (ITP) component for the Individual Education Plan and records any relevant ITP objectives as part of the IPE. The intent of this review is to coordinate educational programming and vocational programming for the benefit of the VR consumer. Additionally, the Division's policy stipulates that the development of the IPE with a student must be based on interests, aptitudes, capabilities, strengths and informed choice. The job choice on the IPE for a student in transition may indicate a family of jobs rather than a specific job code, for example, Health Care Worker, Office Work, and Protective Services such as police, firefighter, or security guard. DVRS policy does require career exploration to be provided and documented in order to determine a more specific goal, and this process and expectation has been further emphasized by recent policy revisions concerning development of the IPE within 90 days of the VR eligibility determination. Amended job choices, including amendments at closure, must be accompanied by documentation reflecting the process and services that had an impact on the final job choice, including job shadowing, job sampling, guidance and counseling. Moreover, DVRS casework policy stipulates that the development and approval of an individualized plan for employment must be completed as early as possible during the transition planning process but, at the latest, by the time each student determined to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services leaves the school setting. This includes students with disabilities who are eligible for VR services including eligible students served by the school under an IEP.

- (2) Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to:
  - (A) consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services;



- (B) transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;
- (C) roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;
- (D) procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.

In order to ensure effective facilitation of the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services, DVRS maintains both a joint formal agreement with the Exceptional Children and Career Technical Education Divisions of NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and also maintains 99 separately held TPCAs with local education agencies (LEA's) or school programs. The agreement with DPI will be revised upon issuance of the final regulations for Title IV to account for new mandates concerning PETS, serving the "potentially eligible," Section 511 impacts on contracted services between schools and programs operated under a subminimum wage certificate, and a number of other new requirements. Additionally, in that the agreement is not only with the Exceptional Children's division of the SEA, but also the Career and Technical Education division, NC DVR hopes to leverage partnerships that create more opportunity for students with disabilities to advance along a career pathway and to participate in work-based experiences beginning in high school. Within the current formal interagency agreement between DVRS and DPI, mutual interagency responsibilities include:

- Mutual participation of appropriate personnel in the development of the transition component of the Individualized Education Program and the Individualized Plan for Employment for students with disabilities.
- Designation of an individual from Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Exceptional Children and Career Technical Education Divisions to serve as liaison with each other to represent the services of the two agencies.
- Exchange of information deemed pertinent and of mutual concern regarding service delivery.
- Interagency cooperation in transition planning for students with disabilities.
- A mutual system to be developed and maintained to ensure that appropriate referrals are made to each party.

*Consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services*

### A description of DVRS responsibilities pertaining to this area

Within the current formal interagency agreement, the DVRS has responsibility to ensure the provision of an appropriate program of vocational rehabilitation services to each perspective VR client by:

- Providing administrative, technical and consultative services when needed through local, regional and state vocational rehabilitation services' staff to local school administrative units serving students with disabilities in transition programs. DVRS' Program Specialist for Transition Services and the state Program Consultant for Intellectual Disabilities and Secondary Education with DPI, cooperatively provide programmatic information, training and support to local school systems and to VR transition staff to maintain and enhance the quality of transition services for successful post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. The DVRS specialist provides regular technical support to schools by participating in and presenting at transition training institutes regarding transition services and adult service agencies. The DVRS specialist also visits and provides consultation and training to local schools with transition teachers, coordinators, job coaches, and other professionals.
- Screening students with disabilities referred to DVRS by the local school administrators to determine eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services. Eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services is based on the presence of a physical or mental impairment which for the individual constitutes a substantial impediment to employment. The student must require vocational rehabilitation service to prepare for, secure, retain or regain employment. The determination of eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services provided by DVRS is the sole responsibility of DVRS and is not delegated.
- Administering all aspects of the DVRS vocational rehabilitation program services including the determination of eligibility, diagnostic and evaluation services, rehabilitation planning, transition services and the provision of a program of vocational rehabilitation services. Some services are subject to the student's financial eligibility and/or comparable benefits.
- Providing vocational assessment trial work and adjustment services to students with disabilities who have an identified need and meet eligibility requirements.
- Providing appropriate data to the Exceptional Children Division about the number of school age students served by DVRS, by disability, age, types of services provided and post-school employment outcome through annual reporting.
- Promoting the development of cooperative agreements between DVRS and local school administrative units that include the following components:
  - Roles of each agency;
  - Financial responsibilities;
  - Vocational Rehabilitation staffing and supervision by the DVRS;

- Procedures for outreach, referral, liaison staff between the parties, eligibility, delivery of services, dispute resolutions, sharing of appropriate client information and student involvement;
- Joint staff development and training;
- Services to students with disabilities who are not receiving special education services;
- Assurances of compliance with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 105-17), Carl Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act (P.L. 105-332), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended; and
- Along with the local educational agency, provide and implement an ongoing evaluation of the cooperative efforts with a formal annual review of the proposed budget and any necessary interagency agreement updates.

#### A description of Exceptional Children Division's responsibilities pertaining to this area

Through the formal interagency agreement in place, the Exceptional Children Division of the DPI has the following responsibilities with respect to the provision of technical assistance and consultation with local educational agencies:

- Provide technical assistance to local school administrative units to ensure access for students with disabilities in appropriate Career and Technical Education Programs based on recommendations of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team.
- Assist local school administrative units in the planning, development and implementation of transition services for students with disabilities.
- Inform local school administrative units of services available from DVRS and promote referral generation.
- Promote the provision of psychological, vocational, therapeutic (e.g., speech-language, occupational and/or physical therapy services), assistive technology, and work adjustment services and educational assessment in collaboration with local educational agencies (i.e., school districts) for students with disabilities having an identified need.
- Promote the development of cooperative agreements between Vocational Rehabilitation Services and local school administrative units in keeping with 34 C.F.R. Section 361.38 Protection, Use, and Release of Personal Information.

#### A description of Career Technical Education Division's responsibilities pertaining to this area

Through the formal interagency agreement in place, the Career Technical Education Division of the NC DPI has the following responsibilities with respect to the provision of technical assistance and consultation with local educational agencies:

- Provide needed consultation to ensure the initiation of cooperative career/technical education and internship programs for students with disabilities involved in local school administrative units and other state agencies.
- Provide consultative services to local school administrative units and other state agencies and institutions to ensure initial placement and maintenance of eligible students with disabilities in Career and Technical Education Programs.
- Provide needed consultation to ensure the initiation of cooperative career/technical education and internship programs for students with disabilities involved in local school administrative units and other state agencies.
- Provide consultative services to local school administrative units and other state agencies and institutions to ensure initial placement and maintenance of eligible students with disabilities in Career and Technical Education Programs.
- Promote the provision of vocational/technical assessment services, career-decision making training, vocational instruction, and transition planning for students with disabilities in local school administrative units.
- Promote career/technical education counseling, cooperative work experience, internships and job placement of students with disabilities by local school administrative units.
- Assist local school administrative units in the planning, development, collection of data, and implementation of transition services for students with disabilities.

*Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs*

The current interagency agreement between DVRS and the state education agency stipulates that transition planning for students with disabilities will be a cooperative effort. Furthermore, the agreements specifically require mutual participation of appropriate personnel in the development of the transition component of the Individualized Education Program and the Individualized Plan for Employment for students with disabilities. The sharing of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs) at the local level is strongly encouraged. DVRS vocational rehabilitation counselors are required to review a student's transition component of the IEP and incorporate, as appropriate, a description of relevant objectives in the IPE. Furthermore, a comprehensive evaluation will be completed by the State agency on each eligible individual, to the degree necessary, to determine the vocational goal and scope of vocational rehabilitation services to be included in the IPE. The agreements state that the student with the disability is expected to fully participate in the development of the plan and any plan amendments. The agreements specify that the DVRS vocational rehabilitation counselors will provide the individuals with information sufficient to make an informed choice among alternative goals, objectives,

services, entities providing such services and methods to procure such services. Additionally, the agreement requires that the vocational rehabilitation counselor is to review the IPE with the individual or his/her representative at least once each year.

*Roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services*

Summary of Roles and Responsibilities of DVRS under the current agreement:

- Provide a program of vocational rehabilitation services to eligible individuals referred by the third party and to other individuals found eligible for services.
- Collaborative development of the transition component of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for students with disabilities.
- Provide effective and appropriate supervision of the vocational rehabilitation activities and VR staff assigned to provide the services.
- Provide administrative and consultative support, in the area of its program responsibilities, to the local education agency.
- Share statistical and fiscal reports to other parties as deemed mutually necessary to ensure open communication and good administrative practices.
- As part of the agreement, DVRS Rehabilitation Counselors will provide individuals with information sufficient to make an informed choice among alternative goals, objectives, services, entities providing such services and methods to procure such services. The counselor is to review the IPE with the individual or his/her representative at least once each year. The VR counselor will provide each eligible individual an IPE Handbook wherein there is an appeals process outlined. Information pertaining to the Client Assistance Program (CAP) is included in the handbook. The VR counselor agrees not to close an individual's record as having achieved a successful employment outcome until the person exits school and is determined that the individual has successfully completed the IPE.
- Conduct an annual survey of students in the school system.
- The vocational rehabilitation counselor will place major emphasis on students who are juniors, seniors, or potential dropouts.
- Screen referrals from other sources within the school system to enable students with disabilities who do not have an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) to be considered for vocational rehabilitation services.
- Mutually agree to utilize appropriate staff development personnel in the planning and implementation of joint inter-disciplinary team training and/or staff development for purposes of effectively providing transitional services to students with disabilities.

- Liaison personnel appropriate and qualified for the provision of transitional services, recommending needed changes and implementing the agreement will be appointed by the administrative units of the parties named in the agreement with the educational agencies.

#### Summary of financial responsibilities of each agency

The current interagency agreement between DVRS and Education Agencies including the NC Department of Public Instruction and Local Educational Agencies/School Boards stipulate the financial responsibilities of each party. Financial responsibilities of respective parties are described in more detail within the TCPAs between DVRS and the LEA's, since this satisfactorily addresses the need. Summary of financial responsibilities of DVRS under the agreements:

- Provide Federal funding in the amount of 78.7% of the agreed-upon annual budget depending on the availability of Federal funds and the program arrangements.
- Maintain accounts and supporting documents that will permit an accurate determination at any time of the status of State and Federal participation of expenditures incurred in operation of the rehabilitation program.
- Assume responsibility, within the limitation of resources, for the cost of services included in the student's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) according to DVRS' established policies and fee schedule.
- Within the limitations of available resources, provide case service funds necessary to the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services
- Accept financial responsibility for the cost of DVRS' portion of cooperative training efforts and maintain proper accounts and records of these activities.

Summary of financial responsibilities of the Educational Agency partners under the agreements:

- Parties entering into an agreement contribute to DVRS an annual cash amount of 21.3% of the agreed-upon annual budget. Whereas DVRS must provide funds equal to the State's share of planned expenditures as specified in the Federal Act. The local per centum match funds are to consist totally of non-Federal funds that have not or will not be used to match Federal funds other than Federal Vocational Rehabilitation funds used in this program.
- Any contribution of funds is made available for expenditure at the sole discretion of the DVRS. It is understood that such funds must be spent for rehabilitation services and for the administration of those services; that expenditures must be made under the approved agency State plan; and that expenditures must be made under the control and supervision of the DVRS.
- Provide all individuals determined eligible for vocational rehabilitation services with those services that are its legal and traditional responsibility, e.g., assistive technology required and included in an individual's IEP, without cost to the

DVRS. The cooperative program is utilized to provide services which represent new services or new patterns of services when compared to existing services.

- Provide and maintain adequate facilities and office space that is accessible to both staff and individuals with disabilities, private for individual counseling, with conditions that are conducive to confidentiality and counseling.
- Accept financial responsibility for the cost of their party's portion of cooperative training efforts and maintain proper accounts and records of these activities.

*Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services*

DVRS ensures that students with disabilities who are not receiving special education services have access to and can receive vocational rehabilitation services, if appropriate, by ensuring outreach to and identification of these students. Outreach to these students occurs as early as possible during the transition planning process and must include, at a minimum, a description of the purpose of the vocational rehabilitation program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals. DVRS vocational rehabilitation counselors are required to contact persons in the schools responsible for coordinating services to students under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and 504 plans and are instructed to conduct high school surveys in order to identify eligible students with disabilities. The Program Specialist for Transition Services has put forth effort at the state level to formulate relationships with pertinent staff with DPI to ensure strong working knowledge of DVRS and to encourage staff development programs to include a VR component. The importance of completing outreach to students through non-traditional means to identify students is emphasized in the Division's casework policy. Furthermore, in order to generate appropriate referrals, DVRS counseling staff members are encouraged to contact other resource personnel within the local schools including social workers, school nurses, occupational, physical and speech therapists. One of the primary goals of the Division's provision of transition services is to work with youth with disabilities who are at risk of dropping out of school. Factors to consider for "potential dropout" referrals include: (a) verbal indications by the student of intent to leave school, (b) students with disabilities failing half of course work, and (c) students in danger of not receiving course credits due to excessive absences. DVRS will be revising policies as the Title IV regulations are finalized to further define the point at which PETS and transition services to eligible clients may begin in order to ensure that PETS services are available to students at the age at which the student is eligible to receive transition services in NC under IDEA. There are differences in available staff and in numbers of students with disabilities in LEAs and DVRS, which impacts the methods by which the Division will approach this goal, but the Division is committed to using innovative programs and methods to meet its mandates.

### Other Evidence and Historical Information on Collaboration with Education Officials

Since 2003, the Division's Transition Specialist and a school counselor have served together with NC Department of Public Instruction representatives and others to form a statewide capacity building team to develop and provide coordinated transition activities for students with disabilities to achieve better results with post-school outcomes, including obtaining employment or attending post-secondary education. The Division's vocational rehabilitation staff participates in an annual Exceptional Children's Conference and regularly scheduled cross training regarding the provision of services at the local level. Specialized cooperative training activities, workshops and conferences have existed over the years and will continue to occur periodically, including both Vocational Rehabilitation staff and educators in conjunction with the requirements of the state's Comprehensive Plan.

DVRS remains active with several organizations serving transitioning youth. With a regular presence on our State Transition Team, grant efforts such as Reaching the Summit of Success, Post-Secondary Education Alliance, and NC Division of Career Development and Transition, DVRS is well represented in our state. DVRS will host transition training in Spring 2016 that will include presentations by many of our partnering agencies and will focus on policy changes and program development as a result of WIOA. Our Program Specialist for Transition Services continues to provide extensive outreach to our transition counselors and provides in service training as requested to ensure consistency, encourage creativity in service delivery, and to provide updated information. In addition to improving PETS offerings, the Division continues to expand Project Search in NC, with a total of nine (9) sites supported this year. Additionally, the Division continues to be a stakeholder in NC's College Supporting Transition, Access and Retention (STAR) program, which provides transition services to secondary students with learning and executive functioning disabilities as they transition to their early years of college. We look forward to continued innovation and partnerships that will improve the quality of transition services to transition-aged youth.

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

The Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) offers a wide variety of services to students with visual impairments or blindness in transition to the world of work. Each student served by the Division of Services for the Blind VR program must have an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) approved by a qualified DSB rehabilitation counselor. The IPE incorporates transitional elements of the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), along with the student's plans for transitioning from secondary school to employment. DSB transition staff and VR counselors are expected to participate in student IEP meetings pertaining to transition matters. Local school systems provide students services that are within its legal responsibility and customary practice. These services are provided without cost to the Division. DSB provides transitional and supportive services that are not available through the local school systems. All costs for



services for which a student is found eligible is paid for through DSB vocational rehabilitation case service funds.

A formal cooperative agreement exists with the NC Department of Public Instruction, which consists of 115 local education agencies (LEA's), 128 charter schools, 1 regional school and 2 education entities. The emphasis of the Memorandum of Agreement with the Department of Public Instruction is on students who are blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired, being served by local education agencies (LEA's) and the schools who are of transition age (14 to 21) and who need vocational rehabilitation services to become employed. This agreement acknowledges the role of DSB in providing these services and encourages local LEA's and schools to develop working relationships with the staff who cover their corresponding areas and encourages referring students, sharing information and facilitating joint involvement in IEP meetings. DSB shares information about the transition program and provides technical assistance and consultation to DPI, LEA's, and schools regarding accommodations and assistive technology that will help facilitate the education and vocational rehabilitation of students who are blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired.

DSB has agreements with twelve LEA's and one regional school across the state. These agreements designate cost sharing of transition staff positions (rehabilitation counselor and community employment specialist), the duties of these positions and the services to be provided by both parties in meeting the needs of transition age students. The school systems with whom DSB continues to have agreements are Brunswick County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, Cumberland County, Edgecombe County, Guilford County, New Hanover County, Onslow County, Pender County, Pitt County, Wake County Schools, Wilson County, Winston-Salem-Forsyth County Schools and the Governor Morehead School for the Blind.

While DSB's goal is that ultimately all eligible students will be served by specialized transition counselors through formal cooperative agreements with the schools, DPI and local LEA budgetary restraints have prevented expansion of cost sharing for transition positions. Studies have demonstrated that students, who are blind, deaf-blind or visually impaired benefit from earlier identification and referral to the transition counselors and access to available services and supports. Such partnerships enable the counselor to develop stronger working relationships with the students, family and the school staff with greater knowledge of the available resources and supports within the school district. Opportunities to participate more fully in the student's individualized education planning process are also more readily available.

Transition students are served by DSB community vocational rehabilitation counselors in schools where DSB does not have formal cooperative agreements with the LEA's. Vocational rehabilitation counselors develop and cultivate working relationships with school systems by educating them about the transition and vocational services available through DSB and providing technical assistance and consultation pertaining to the needs of and resources available to transition students.

Due to the growth of charter schools, private schools, and home-school organizations, DSB is reaching out to these entities to provide resources for any student who is blind, visually impaired, or deaf-blind. While most students do attend public schools due to the resources of specialized teachers for persons with visual impairments, DSB recognizes the importance to reach students enrolled in these programs.

Therefore, DSB will continue its outreach efforts and collaboration with school districts to develop and implement formal cooperative agreements and transition programs in other locations throughout the state.

DSB has also enlarged the transition rehabilitation services presently offered for students in North Carolina who are blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired by adding specific Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS).

1. Student Counseling on Transition/Higher Ed Training Opportunities- Required Student Workplace Readiness Training
2. Student Self-Advocacy Training
3. Student Job Exploration Counseling
4. Student Job Exploration Counseling Materials
5. Student Work Based Learning Experience Maintenance

These services are offered to all student program participants in secondary education.

## **Section (e) Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations**

(e) Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations. Describe the manner in which the designated State agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-profit VR service providers.

### **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

Private non-profit providers of rehabilitation services are necessary and valuable partners in the delivery of the array of services needed by the individuals eligible for VR services within the state. The NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) routinely seeks out such partnerships especially in geographic areas where additional

services and/or service provider choices need to be established. DVRS establishes and maintains contracts or agreements with over 120 non-profit vocational rehabilitation service providers providing an array of services to DVRS consumers. Fifty six (56) private-non-profit vocational rehabilitation service providers have established performance-based contracts with the Division, where the organizations are administered funds when an individual receiving services within their program has achieved designated goals or "milestones" on their way toward their ultimate goal of competitive employment. During federal fiscal years 2014 almost all supported employment and work adjustment services provided through community rehabilitation programs were transitioned from a fee for services hourly rate payment system to a milestone payment system. Details of this system and its implementation were developed in collaboration with the community rehabilitation provider community through representation via the CRP-DVRS steering subcommittee and through feedback solicitations made via web-based feedback mechanisms.

In federal fiscal year 2014, DVRS had established four (4) contracts with private non-profit service providers providing transitional employment services for the Division's consumers who are transitioning from facility-based settings to community-based settings; but in federal fiscal year 2015 there were three (3) due to one of the contracts not being renewed. A private non-profit service provider can enter into an agreement or contract with DVRS once it has gone through the Division's vendor approval process, by which a candidate service provider demonstrates its ability to provide services that meet established standards while fully compliant with all applicable state and Federal requirements. Site reviews are conducted to ensure that programs and services are accessible to individuals served by DVRS. Service rates are based largely on program costs, rates that have been established through researching regional market rates, or through competitive processes. Contracts are implemented through the Division's Center of Excellence Committee (COE), which is a committee established by the NC Department of Health and Human Services Office of Procurement and Contract Services. The committee's purpose is to identify and approve program needs, produce clear meaningful data, identify and approve outcomes, train and assist division/office program staff regarding the contractual procurement of services and reassessment of contract services. The COE includes senior management (director, section chiefs, budget officer) support and involvement. In addition to senior management, the COE includes subject matter experts in contracting, budgeting, programming, policy-making, and technology as applicable. The COE provides continuity to maintain a knowledge base about programs that can include evaluations of several contract services over long periods of time. This approach shifts the focus from contract processing to program management, ensuring that the scope of work for the service provider is tied to results.

### **Collaboration with the Lumbee Tribe and Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians**

During federal fiscal year 2008, both the Lumbee Tribe and Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians became recipients of RSA's American Indian Vocational Rehabilitation Services (AIVRS) discretionary grants.

From July 2009 - June 2015, the program director for the Lumbee Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation program (LTVRS) became a participating member of the State Rehabilitation Council and had regularly attended quarterly meetings. The majority of the collaborative activity between LTVRS and DVRS occurred in the south central geographical region of the state, where the tribe is established. DVRS managers located within that region and LTVRS staff developed strategies for interagency referral and information sharing that assists with eligibility determinations and the development of individualized plans for employment for individuals within the covered population. Referrals are regularly made between both agencies. In order to strengthen and clarify the procedures and expectations of both agencies relating to casework, resource, and training collaboration, an interagency agreement was developed and implemented on September 28, 2009.

Much of the collaboration between the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI) and DVRS occurs through Vocational Opportunities of Cherokee, Inc., the community rehabilitation program that provides vocational evaluation, work adjustment, and other vocationally-oriented training services for individuals with disabilities who reside on the Cherokee Reservation (Qualla Boundary). DVRS contracts with Vocational Opportunities of Cherokee, Inc. (VOC) for the purchase of these services when it is appropriate for DVRS VR clients who are not members of the EBCI.

DVRS also employs rehabilitation counselors that serve as liaisons with the Cherokee Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program, which helps maintain communication channels. Recently, DVRS has worked closely with the Cherokee Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation program to effectively meet the vocational rehabilitation needs of eligible individuals in their service area through a collaborative relationship. As of July 2015, the Executive Director of VOC/CTVRP was appointed to the DVRS State Rehabilitation Council as the mandatory representative for the AIVRS. DVRS and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians updated their memorandum of agreement October 19, 2009.

### **The Division of Services for the Blind**

DSB purchases supported employment services, extended services, and community based work adjustment services from Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP) for individuals who will require the assistance of a job coach to find a job, to learn the duties of the job, to develop acceptable work habits, and to provide long term support to ensure the individual is able to retain the job if required by the individual. The CRP

must meet certain requirements before services are purchased. The Contractor will maintain accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), Council on Accreditation (COA), or other accreditation by a DSB approved national accrediting authority will be a vendor with the state of North Carolina and will accept payments for services provided through an outcome based program.

DSB has cooperative agreements with eight CRPs for the provision of long term follow up support services (extended services) to individuals who achieved their goal of employment assistance from the supported employment program. The CRP meets with the individual based on DSB's phasing system for long term follow up. The Contractor provides extended services and ongoing support services through individual contacts on the schedule as listed below. The contractor bills DSB for these contacts and follows the phases of DSB's extended services plan as follows:

Phase 1: Twice monthly contacts with the individual and employer for the first 6 months of extended services, unless a provision is put in place on the individual's original or amended IPE for off –site monitoring.

Phase 2: At the end of 6 months, the contractor, individual and employer will make determination as to the individual's stabilization on the job. If ongoing support is required by the individual to maintain employment, ongoing support of two monthly contacts can condition. If and when the individual is determined to be well stabilized in the employment situation, an offer will be made to the individual and employer that continued monitoring could be made once every six months. If this offer is accepted by the individual and employer, the contractor must continue to monitor in the phase 2 for no less than 24 months. The individual and employer must sign a waiver acknowledging their agreement to this action during this phase.

Phase 3: When the individual has successfully completed phase 2, the contractor may offer the individual and employer an opportunity to cease regular monitoring. If they chose to enter into phase 3, the individual is placed on an inactive list and monitoring would only be at the individual or employer's request. The individual and employer must sign a waiver agreeing to the conditions of phase 3. If the contractor is contacted by either the individual or employer, the contractor will make an on-site visit to determine what services are needed to re-stabilize the individual's job. If the contractor determines that more than minimal services are needed, then the contractor should refer the individual back to the DSB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program for possible

case activation. However, if the contractor determines that the issues can be resolved with for example, short term training or educating of staff, the contractor can provide required services to the individual and/or employer.

DSB developed a community-based work adjustment services program with assistance from several community rehabilitation programs (CRP) for eligible individuals who require initial intervention to improve and increase productivity, attendance, punctuality, ability to interact appropriately with coworkers and supervisors, and work tolerance, yet do not require long-term support. CRP's across the state have developed specialized programs for these services that include situational assessments, job placement and job coaching services. Payments are made to the CRP's using an outcome based format, with increment payments made based on milestones.

DSB provides the Contractor with staff training, consultation and technical assistance, as appropriate. DSB's VR Counselor coordinates individual admissions and subsequent services with the contractor. Consistent with DSB policy, the referring VR Counselor provides the Contractor with the necessary documents. DSB participates in admissions, attends subsequent staffing, and provides individual rehabilitation counseling and other rehabilitation services to promote the individual's progress while enrolled with the Contractor. Individual records will reflect evidence of mutual effort and each party will keep the other informed regarding placement and follow-up activities.

The DSB Rehabilitation Program Specialist meets periodically with the CRP's personnel to provide assistance relative to standards compliance, fiscal accountability, quality of service, individual referrals, and the planning of program services for DSB individuals as identified in this contract.

## **Section (f) Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services**

(f) Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services. Describe the designated State agency's efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.

## **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

The North Carolina Division of Vocational Services (DVRS) is developing a cooperative agreement with both NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services (DMHDDSAS) and NC Division of Medical Assistance (DMA) to ensure that individuals with the most significant disabilities have equal access to vocational rehabilitation and best practice employment services. The relationship among the divisions continues to improve on the mental health side and has been enhanced over the past several years through changes in personnel at DMHDDSA as well as a change in their focus towards a recovery oriented system of care which incorporates employment as a goal for consumers. For individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, DMHDDSAS has had a total changeover in staff during the past six months; therefore, the working relationship with DMHDDSAS staff is under development and ongoing.

The NC Department of Health and Human Services reached an agreement with the US Department of Justice to address the needs of persons with severe mental illness living in adult care homes or were at risk of residing in an adult care home. This agreement became known as Transitions to Community Living Initiative (TCLI). TCLI resolves to address the needs of those who would like to live independently within their community versus an institutional setting by utilizing evidence based practices. DVRS, DMHDDSA, and DMA are partnering to implement the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment in this state. In 2012 DMHDDSAS received a four year grant from Dartmouth Supported Employment Center to implement IPS SE. A fifth research site was added in July 2015. Outside of the five research sites is a statewide network of employment providers who are also partnering with clinical behavioral health providers to implement this program. During federal fiscal year 2015, the state's IPS team leaders attended the annual meeting of the Johnson & Johnson/Dartmouth IPS Learning Community meeting in San Francisco, CA along with representatives from the other 17 states, Alameda County, CA, the District of Columbia, and three international countries to learn more about and discuss implementation of the IPS model of SE. DMHDDSA has also developed a state definition for supported employment and long term vocational support using the IPS model of supported employment as well as increased the hourly rate to meet the needs of the providers. North Carolina's definition calls for the inclusion of Peer Support Services as a mandatory service available to individuals with services paid through funds from the local management entity. Through this definition, if an individual with mental health disabilities chooses DVRS as their supported employment provider and the person is served through the Local Management Entity/Managed Care Organization (LME/MCO) system, they will be able to receive long term vocational supports (LTVS). Each VR office will have a liaison specifically for those CRP agencies providing IPS model of SE.

In response to the statewide need for adequate funding of IPS supported employment services, DVRS developed a milestone-based contract for the pilot sites. Currently, three IPS contracts have been developed. For those providers who have a contract with DVRS to provide supported employment services and also provide IPS model services, the standard supported employment milestones can be accessed until further IPS model contracts are implemented.

Through long term collaborative efforts between DVRS and the community rehabilitation program (CRP) providers developing ways in which consumers can be better served through supported employment, the LME/MCOs, will have a dedicated and experienced system of providers to rely on as this state moves forward in developing and funding employment services within the state.

Another partnership NCDVRS has with DMHDDSA is educating the LME/MCO, VR field staff, and IPS contracted providers concerning the IPS model of supported employment (SE) Representatives from both DVRS and DMHDDSA are assisting with education and collaboration among all entities to help with implementation throughout the state. LME/MCO systems have increased the number of contracted SE providers as this model becomes more familiar and systems change to include this model.

The established CRP-DVRS steering committee continues to review the provision of supported employment services in North Carolina to ensure that funding is optimally utilized so that adequate funding will be available for ongoing extended services. The steering committee continues to address the issues that surround long term support funding such as inconsistencies in the levels of disability-type funding and shortages as well as looks at other best practices that can be incorporated into the NC service delivery system. Further, DVRS partnered with DMHDDSA to utilize the expertise of national experts through the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) a project funded through the NC DD Council. The SELN provides technical assistance to implement best practices for employment and systems change where necessary to maximize resources for services. The North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities will suspend its funding of the SELN at the end of this federal fiscal year. Efforts by DVRS and DMHDDSA to find alternate funding are being explored. Most recently, NCDVRS has partnered with DMHDDSA and DMA on a workgroup through the Employment First Leadership State Mentoring Program with the mission of developing ways to infuse integrated employment into Medicaid Waivers and State Plan Medicaid Options. This is a national effort through the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) to promote the alignment of policies, regulatory guidance, and reimbursement structures to commit to integrated employment as the priority option with respect to the use of publicly financed day and employment services to youth and adults with significant disabilities.



NC DMHDDSAS has partnered with DVRS to implement an ODEP grant for technical assistance. The goals of this grant was to assist NC in establishing an employment first policy, implement a plan for employer engagement, and develop a unified workforce plan. Executive leadership from DVRS met with other executive leaders from DMHDDSAS, DMA, Commerce, Community College, and Public Instructions to develop the initial objectives and plan for an employment first initiative. DVRS mounted the employer engagement work group that focused on the use of technology, specifically iPads to address barriers to employment. A national subject matter expert met with select DVR and CRP staff who learned to use the iPad and related apps as well as how to speak with employers on meeting their business needs.

The DVRS Program Specialist for Statewide Community Rehabilitation Programs and six (6) Regional Community Rehabilitation Specialists provide oversight for CRP's to verify that supported employment services provided by the Division will include a transition period in which extended services will be provided jointly by DVRS to assess the individual's performance within their job choice and their individual adjustment and success in their position. This time allows any observed issues to be resolved and an extension of the stabilization phase if necessary.

The continued growth of the statewide network of supported employment service providers has resulted from collaboration between the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and entities such as the North Carolina Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, the North Carolina International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services, the NC Developmental Disabilities Council and the Mental Health Consumers' Organization. In addition, the North Carolina Association for Persons Supporting Employment First (NCAPSE) provides a forum for focusing on supported employment standards and expanded choices for individuals with the most significant disabilities in the state.

The North Carolina Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (NCARF) and the North Carolina Association for People Supporting Employment First (NCAPSE) have been heavily involved in the continued development of supported employment services, specifically for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities. DVRS, NCARF, and NCAPSE have collaborated on training events and the development of new supported employment programs across the state as well as new service models. Community rehabilitation programs, which include facility-based and free-standing programs, provide the majority of supported employment services for persons with the most significant disabilities. New community-based options are expanding through collaboration with the community college system, the Post-Secondary Education Alliance, DMHDDSA, and with the addition of contracting private providers. Brain Injury Support Services continue to operate within the state in Goldsboro, Greenville, Winston Salem, Raleigh, and Charlotte areas with an interest in expanding to underserved areas of the state. DVRS has recently released a Request for Applications to solicit proposals

from providers to provide brain injury services, particularly in areas of the state that are underserved. Selected providers are in negotiations to modify existing models for brain injury services with DVRS and will add at least one additional location for the next federal fiscal year that is currently not served. In addition, transitional employment continues to be an option for psychological rehabilitation (PSR) programs to provide if the PSR program is certified through the International Center for Clubhouse Development (ICCD). Options are being explored to expand the transitional employment service to community rehabilitation programs that do not have ICCD certification.

The North Carolina Developmental Disabilities Council has sponsored funding for several new initiatives entitled *Reaching for the Summit of Success*, *Emergency Preparedness for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, and *Learning and Earning After High School*, all of which the DVRS will or has been a collaborative partner. The NC Developmental Disabilities Council awarded the Summit of Success grant to the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI), University of Massachusetts to expand employment opportunities around the state and incorporate stakeholders' input through regional summits. Summits have been held in Charlotte, Raleigh and Wilmington in 2014, and a conference is in the final planning stages. Additionally, the North Carolina Developmental Disabilities Council has created a workgroup entitled the Stakeholders Employment Group (SEG) which enlist persons with disabilities to take part in planning and development of employment initiatives. The Employment and Program Development Section represents the Division at the Council with full membership and is engaged in committee work dealing with community capacity building around employment initiatives funded by or in development for funding by the Council.

Finally, the DVRS Employment and Program Development Section has continued to represent DVRS with active membership in several statewide advisory boards, including on the NC Brain Injury Statewide Advisory Council and the Mental Health Planning Council. Established through legislative mandate in the 2003 General Assembly, the NC Brain Injury Advisory Council's mission is to review the current definition of traumatic brain injuries, promote interagency collaboration among state agencies serving this population, study the needs of persons with traumatic brain injuries and their families, make recommendations regarding a comprehensive service system for this population, and promote and implement injury prevention strategies across the state. The Mental Health Planning Council meets quarterly to review the annual Mental Health Block Grant Plan and to submit to the state any recommendations of the Council for modifications to the plans. The Planning Council also serves as an advocate for adults with a serious mental illness, children with a severe emotional disturbance, and other individuals with mental illnesses or emotional problems; and monitors, reviews, and evaluates the adequacy of mental health services within the state.

In addition, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation represents the agency on the "Governor's Working Group on Service Members, Veterans, and their Families," which is a collaborative monthly meeting that serves as a resource clearinghouse for addressing issues of returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan and other service members. Outreach efforts between DVRS, the Veterans Administration, and other military operations have occurred to ensure that veterans and their family members are aware of services available to them through the DVRS.

An agreement between the DVRS and Veterans Administration's Vocational Rehabilitation Program was implemented in late 2014, which is intended to maximize mutual services for Veterans and ensure a more streamlined referrals process between the two agencies.

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

The Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) utilizes an outcome based method of purchasing supported employment services from private non-profit community rehabilitation programs (CRP) for eligible individuals who are determined to be most significantly disabled and are in need of supported employment. The CRP must meet three requirements:

- (1) the CRP must be certified by a nationally recognized certification program such as Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), Council on Accreditation (COA), or Council on Quality Leadership (CQL);
- (2) the CRP must be a vendor of the state; and
- (3) the CRP must be willing to accept DSB's milestone payment system.

There are five milestones and two incentives throughout the entire supported employment process. The current milestones and payments are as follows:

#### *Milestone 1: Assessment and Employment Plan*

Completion: The eligible individual has completed a situation assessment, and an Employment Plan has been developed to identify the strategies to be used to assist the individual in reaching their goal of employment. Payment rate of \$500.00 is paid.

#### *Milestone 2: Job Development Services*

Completion: The individual has completed applications with 10 different employers and three interviews with confirming documentation to referring VR counselor. If the individual is placed on a job prior to completing 10 applications and three interviews, the milestone is considered to be completed and payment can be made. Payment rate of \$500 is paid.

### *Milestone 3: Job Placement Services*

Completion: The eligible individual is placed on a job and has worked for 14 business days with confirming documentation to the VR counselor of placement and progress. (Business day is a day in which the individual has actually worked on the job.) Payment rate is \$3,800.

*Incentive 1:* The individual is placed on a job by the CRP staff in 90 days or less from the date the individual begins the situational assessment. The incentive payment rate is \$200. This can only be paid once per case.

### *Milestone 4: Stabilization*

Completion: The individual has learned the tasks of the job and has become comfortable with the work environment and coworkers. The job coach is spending no more than a weekly visit to the job site. The individual, VR Counselor, and Job Coach including feedback from the employer, all agree the individual has stabilized in the job. Payment rate is \$3,800

### *Milestone 5: Successful Employment Outcome (Status 26 Closure)*

Completion: The eligible individual is considered successfully working without provision of substantial services for at least 90 days from the date of stabilization. Payment rate is \$1,200

*Incentive 2:* The employer provides health insurance coverage at little or no cost to the individual, and the individual is eligible to be covered at the time of case closure. The incentive payment rate is \$200.

Total payment for each successfully completed placement is currently \$10,200.

The Community Rehabilitation Program provides documentation in the form of a record of service hours provided and case notes from the job coaches to the DSB VR Counselors with each invoice for payment of the milestones. The DSB VR counselor and individual must agree the milestone is met before payment is made. DSB continues to contract for extended services and currently has agreements with CRPs to provide this important service. These services are paid through state funds without use of Title VI funding.

## **Section (g) Coordination with Employers**

(g) Coordination with Employers. Describe how the designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:

- (1) VR services; and
- (2) transition services, including pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities.

### *Coordination with Employers: General Overview*

DVRS currently utilizes a dual customer approach by providing services to both businesses and individuals with disabilities. The Division emphasizes the definition and marketing of business services to ensure the dual customer approach is recognized and implemented. Business services include recruitment, hiring, consultation on Section 503 compliance, sensitivity/diversity training, accessibility consultation, internships, On-the-Job Training (OJT), education on tax incentives, and follow-up and job retention services. NC DVR continues to market business services by employing 67 business relations representatives (BRR) that serve as employment specialists across the state. These individuals are often have education and experience in a business-related field, such as human resources and marketing, so that the Division is equipped with personnel who understand the needs of employers. In addition to providing individualized job seeker services, the business relations representatives connect with local industry through participation in networking events and working relationships with workforce system partners. The performance of business relations representatives is measured, in part, by assessing relationships with business as evidenced by direct and indirect placements of eligible jobseekers with disabilities. DVRS believes that relationships with employers is the essence of creating positive connections between jobseekers and business, and that providing follow-up and technical assistance to business fosters these relationships so that they can have a sustainable impact on the supporting individuals with disabilities in finding, maintaining, and advancing in employment.

### *(1) Provision of VR Services through Coordination with Employers*

DVRS services to adults intersects with business services in the areas of vocational evaluation and career development, job seeker preparation, and job development and job placement of individuals with disabilities who are ready to work. DVRS staff continue to be trained in the dual customer approach and employment outcomes to identify these intersection points between the VR services that DVRS provides to

jobseekers and those services provided to employers. The unique role of the business relations representatives highlights this intersection well.

DVRS staff plan to expand the role of employers in vocational evaluation and career development services. DVRS will be enhancing policies around internships and on-the-job training (OJT) services so that the service procedures are consistent with employer practices while still preparing the individual for competitive employment. DVRS plans to work towards a service definition that is complementary to other internship and OJT programs available in the state through our workforce system partners.

DVRS staff, including business relations representatives, will continue to develop relationships with business based on the individual placement needs of eligible individuals with disabilities who are placement-ready. Employers will be engaged in the individual preparation of job seekers with disabilities by involving them in Employment Marking Skills training classes as well as Job Clubs. Employers participate in job interview preparation of job seekers in addition to information-sharing with job seekers about employer expectations in general and within their specific industry.

DVRS plans to increase the quantity and improve the quality of business partnerships in the future with the expectation that an increased number and depth in business relationships will result in increased opportunities to assist individuals with disabilities with vocational evaluation and career development, job seeker preparation, and job development and job placement. We plan to identify methods for capturing information on employment relationships within our case management system in order to map out the presence of business partnerships and identify opportunities for growth and means for leveraging peer-to-peer marketing of VR business services.

## *(2) Provision of Transition Services through Coordination with Employers*

While youth and students with disabilities have access to the same VR services as adults, there are some VR services reserved for or targeted to transition-aged youth for the purposes of assisting them with leaving high school and preparing for competitive employment. The Division plans to focus on program development in the coming year in order to meet the 15% required spending allocation for Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) to students with disabilities. A number of areas of program development are focused on increased engagement with employers in order to implement PETS. These include: summer internships for students and youth with disabilities including on-the-job supports, increased utilization of OJT for students and youth, and increasing the number of Project Search © sites.

DVRS plans to enhance its current internship policies to expand the service to a larger group of students with disabilities, including possibly, those who are college-bound or currently enrolled in college training. The goal is to create enriching work experiences

for students that expose them to work options, allow them to develop high expectations around their capacity for competitive employment, and build a resume that will enable young people with disabilities to compete for quality jobs. DVRS plans to also enhance internship opportunities for individuals with disabilities by developing employer-based internship programs with businesses who recognize the value of building up workers. Internship opportunities for youth will be short-term, occur in conjunction with the student's educational requirements or during the student's school breaks, and may involve paid training and engage internship training supports such as job coaching.

DVRS will work on enhancing OJT utilization for students and youth with disabilities as well by engaging business in the development of young talent. DVRS plans to streamline OJT processes, revise policies so that they are complementary to similar OJT programs, and improve marketing and tracking materials and processes so that the materials are engaging to both student/youth participants and potential business as well as easy to complete and accessible.

DVRS will continue to explore unique business partnerships that benefit the unique training and recruitment needs of students and youth with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities. DVRS plans to continue partnering on Project Search © sites where there is a need and willingness by community partners. This model places business in the middle of the training and employment of young people by hosting student interns at the business and seeking placement opportunities within the business where they may exist. Project Search © host businesses can not only support the students enrolled in projects on their site, but can also be business advocates for people with disabilities in their industries.

DVRS will continue to explore unique training, career development, and placement opportunities with NC businesses that may result from greater collaborations with the NC Department of Public Instruction, local education agencies, the NC Community Colleges System, and Title I youth services providers.

Similarly, the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) VR Employment Services Specialist, VR Counselors and Business Service Representatives will reach out to employers in their geographic areas and statewide to make contact on behalf of the agency to ensure that area employers are aware of what DSB-VR has to offer regarding their employment needs. They will offer general information on DSB Services including opportunities for internships and job shadowing experiences, the Supported Employment Program, potential employees so that they may represent, disability sensitivity training available and benefits to employers that hire those with disabilities.

The DSB VR Employment Services Specialist, VR Transition Counselors and Community Employment Specialists will also communicate with employers regarding the expansive program DSB offers its students and youth with disabilities. They will offer general information on DSB Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) and Youth Services

including opportunities for work-based learning experiences, the Supported Employment Program, potential employees that we may represent, disability sensitivity training available and benefits to employers that hire those with disabilities.

## **Section (h) Interagency Cooperation**

(h) Interagency Cooperation. Describe how the designated State unit will collaborate with the State agency responsible for administering each of the following programs to develop opportunities for competitive integrated employment, to the greatest extent practicable:

- (1) the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act;
- (2) the State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities; and
- (3) the State agency responsible for providing mental health services.

## **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

The North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) is partnering with the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services (DMHDDSAS) and other divisions and departments in developing competitive, integrated employment opportunities by collaboration efforts with the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) grant. Subject matter experts in policy, technology and other areas were availed to DVRS and DMHDDSAS to explore employer engagement tactics as well as policy development and workforce development.

The ODEP grant was for one year, ending FFY 2016. DMHDDSAS has applied for an extension of this grant so further work can be done on these three areas. DVRS collaborated with the North Carolina Assistive Technology Program (NCATP) to purchase iPads to train DVRS and community rehabilitation program (CRP) field staff in the use of technology to overcome specific barriers to employment. Staff learned different software applications (apps) as well as different ways to communicate to employers during job development. A team member from the Employment and Program Development Section will present at the National TASH Conference in Portland, Oregon in December 2015 where NC's project with the iPads will be highlighted.

The NC Council on Developmental Disabilities (NCCDD) recently decided not to renew funding for membership to the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN); therefore efforts are ongoing at this time to attempt to secure funding from within partnering divisions. The SELN has provided technical assistance with the recent



planning and development of NC's waiver amendments as well as conducting on-site system reviews for development of NC's collaborative employment plan. Additionally, they have been working with the division in planning of referral protocol for waiver recipients from improving Local Management Entity/Managed Care Organizations (LME/MCO).

DVRS is implementing a new milestone contract for traumatic brain injuries beginning October 1, 2015 that will offer services in Charlotte, Winston-Salem, Raleigh, Greenville, and Wilmington. DVRS will re-issue another Request for Applications (RFA) to provide brain injury services in early 2016 in order to prepare new contracts by October 1, 2016.

Staff from the Employment and Program Development Section continues to represent DVRS at the Governor's Working Group on Veterans, Service Members and their Families. DVRS is actively engaged with other resource groups to promote DVRS as a resource for veterans and service members and their families.

DVRS is also partnering with DMHDDSAS in implementing individual placement and support supported employment (IPS SE) throughout the state. Currently, there are 31 IPS SE programs throughout the state. DVRS offers supported employment contracts to many of the providers and offers them a way to become a supported employment vendor. DVRS also works alongside DMHDDSAS staff to conduct onsite fidelity reviews of the IPS SE programs, training of CRP and VR field staff, statewide IPS learning collaborative, provider steering committees, monthly calls with Dartmouth Supported Employment Center, as well as the annual IPS SE Dartmouth Learning Collaborative. DVRS also works with DMHDDSAS to inform providers and beneficiaries on the impact of employment on federal and state benefits.

## **Division of Services for the Blind**

The Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) is making every effort to collaborate with agencies within DHHS including our sister agencies, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRs) and Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DSDHH). DSB and DVRS have jointly purchased and developed a customized version of the Libera System 7 Electronic Case Management System, which has greatly increased DSB reporting and monitoring capabilities while also enabling DSB to better serve VR program clients on an everyday basis. With DSDHH, DSB has continued collaboration on a grant-funded effort to deliver state of the art assistive technology equipment and assistive technology training to those that are Deaf-Blind. In combination with these efforts, we have reached out to NCTracks, the recently developed multi-payer Medicaid Management Information System for North Carolina, to

make sure that DSB is sponsoring all approved medical cost services at the appropriate pricing tier. This has taken a combined effort with DVRS, the Controller's Office, Information Technology Services and the NCTracks team to make sure this information is shared accurately and is up to date at all times.

DSB has also reached out to the NC Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services to begin discussions regarding how our agencies might work together to better serve the needs of North Carolinians with multiple disabilities.

## **Section (i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development**

- (i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development. Describe the designated State agency's procedures and activities to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit, including the following:
  - (1) Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development
    - (A) Qualified Personnel Needs. Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:
      - (i) the number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;
      - (ii) the number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and
      - (iii) projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the State agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.
    - (B) Personnel Development. Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:
      - (i) a list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;
      - (ii) the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and

- (iii) the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.
- (2) *Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel.* Describe the development and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated State unit and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.
- (3) *Personnel Standards.* Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:
  - (A) standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and
  - (B) the establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.
- (4) *Staff Development.* Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section 101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:
  - (A) a system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated State unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and
  - (B) procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.
- (5) *Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs.* Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

- (6) *Coordination of Personnel Development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.* As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

## **1. Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development**

- (A) Qualified Personnel Needs. Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:
- (i) the number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;
  - (ii) the number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and
  - (iii) projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the State agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Combined Response**

The North Carolina Divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Services for the Blind utilizes a personnel system called Building Enterprise Access for North Carolina's Core Operations (BEACON). Reports pertaining to the State Plan are customized to provide updated information. This database includes information on the specific degree and progress toward meeting those requirements.

The table below lists all DVRS Counselors, and staff in support of these Counselors. An analysis of these 658 positions was completed, with respect to current vacancies and the projected vacancy rate over the next 5 years. DVRS experienced a 16% turnover in the Rehabilitation Counselor I positions and a 10% turnover rate in Rehabilitation Counselor II positions. The tables immediately below show an average for the past 3 years of actual data and the total number of expected vacancies based on the number of actual vacancies since April 2008.

**Table x. Rehabilitation Counselor Positions and Vacancies**

Job Title	Total positions	4/1/11-3/31/12 Vacancies	4/1/12-3/31/13 Vacancies	4/1/13-3/31/14 Vacancies	Average 3 Year Rate	Total Expected Vacancies for 5 years*
Rehabilitation Counselor I	200	28	30	29	29	147
Rehabilitation Counselor II	113	7	11	18	12	61

\* Total expected vacancies are projected from the actual number of vacancies from 4/2009 – 3/2014.

**Table x. Rehabilitation Services Positions and Vacancies**

Job Title	Total Positions	Current Vacancies	Total Projected Vacancies Over the Next 5 Years*
Rehabilitation Counselor I	200	1	137
Rehabilitation Counselor II	113	0	48
Counselor-in-Charge	59	1	18
Rehabilitation Administrative Counselor I	3	0	0
Rehabilitation Administrative Counselor II	14	0	1
Rehabilitation Administrative Counselor III	14	1	1
Vocational Evaluator II	42	1	27
Human Resources Placement Specialist	68	0	32
Human Services Coordinator	26	0	7
Rehabilitation Casework Technician	114	5	39

\* Total expected vacancies are projected from the actual number of vacancies from 4/2009 – 3/2014.

DSB's vocational rehabilitation (VR) program served 3,994 individuals over the past year, and the number served is projected to change in the upcoming years with continued outreach efforts being made with the Hispanic/Latino populations. The independent living rehabilitation (ILR) program served 1,486 individuals during the past year. It is determined that, based on these current numbers of individuals served, DSB has adequate qualified rehabilitation staff positions.

Positions within DSB that fall under CSPD requirements are 32 VR counselors, 15 ILR counselors, 1 vocational evaluator, 4 VR area supervisors, 3 VR district supervisors for a total of 55 personnel required to serve these numbers of individuals. If vacancies occur in these positions, applicants are recruited that will meet the agency's definition of "qualified rehabilitation counselor". Turnover rate for VR counselor I positions has averaged about 26.087% while the turnover rate for VR counselor II positions has averaged about 7.692%. Based on the turnover rate and current positions, including the number of individuals who are approaching retirement age, it is anticipated that a total of 15 new VR and ILR counselors will be needed during the next year. This will result in the potential for recruitment of 45 new individuals over a 3 year period. It must be recognized that some of these vacancies are created by promotion into administrative roles in the agency that are not counted in the 54 counselor positions. Other administrative positions are anticipated to become open due to retirements over the next 5 years, creating openings for advancement of identified positions.

DSB has developed a system to analyze and record the educational background of rehabilitation counselors as they are hired. This system also tracks the progress of current rehabilitation counselors who are working towards compliance with CSPD requirements such as those hired with related degrees that only need 1 or 2 courses.

The breakdown of education levels for the 55 DSB positions that were subject to CSPD requirements is as follows:

- 34 with Master Degrees in Rehabilitation or Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC)
- 16 with Master Degrees in closely related fields that are considered a "qualified rehabilitation counselor" by CSPD standards
- 6 vacancies

Currently, 100% of the 50 currently employed VR Staff meet the education standards for qualified rehabilitation counselor. Individuals who will meet the definition of "qualified rehabilitation counselor" are being recruited for all current vacancies and are hired whenever possible. DSB utilizes 18 paraprofessionals in the VR program. The breakdown is as follows: 2 rehabilitation casework assistants, 2 rehabilitation casework technicians, 7 human services placement specialists, and 7

community employment specialists. At present we have enough paraprofessionals to meet the number of eligible individuals being served. It is anticipated DSB will need 10 additional paraprofessionals in the next 5 years as numbers served increase and due to turnover.

The agency currently has 21 staff members with 30 years or more and 16 staff members with 25 years to 30 years for a total of 37 staff that could retire in the next year. Presently, DSB has the following vacancies:

**Table x. DSB Rehabilitation Services Positions and Vacancies**

Job Title	Total positions	Current vacancies	Projected vacancies over the next 5 years
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors	30	4	28
Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselors	16	2	9
Vocational Evaluator	1	0	0
District Supervisors	3	1	0
Counselor-In-Charge	3	0	0

- (B) Personnel Development. Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:
- (i) a list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;
  - (ii) the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and
  - (iii) the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Response**

DVRS and DSB work closely with all of North Carolina's Rehabilitation Counseling university programs of study through advisory board participation, internships, the Recruitment and Retention Committee, and partnerships in conferences and trainings. The chart below includes information obtained from each Rehabilitation Counseling university program, as well as from the Staff Development section's database.

**Table x. Institutions and Type of Program, Students Enrolled in the Program, Total Number of Students Graduating During Prior Year with Certification or Certification for Licensure, and Number Employed by VR & Their Corresponding Personnel Categories**

	<b>Students Enrolled</b>	<b>Total Graduates from prior year w/ credentials</b>	<b>DVRS Hired/ Personnel Category</b>
NC A & T Technical State Univ. - Human Resources Rehab Counseling Master's Program.	109	7	2
East Carolina University-Rehab. Counseling Master's Program	29	0	2
East Carolina University-Vocational Evaluation Master's Program	2	0	2
East Carolina University Substance Abuse Counseling Program	41	27	0
Winston Salem State University - Rehabilitation Counseling Master's Program	62	16	3
University of NC-Chapel Hill -Rehab. Counseling & Psychology Master's Program	40	14	1
<b>Total</b>	263	64	10



**Table x. Institutions and DVRS Employees Enrolled, Sponsored by DVRS and/or RSA, Graduates Sponsored by DVRS and/or RSA and Graduates from the Previous Year**

<b>Institutions</b>	<b>Students enrolled</b>	<b>Employees sponsored by DVRS and/or RSA</b>	<b>Graduates sponsored by DVRS and/or RSA</b>	<b>Graduates from the previous year</b>
NC Agricultural & Technical State University	2	1	1	0
East Carolina University	1	1	1	1
Winston-Salem State University	1	1	0	3
UNC at Chapel Hill	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	4	3	2	4

DSB has developed a relationship with four North Carolina universities who currently offer graduate degrees in rehabilitation counseling studies. These include East Carolina University (ECU), A&T State University, Winston-Salem State University (WSSU), and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). A&T State and the WSSU programs are historically black universities and were established with the assistance of Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) grant and school funding. Stipends and financial aid assistance are offered to candidates in these programs. Classes began in fall, 2003 and continue to this date. Division representatives serve on the steering committee at each university. The universities and DSB plan to continue partnering to provide internships for students as needed. Winston-Salem State University received funding in 2002 to offer a bachelor degree in rehabilitation studies, and coursework continues. The master degree program in rehabilitation studies is designed in coordination with the undergraduate program to encourage these graduates to pursue a master degree. North Carolina A&T State University has used the structure in existing master degree programs in guidance and counseling to build the rehabilitation counseling master degree program. UNC has received an RSA grant to provide a master's degree in psychiatric disabilities and is currently offering four courses as part of their master's program.

**Table x. Institutions and DSB Employees Enrolled, Sponsored by DSB and/or RSA, Graduates Sponsored by DSB and/or RSA and Graduates from the Previous Year**

Institutions	Students enrolled	Employees sponsored by agency and/or RSA	Graduates sponsored by agency and/or RSA	Graduates from the previous year
East Carolina University (ECU)	15	0	0	0
A&T State University	49	0	0	7
Winston-Salem State University	54	2	0	8
University of North Carolina	40	0	0	14

## **2. Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel**

Describe the development and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated State unit and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Combined Response**

DVRS implemented a paid internship program in January of 2005. This program was coordinated from our Staff Development section with the support of management, Human Resources, and counselors across North Carolina. Due to budget restrictions, this program became an unpaid internship program. This change in the program did have impact in the initial involvement of students, but participation is improving overall. The benefit of hiring interns into vacant positions is that we have a sense of the person's strengths and weaknesses prior to being hired. The 24-month probationary period that every new employee undergoes does allow the Division better assess a proper job match. If the person is not successful during this time, the person is released from the job during probationary status. This is not viewed the same as a dismissal. It is considered an extension of the hiring process and not disciplinary action. A majority of our interns hired by DVRS have been from the two Historically Black Universities in our state; NC Agricultural & Technical State University and Winston-Salem State University.

DVRS personnel participate in the university Rehabilitation Counseling program advisory boards within the state. The type of personnel representing DVRS within these advisory boards varies; however the Division is well represented and our role well respected

within these programs. Our partnerships with these institutions are fortified through our staff enrolled in many of these programs, which include the historically black schools. Further, the unit offices are encouraged to participate in partnering local career fairs at the partnering universities and colleges. Marketing displays and brochures have been provided to every unit office so that marketing materials remain available for the unit offices' activities.

A broader perspective on retention includes a comprehensive, timely and effective onboarding/orientation program that is in progress. The Division recognizes that getting off to the right start can make the difference in retaining an employee. A comprehensive overview of the Division—its mission, staff, organizational structure, processes and relevant information—can ensure a good start. The Staff Development section is working with an advisory board that includes different job classifications throughout the agency to structure an onboarding program that will be effective for all levels of employees. The program will not begin with the first day of employment; it will begin as part of the hiring process and will extend throughout the career of each employee. An onboarding program helps a person feel that the agency is prepared to help new employees gain information necessary for their job at the right time. The intent is not to flood a new employee with so much information that it becomes useless. The program will be presented largely in an on-line tutorial or distance learning format, enabling employees to be at different places within the process at one time.

DSB has offered unpaid internship positions for students in their last semester of a master level degree program in rehabilitation counseling. Offering internships educates students about the needs of individuals who are blind or visually impaired and strengthens the pool of candidates for possible employment with DSB.

Nationwide recruitment is now done by posting positions in NeoGov, an Internet Human Resources Application Provider for Government Agencies. NeoGov has eliminated the need for numerous individual contacts to advertise available positions and has expanded the available applicant pool. A section on DSB's website labeled, "Career Opportunities" links browsers to NeoGov listings. Plans have also begun to begin to alert the universities with Rehabilitation Counseling Programs to openings as posted to further encourage qualified applicants.

Among senior management and area supervisors, DSB has 2 staff members with more than 25 years of service and one vacancy. The need for succession planning was identified and steps have been taken through cross-training for all staff and training opportunities for those hoping to lead. DSB utilizes the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services leadership training as a point of entrance for pre-supervisory training. DSB conducts leadership/pre-supervisory training in an effort to begin to identify staff interested in management opportunities.

DSB uses affirmative action to ensure the employment and advancement in employment of qualified individuals with disabilities. On an annual basis, DSB conducts a workforce analysis of its representation of persons with disabilities, of persons of different ethnic groups and of males and females in different personnel classifications and occupational categories. Those classifications and occupational categories in which persons with disabilities and minority groups are under-represented are identified, and goals are established to increase representation in DSB's workforce.

During their first year of employment, all rehabilitation counselors are required to complete developmental training in casework requirements and documentation. The chiefs of rehabilitation and the REA and district rehabilitation supervisors provide this training in small groups to directly address agency policies and procedures for professional casework practices. After 1 year of employment, rehabilitation counselors who meet the standard for qualified Rehabilitation Counselor may request promotion to rehabilitation counselor II. Evaluation procedures for this promotion consist of a written and oral examination of casework policies and procedures, caseload review and audit, and review of contact with caseload eligible individuals to assess quality and satisfaction of services. The Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services administers and reviews all aspects of the examination process. Counselors are also required to participate in a week-long adjustment to blindness training which is organized by the rehabilitation center teacher staff and management to increase knowledge regarding working with those with a visual impairment or blindness.

### **3. Personnel Standards.**

Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:

- A. standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and
- B. the establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

## **Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Combined Response**

While DVRS modeled its counselor personnel standard after the CRCC, DVRS also initiated its own comprehensive standard with more specific listing of degrees that it will accept. Effective October 1, 2008, this standard-related requirement for a Rehabilitation Counselor hire included:

- Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling;
- Master's degree in a closely related field such as Counseling, Social Work, Psychology, Special Education, Communication Disorders, Human Services;
- Current certification as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor or Licensed Professional Counselor;
- Current enrollment in a qualifying master's degree program AND graduation occurs prior to the date of hire.

As of December 21, 2009, all employees in the Rehabilitation Counselor I and Rehabilitation Counselor II roles met the CSPD mandate. DVRS has not at this time changed its policies regarding minimum requirements for the VR counselor position but is investigating whether lowering the educational standard for VR counselors to the minimum credentialing specified in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act is necessary and beneficial to VR clients. Currently, employees that do not meet the minimum education requirements serve in trainee status and not function as a Rehabilitation Counselor, and must progress toward attaining the necessary requirements outlined in a Memorandum of Agreement within the specified timeframe. If the employee does not meet the specified requirements or they are not progressing at an acceptable rate, the employee is separated during their probationary status period.

As of March, 2014, the DVRS had the following number of employees of which all meet DVRS CSPD requirements with the exception of trainees, who are making progress toward an approved Master's degree:

- Rehabilitation Counselor Trainees: 2
- Rehabilitation Counselor I: 200
- Rehabilitation Counselor II: 113
- Counselors-In-Charge: 59

The chart listed below shows the change in the past year in relationship to turnover in the Rehabilitation Counseling positions. The most significant change is noted in the position of Rehabilitation Counselor II. The Division feels this reduction is in relationship to the current budget situation within the state.

**Table x. Change in Rehabilitation Counselor Turnover Rate**

<b>Position</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>Difference</b>
Rehabilitation Counselor I	17%	16%	-1%
Rehabilitation Counselor II	9%	10%	1%

DVRS currently averages around 10 qualified applicants for each vacancy, which is primarily attributable to the current economic climate. This means that recruitment for Rehabilitation Counselor I and Rehabilitation Counselor II positions have not been as challenging as in years past. DVRS does find it more challenging to find individuals prepared to serve a Deaf and Hard of Hearing caseload, but these vacancies have not been impossible to fill.

DSB implemented a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) as established in the 1998 State Plan and as amended in January 1, 1999. This system is based on the 1998 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, its regulations, and technical assistance and guidance from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Changes implemented over past years have resulted in growth of the number of the agency's rehabilitation counselors who meet CSPD education requirements. Currently, 100% of DSB Rehabilitation Counselors meet CSPD requirements.

The requirements of education and experience for Rehabilitation Counselor I positions were developed by DSB in conjunction with the Office of State Personnel (OSP), the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and RSA. The standard for vocational rehabilitation counselors at DSB is consistent with the national standard as there is no standard in North Carolina for vocational rehabilitation professionals. On October 1, 2008, DSB initiated a more comprehensive standard. For a Rehabilitation Counselor I, this standard will include a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling; a master's degree in a closely related field such as counseling, social work, psychology, and special education; current Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) certification; or current enrollment in a qualifying master degree program AND graduation prior to the date of hire. For an Independent Living Rehabilitation Counselor, the standard will include the same requirements as for a Rehabilitation Counselor I. DSB believes that this more comprehensive standard will assist in recruiting for more difficult-to-fill counselor positions, particularly those positions based in rural areas and those covering several counties which require extensive travel.

The agency will, to the maximum extent possible, hire only those applicants who possess master degrees in rehabilitation counseling or a master degree in a closely related field. Reviews of all transcripts will be conducted by the agency's personnel

department and the rehabilitation program specialist for CSPD. If it is determined that an applicant has a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling or a closely related field but is in need of specific coursework e.g. Counseling Theories and Techniques and (one of the following) Medical Aspects of Disability or Psychosocial/Cultural Aspects of Disability, DSB will assist the applicant in obtaining that coursework in a manner and time frame agreed upon between the agency and employee. The newly hired counselor will be required to be registered for the first class within six (6) months of their hire date. Completion of any needed coursework must be accomplished within two (2) years from their hire date but prior to moving to independent counselor status.

If qualified applicants cannot be found after extensive recruitment, DSB will consider applicants who have a closely related master of counseling degree with an additional requirement to complete courses as they relate to the CSPD requirement.

#### **4. Staff Development**

Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section 101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:

- (a) a system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated State unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and
- (b) procedures for the acquisition and dissemination to designated state unit professionals and paraprofessionals significant knowledge from research and other sources.

#### **Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Combined Response**

DVRS continues to put forth a concerted effort to train staff in job development and placement. During, 2015 an additional 82 staff participated in the in a comprehensive Dual Customer Approach training initiative. Training sessions were made available to all new hires without wait lists or alternates. Now that everyone across the state has received the training during the initial Dual Customer Approach training, the number of participants is dropping. That participation reflects the number of new hires. This training provides meaningful techniques to assist all employees that work with a VR Unit Office to assist in the process of developing relationships with employers. The strategy has had great success in increasing successful employment outcomes. The premise is that for job development and placement to be successful, the Division must consider the needs of both the consumer and employer. Additional training opportunities occurred for 60 NC DVRS staff during the past year in relation to job development by attending the 2014 Workforce Development Conference.

DVRS also places emphasis on vocational assessments. This is reflective in its maintenance of 45 Vocational Evaluators and 3 Vocational Evaluation Specialists. As a result, DVRS does not typically utilize contractual services for assessing consumers. We also strive to provide excellent training for those serving in the vocational evaluator positions. Each year, the Staff Development Department supports participating in East Carolina University's Evaluator Summer Institute. However, as of Summer 2012 it was determined that the ECU Vocational Evaluation Program would not be continued. The Human Resources Director, Assistant Human Resources Director and 2 Rehabilitation Specialists (during the medical absence of the Chief of Staff Development), meet with the main instructor of the Summer Institute to develop a program that would provide ongoing education for the current Vocational Evaluators and Vocational Evaluation Specialist. Planning is on-going.

Another professional development program that is available to all VR and IL staff who provide evaluation, Assistive Technology equipment and Assistive Technology services for the consumers they are serving is the NC Assistive Technology Program (NCATP). NCATP has twenty staff serving the state of North Carolina, which includes the Director, Funding Specialist, AT Information and Referral Specialist, Intake Coordinator, 2 Processing Assistants, 4 Speech Language Pathologists( SLP) and 10 Assistive Technology Consultants. The 10 AT Consultants and 4 SLPs provide direct one-on-one services in the AT Centers. Their annual Assistive Technology Expo is regularly attended by Division staff, but was recently canceled 2 years ago due program budget limitations. However, during 2012 the NCATP Expo joined forces with the North Carolina Rehabilitation Association for "*The Great Conference*". The resulting conference was well attended and supported by the North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Feedback from attendees was positive regarding the value of the conference and the collaboration between both organizations.

The 2014 North Carolina Rehabilitation Association Conference and NCATP Expo called "*The Great Conference*" hosted 374 participants and an additional 30 students participating in poster sessions. North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living program staff represented 196 out of 374 of those attending. Staff benefit from the networking and learning that occurs at this annual conference. Various topics such as ethics for rehabilitation staff, effectively serving specialty populations, and assistive technology solution updates are featured at these training events.

DVRS continues the use of the Bulletin Board on its Intranet for the dissemination of information between staff. General information pertaining to conferences, trainings, research, articles, and relevant rehabilitation information is shared there. Different



forums also exist on this Bulletin Board for discussion among staff in specific positions; such as for Counselors, Vocational Evaluators, Business Relations Representatives, etc.

DVRS sponsored the attendance of 419 staff in conferences this past fiscal year. These conferences included the NC Summer and Winter School for Alcohol and Drug Studies, ECU Summer Vocational Evaluator Institute, Autism Society Conference, Spring Transition Conference, NCAPSE Annual Conference, NC Workforce Development Conference, NC Exceptional Children's Conference and the already mentioned, the collaboration of NCRA and NCATP Expo conference called *"The Great Conference"*.

Other Individual training requests included: "Everything You Wanted to Know About Drugs, But Were Afraid to Ask"; "Rehabilitation of Racial and Ethnic Minorities with Behavioral Addictions"; "Vocational Evaluators Work Adjustment Association"; "Substance Abuse & Personality Disorders"; "Mental Health Ethics Training"; "Addictions Training"; "NC Business Leadership Network"; "Navigate"; "Dementia Care"; "Co-Occurring Substance Abuse"; "Clinical Supervision Training"; "Former Offenders: Helping You Help Them"; "Depression and Suicide Among Elderly"; "Women of Color and HIV Community Forum"; "Customer Service Works: Addictions and Criminals"; "Helping and Mentoring"; ARC of North Carolina Conference; Autism-Asperger's Syndrome Training; 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Substance Abuse Services State of the Art; Way 2 Work Summit; NC Division of Career Development and Transition Training, and "Neurobiology and Addition."

"Embracing Performance Management" training was offered to all managers at the Statewide Manager's Meeting in September 2015. Currently, 22 unit offices have participated in the training. Customized trainings included: "Change Leadership"; "Accountability"; "Performance Coaching"; "Best Practices Roundtable Discussions," and "Generations at Work with the Team Approach."

Other initiative trainings that continue to occur yearly are: "Dual Customer Approach/Employment Outcomes Professionals"; "Performance Management for Supervisors and Employees" and six on-line health and safety trainings.

A major training initiative that will implemented this year was "Passport to Productivity" Onboarding program. Onboarding is an ongoing developmental process to acclimate new and transfer employees to NC Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Onboarding is an important strategic program managers can use to establish a positive path early in a new employee's career. NC Vocational Rehabilitation Services is committed to providing new employees with the support and resources during their transition.

New managers receive training in various courses including: "Performance Management Training for Supervisors"; "Equal Employment Opportunity Institute"; "Managing Effective Performance"; "Results-Based Interactions"; "Supporting Leadership Development"; "Leadership Facilitating Change"; "Drug-Free Workplace and Employee Assistance Program," and "Human Resources Skills." Additional attendance for the NC Office of State Personnel's Certified Public Manager's Program was offered for more experienced managers. Additional trainings are provided at the Annual Statewide Manager's Meeting, most recently in September 2015 where the theme was "Embracing Performance Management."

The Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) has an ongoing comprehensive system for personnel development that provides all staff classifications with appropriate job-related training. Staff members complete Learning Request Forms yearly to identify specific training needs. The Program Specialist for Staff Development analyzes the learning requests, and then plans specific training activities to meet the identified needs. As a result of these requests, training has been provided in an array of training events with relevant curriculum and skills acquisition experiences. DSB has developed and presented intensive training sessions this year.

DSB staff attended trainings many of which were developed as in-service trainings included: Administrative Professionals Certificate Training; Assistive Technology; BEAM-System 7 Training- All Staff Statewide; Best Practices for DSB's New Rehabilitation Counselors; Business Service Representative Training; Community Collaboration and Training Forum; CPR Training; CFNC.ORG Training Sessions; DHHS Leadership Training; Employment Opportunities Professional Training; National Equipment Deaf-Blind Training Program; National Transition Conference; New Employee Sensitivity Training; North Carolina Conference on Visual Impairment and Blindness (NCCVIB) in collaboration with Governor Morehead School for the Blind, and the NC Department of Public Instruction; North Carolina Deaf Blind Association Conference; Orientation & Mobility at SOMA Conference; Pre-Supervisory Training; Professional and Personal Development; Rehabilitation Center and Evaluation Unit Annual Training; Spanish Training Courses; Strategic Planning; Teaching Financial Literacy; Workplace Violence Prevention

A library of rehabilitation resources is maintained in the state office. The Staff Development Program Specialist continually reviews available materials for the library, identifies and purchases current information relevant to vocational rehabilitation and to vision-related topics. Areas specifically addressed in the learning requests are targeted in this search of materials. These books and materials are available in regular and adapted format, and can be checked out from the library by any staff member across the state. Equipment is purchased and maintained to enhance training programs, presentations, and small group work.

DSB requires professional skills in customer service and business relationship development to enhance employment opportunities. Training materials are extensively researched and drawn from a rich spectrum of resources, including vocational rehabilitation, sales, customer service, business, marketing, workforce development, job development, SSA, RSA, EEOC, ODEP, ADA National Network, and Technical Assistance and Continuing Education (TACE) Centers. Attention is given to knowledge translation: a process which includes knowledge dissemination of evidence-based and best practices derived from the results of rigorous research. The Program Specialist for Employment Services provides comprehensive training on these subjects to all newly hired VRCs and VR staff responsible for job development and placement. Follow-up training and one-on-one coaching is available to staff not meeting performance objectives.

DSB has maintained the authority granted by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification to provide Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Credits (CRC) for all certified rehabilitation counselors. The agency also has the authority to grant Continuing Educational Units (CEU) by the International Association for Continuing Education and Training (IACET).

DSB partnered with Mississippi State University Research and Training Center Vision Specialist Certificate Program to train staff in the specific area of vision. DSB had one person graduate from this program in August 2012 and nine graduated in 2011. DSB began a Transition Certificate program with Winston-Salem State University and 2 staff began this program, but it has presently been suspended by the University. We are in touch with WSSU and will again offer this opportunity to staff as it presents itself. DSB is also researching additional resources for transition training.

DSB continues to work towards expansion of the availability of additional transition programs that can better prepare students in transition from school to work and develops specialized training in transition services. The Department of Public Instruction's consultant for vision impairment and DSB's specialist for transition services work together to identify areas to establish new programs and to provide consultation for the school systems in transition program development. The program specialist is responsible for maintaining a good relationship with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to ensure continued communication at the state level that will enhance the availability of services to students in their local school systems. DPI's consultant for vision impairment serves on DSB's state rehabilitation council.

## **5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs**

Describe how the designated state unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in the native language of applicants or eligible

individuals who have limited English speaking ability or in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Combined Response**

DVRS counselors have the responsibility for determining the individual's preferred language and providing a qualified foreign language interpreter/translator at the earliest possible opportunity, before or after the initial contact with the Division. This translation service is provided at no cost to the person with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). A specific budget (budget code 1292) is designated solely for the provision of this service. The interpreters/translators for all languages must be qualified and trained with demonstrated proficiency in both English and the native language of the client. The Membership Directory of the Carolina Association of Translators and Interpreters at <http://www.catiweb.org/> is presently used; however, it is not required that all qualified interpreters/translators be listed in this directory.

All fundamental VR and IL forms (44 currently) are available in Spanish for individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). The DVRS public website is also in Spanish for the section regarding VR Services to Consumers.

During federal fiscal year 2015, DVRS employed 14 counselors proficient in American Sign Language with caseloads specifically serving deaf and hard of hearing individuals. There were also 10 technicians, 3 Business Relations Representatives, 2 Human Service Coordinators, a program specialist, and 2 Assistive Technology consultants for the deaf who support these counselors and the consumers being served. Approximately 15 interpreting agencies and over 125 independent licensed interpreters contract with the Division and are paid out of this budget. The Division acknowledges communication as a vitally important aspect of the rehabilitation process from start to culmination and remains committed to the provision of services that enable individuals who have specific communication needs to participate in their rehabilitation program. Further, these interpreting and translation services have been identified as essential for quality and success in the delivery of VR services.

The Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) has personnel and obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability or in appropriate modes of communication with applicants or eligible individuals.

The capability to produce Braille is available in all seven district office locations. Information can also be produced in large print for distribution as needed in the district offices with use of existing computer equipment. Mass production of Braille and large print material is done by the specialized communications unit located at DSB's state office to support DSB's employees who are blind or visually impaired. Information is put on tape for those who prefer this mode of communication by

district office staff. Information is also shared using e-communications (e-mail, disks, etc.), and each office has a computer with speech access for staff who use this mode of communication. DSB has placed the policy and procedures manual on DSB's website. The website currently contains information about all of DSB's programs, frequently used forms, links to resources, the local office locations, and the staff directory.

DSB has a specialized program for persons who have both vision and hearing loss. The program consists of 5 specialists to serve the district offices and a statewide program specialist who manages the activities of this program. Each member of this program is skilled in use of sign language to enhance communication. The consultants work very closely with rehabilitation counselors on all cases where individuals have any degree of both vision and hearing loss. They provide information regarding specialized needs of these individuals, the availability of resources, and the arrangement of appropriate communication. This collaboration ensures the individual has the opportunity for maximum participation in a rehabilitation program of services that will lead to successful employment. DSB maintains a list of approved interpreters and dedicated funding for interpreting services through the resources of the Department of Health and Human Services.

North Carolina has a large Hispanic/Latino population, with an increasing number of Spanish-speaking individuals. DSB has worked with other organizations to provide outreach information about available services. The rehabilitation program handbook and the brochure, "Having Trouble with Your Vision", have been printed in Spanish for distribution. Software has been purchased in several offices that will translate appointment letters and individual plans for employment (IPE) into Spanish. A list of qualified interpreters is maintained in each office, and these can be hired as required to enhance communication. When necessary, all offices have access to a state-contracted service for interpreting services available through use of a telephone. When an applicant or eligible individual meets with a staff member, the Telelanguage service is contacted, and they obtain a language specific interpreter by telephone. Through use of a speakerphone, the interpreter translates the conversations into a language that the individual and staff understand. Initial feedback from use of this program is that it is efficient and constructive to effective communication.

Also, DSB purchased Rosetta Stone-Spanish and made the program available to all staff in the agency. DSB has had 26 staff engage in the program since its inception. However, secondary to technical difficulties with the program, DSB is presently seeking an alternative that will be more accessible to all users.

## **6. Coordination of Personnel Development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act**

As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Combined Response**

North Carolina's Secondary Education and Transition Services team consisting of members from DVRS, NC Department of Public Instruction representatives, parents and university representatives, developed a state transition plan which includes a goal to accomplish a system of personnel development in support of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) and the Rehabilitation Act for collaboration to increase transition services to students with disabilities.

The NC Secondary Education and Transition Services planning team began a planning process during SFY 2011 with the purpose to execute the original transition training objective identified in the state plan. The purpose of the resulting Transition Capacity Building Summit is to replicate the state planning process at the local level which will facilitate training and team building for the local school systems and cooperative VR offices that attend. The training conference will be a combination of lecture sessions and group work activities, centered on building capacity for participating local community level transition teams to implement *transition-focused education*. Each team will be the local school system exceptional children's division transition staff and the cooperative VR office. The planning tool focuses on assisting state teams to review and plan their strategies for increasing capacity within their community. The framework of transition-focused education provides a structure for educational planning that is outcome-oriented and promotes greater involvement and ownership in the decision-making process by key stakeholders, particularly students and their families. The transition capacity building professional development training summit was completed February 24 -25, 2011. The NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) was the major sponsor of local grants to the Local Educational Agency (LEAs) to attend the Transition Training Summit allowing 8 local education agency teams to attend from across the state lead by the school system Exceptional Children's department. The 8 school systems from around the state received a grant to invite and sponsor local partners to participate in the local transition team. The Summit concentrated on Student-Focused Transition Planning through Interagency Collaboration. The 8 school systems selected by DPI were challenged to develop an action plan for improving the provision of transition services systemically in their school system and receive technical assistance as needed from the Exceptional Children's Division (ECD) to enhance and implement the LEAs Continuous Improvement Performance Plans (CIPP). DVRS was instrumental in planning and providing presenters for the summit. The State planning team has a continuous goal to include other LEAs in additional summits. At any point that this

planning summit is not available, serious consideration will be given to the reinstatement of the single-day Interagency Collaboration Sessions in local VR Units for continued collaboration and exchange of needs and services between DVRS and local school systems.

DSB works with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to ensure all students who are blind or visually impaired have access to vocational rehabilitation services while attending public school. DSB has 13 memorandums of agreements with school systems to provide transition programs for their students who are blind or visually impaired. These programs work with students who are blind or visually impaired, the school staff, and the parents or guardians as the student transitions from school to work, and continue working with them until they achieve their employment goals. The specialized programs are located in the following school systems: Cumberland County Schools, Mecklenburg County Schools, Pitt County Schools, Wilson County Schools, Edgecombe County Schools, Wake County Schools, Guilford County Schools, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, New Hanover County Schools, Pender County Schools, Onslow County Schools, Brunswick County Schools, and the Governor Morehead School for the Blind. Each program consists of a Rehabilitation Counselor and a Community Employment Specialist who are trained to work with students during their transition from school to work.

All Rehabilitation Counselors have received training on IDEA. Rehabilitation counselors in the district offices develop relationships with school systems and with teachers who serve students with blindness or visual impairments in their coverage area. They participate as members of the school's individualized education program (IEP) team as a provider of transition services for students who are blind or who are visually impaired. Consultation is provided to all rehabilitation counselors who include students on their caseload. The program specialist and the specialized transition counselors are available to advise counselors in areas such as participation on the IEP team and location of specialized resources for students as they transition from school to work.

DSB provides additional specialized services for students, such as the summer youth programs at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. One program called "SAVVY" (Summer Adjustment to Blindness Vital to Visually Impaired Youth) World Of Work provides career exploration, paid internships with job coaching, interviewing skills and counseling provided by DSB staff. One program "SAVVY" Youth in Transition provides a classroom setting and field trips to develop skills and confidence for greater independence, specific life skills, basic living skills, social development, vocational and study skills and independent living. Another program called "SAVVY" College Prep provides "college survival skills," such as independent study habits and maximum use of any assistive technology.

In addition, DSB often provides Youth Mini Centers in the communities throughout the state in coordination with the vocational rehabilitation transition program staff and the independent living rehabilitation staff for those students who cannot attend one of the Center programs. These programs focus on direct requests of the youth in that area and may include local recreational offerings, activities of daily living instruction, O&M, assistive technology evaluation and training, banking, college tours and much more.

A rehabilitation program specialist is assigned to coordinate transition services to ensure all students have access to DSB's vocational rehabilitation services while in high school. The school systems with transition programs renew their cooperative agreements for funding and the transition program specialist coordinates the involvement of the local DSB staff, the school staff, and DSB's financial officers to ensure these agreements are complete and accurate.

## **Section (j) Statewide Assessment**

### **(j) Statewide Assessment.**

- a. Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the VR services needs of those:
  - i. with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;
  - ii. who are minorities;
  - iii. who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;
  - iv. who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and
  - v. who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.
- b. Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State; and
- c. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

## **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

### **Data Collection for the Needs Assessment**

To address the mandated requirements, the data collection and analysis portion of the DVRS CSNA focused on surveys with consumers and VR staff and other stakeholders. These data were supplemented with data on the demographics of people with disabilities, employment and labor statistics, other components of the North Carolina's Workforce Development System, and community rehabilitation programs.



The survey data presented in this report includes two sets of surveys: one set of surveys was conducted from mid-August through mid-September 2013 specifically for the purpose of the CSNA. These surveys were sent electronically to VR consumers, VR staff members, and also to leaders of consumer advocacy groups and Workforce Development Board Directors, who served as key informants. The self-administered electronic questionnaire was delivered using the NC DHHS online survey data collection tool, called SurveyMax II. The survey responses, which were mostly free-text because the survey consisted mainly of open-ended questions, were first coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys, with the results reviewed a second time for validation.

Other survey data incorporated into the CSNA report were collected for other program development, planning, and evaluation purposes that were applicable to the CSNA. These include (a) the results of our ongoing VR consumer satisfaction surveys and (b) the results from surveys of VR staff and Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) conducted to address the need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs within the state through a change from an hourly-rate fee-for-service payment system to a milestone-based payment system. This section provides an overview of the surveys conducted specifically for the CSNA.

### ***DVRS VR Consumer CSNA Survey***

Approximately 5,000 VR Program consumers with active or recently closed cases and known email addresses received electronic surveys asking them to:

- (a) Identify their most important, second-most important, and third-most important VR needs for getting a job and keeping a job;
- (b) Rate the ability of the VR Program to help them with each of these needs; and
- (c) Let us know what they think the VR Program could do to help with each of these needs.

There were also questions for the VR consumer to let us know whether they were currently working and if there was anything else we could do to help them. In total, 867 VR consumers responded to the survey, of which 684 (79%) provided responses that identified one or more specific needs. The remaining 21% were responses indicating the client didn't know or didn't have any needs, or were off-target in that the response didn't address the question that was asked. The level of participation was comparable to that of the VR consumer satisfaction survey, and similarly self-selection and the ability to access an electronic survey resulted in respondents who were generally somewhat older, were more often women, were more often not of a minority race or ethnicity, and were more often clients with physical disability or chronic medical condition rather than a cognitive or psychosocial disability.

- Individuals of Hispanic or minority racial background accounted 38.5% of survey respondents and 52% of eligible VR consumers served.
- Survey respondents were older, with a median age at application of 43; whereas the median age of all eligible consumers with open VR cases was 34. The proportion of survey respondents who were transition age youth was about 18%, which is less than half that of the population of eligible consumers, which is 38%, and the proportion of respondents ages 55 and older was 19%, or more than double that of the general population of VR consumers, which is about 9%.
- Women with disabilities accounted for 57% of the survey respondents, and 45% of the total population of eligible VR consumers.
- Individuals with a cognitive or psychosocial impairment account for 42% of the survey respondents but 69% of the total population of eligible VR consumers.
- The proportion of respondents with significant or most significant disabilities (86%) was close to that of the total population of eligible VR consumers (84%).

### ***DVRS VR Staff CSNA Survey***

DVRS staff members received electronic surveys consisting of two parts that respectively addressed the objectives of (a) assessing the needs of individuals with disabilities, including those with significant and most significant disabilities, and their need for supported employment services, and (b) the needs of individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program. These sets of questions were intended to meet only two of the 34 CFR §361.29 requirements, although several responses overlapped with the other report requirements in that they addressed the need to collaborate with other Workforce Investment Act agencies and establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs. The survey was presented in two sections. The first part of the survey requested that respondents:

- (a) Identify the most critical, second-most critical, and third-most critical needs toward becoming employed or continuing employment for people with disabilities in North Carolina, and for each:
- (b) Rate how DVRS responds to that need;
- (c) Identify the major gaps/barriers DVRS experiences when fulfilling this need; and
- (d) Recommend a solution for DVRS to overcome these barriers.

The second component of the survey requested that the respondents identify special populations of people with disabilities in North Carolina they considered to be unserved or underserved, the specific VR needs of these populations, and what DVRS can do to increase outreach to these unserved or underserved populations.

Surveys were completed by 370 VR staff members representing all aspects of service provision, including various levels of management, direct service staff, rehabilitation specialists and consultants, and support staff.

**Table x. DVRS Staff Survey Respondents by Role**

<b><i>DVRS Staff Role</i></b>	<b><i>Count</i></b>	<b><i>Percent</i></b>
Managers (Regional Directors, Assistant Regional Directors, Unit Managers)	27	7.3%
Casework Supervisors (Asst. Unit Managers, Counselors in Charge)	33	8.9%
Rehabilitation Counselors (RC-1 and RC-2)	137	37.0%
Rehabilitation Specialists and Consultants*	75	20.3%
Casework Technicians and Assistants	37	10.0%
Administrative Support (Office Assistants and Lead Office Assistants)	45	12.2%
Other VR Staff (State Office and Vocational Facility staff members)	16	4.3%
Total	370	100.0%

\* Includes Rehabilitation Engineers, Vocational Evaluators, Benefits Counselors, Employment Specialists, State Office Program Specialists, CRP Specialists, Quality Development Specialists, Rehabilitation Education Specialists, and the DVRS Small Business Specialist and Medical Consultant.

### ***Advocacy Organization Key Informant Survey***

Electronic surveys were sent to disability advocacy organization leaders with a request to forward to their staff members as they felt appropriate. The survey consisted of two main components that respectively addressed the objectives of assessing the needs of individuals with significant and most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services; and the needs of individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the vocational rehabilitation program. The first part of the survey requested that respondents:

- Identify the most critical, second-most critical, and third-most critical needs toward becoming employed or continuing employment for people with disabilities in North Carolina, and for each:
  - Rate how DVRS responds to that need;
  - Identify the major gaps/barriers DVRS experiences when fulfilling this need; and
  - Recommend a solution for DVRS to overcome these barriers.

The second component of the survey requested that the respondents identify special populations of people with disabilities in North Carolina they considered to be unserved or underserved, the specific VR needs of these populations, and what DVRS can do to increase outreach to these unserved or underserved populations. A total of 22 survey responses were received representing members of the following agencies and organizations, with some members representing more than one:

- Information Technology Accessibility Working Group at NC State University
- North Carolina Psychological Association
- Disability Resource Center

- Disability Rights, North Carolina
- North Carolina Association of Peer Specialists (NCAPS)
- North Carolina Mental Health Consumers' Organization
- National Alliance on Mental Illness, North Carolina
- Cardinal Innovations Healthcare Solutions
- NC DHHS - Division of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse.

Members from these organizations advocate for employment, community involvement, and accessibility on behalf of:

- Individuals who are blind and visually impaired
- Adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Adults with mental illness and substance abuse disorders, and their families
- All people with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities.

### ***Workforce Development Board Director Survey***

Electronic surveys were sent to the Board Directors of each of North Carolina's 23 Local Workforce Development Boards to assess the vocational rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide Workforce Development System (other than the vocational rehabilitation program), as identified by such individuals and personnel assisting such individuals through other components of the statewide Workforce Development System. Five of the 23 Board Directors agreed to serve as key informants by participating in the survey.

The survey instrument was structured similarly to that sent to advocacy organizations in that it consisted of two main components with the first part asking the Board Director to:

- Identify the most critical, second-most critical, and third-most critical needs toward becoming employed or continuing employment for people with disabilities in North Carolina, and for each:
  - Rate how well they thought their component of the NC Workforce Development System responded to that need;
  - Identify the major gaps/barriers the NC Workforce Development System experiences when fulfilling this need; and
  - Identify what their component of the NC Workforce Development System could do to better address these barriers.

The second component of the survey requested that the Board Directors:

- Identify challenges the NC Workforce Development System as a whole faces when fulfilling the needs of people with disabilities;

- Identify what they thought could be done to overcome these challenges; and
- Identify what they thought DVRS and the State Rehabilitation Council could do to help in overcoming these challenges.

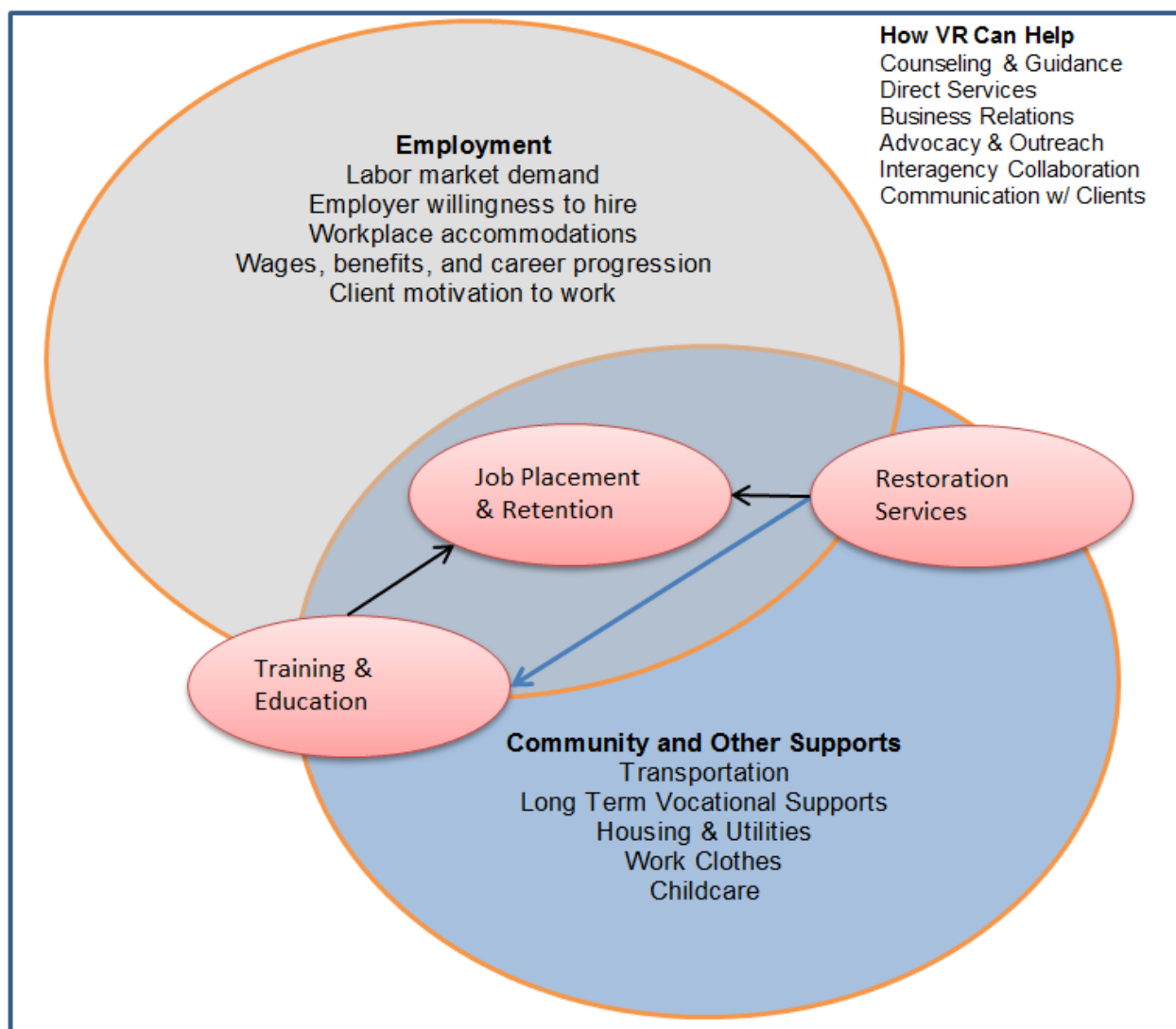
### **Summary of the Findings Regarding the VR Needs of People with Disabilities**

This section provides a summary of the findings regarding the vocational rehabilitation needs of North Carolinians with disabilities. These data were achieved through the surveys with consumers, VR staff, and other stakeholders who served as key informants. The findings from the surveys are supplemented with secondary data from multiple sources. A more detailed account of the survey data collection process and findings is presented in complete report.

The needs of North Carolinians with Disabilities, as ascertained by the survey responses, are visually represented in the following figure, which illustrates that the most critical needs of VR consumers are related to employment services, such as job search and placement assistance, and that physical and mental restoration services and training services needs are often antecedents to job placement and retention. The need for these services is embedded in the context of two overlapping environments:

- A labor market environment consisting of various employment-related factors, including labor market demand-side factors, such as the availability of jobs, wages, benefits, and career progression, which may be influential on supply-side factors, such as the VR Consumer's motivation to work and the type and level of training the VR client will require.
- A supportive environment that provides the needs for various types of support services, most notably transportation, but also assistance with meeting basic needs such as housing and utilities, work clothes, childcare, and other support services. Some of these services can be sponsored through the VR Program, but other community resources may also provide these services until the VR consumer achieves economic stability.

**Figure x.** Summary of VR-Related Needs and How DVRS Can Help Consumers



### Results of the VR Consumer CSNA Survey of Vocational Rehabilitation Needs

The most frequently mentioned needs of individuals with disabilities, as identified by VR consumers, are listed in the table below. Job search and placement assistance, including workplace accommodations and help with job applications and interviewing skills, ranks first as having the most responses, followed by training services; transportation; physical and mental restoration services, including medication and medical supplies and equipment; on-the-job supports, such as peer mentors and job coaches; and other supports, such as help with housing, utilities, childcare, and work clothes and shoes.

**Table x. Major Categories of Need Identified by VR Consumers on the CSNA Survey**

<b>Category of Need*</b>	<b>Total Responses (Total = 684)</b>		<b>Most Critical Need</b>		<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Most Critical Need</b>		<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Most Critical Need</b>	
	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>
Job search & placement assistance	287	42.0%	214	74.6%	50	17.4%	23	8.0%
Training	175	25.6%	128	73.1%	36	20.6%	11	6.3%
Transportation	136	19.9%	76	55.9%	44	32.4%	16	11.8%
Physical and mental restoration, including medication and medical equipment	107	15.6%	65	60.7%	33	30.8%	9	8.4%
On-the-job supports	34	5.0%	17	50.0%	12	35.3%	5	14.7%
Other support services	32	4.7%	13	40.6%	13	40.6%	6	18.8%

\*Multiple needs can be identified from a single open-ended response.

## Results of the VR Staff CSNA Survey of Client Vocational Rehabilitation Needs

The most frequently mentioned needs of individuals with disabilities, as identified by VR staff members, are listed in the table below. Transportation ranks first as having the most responses, followed by employer and community awareness, training services, VR counseling and guidance, including benefits counseling, access to healthcare, including mental healthcare, and the overall labor market and economy, which has disproportionately impacted many rural areas in North Carolina. The number and percent of responses for each category is provided in the table below.

**Table x. Major Categories of Need Identified through the VR Staff CSNA Survey**

<b>Category of Need*</b>	<b>Total Responses (Total = 370)</b>		<b>Most Critical Need</b>		<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Most Critical Need</b>		<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Most Critical Need</b>	
	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>
Transportation	206	55.7%	94	45.6%	67	32.5%	45	21.8%
Employer / community education & awareness	169	45.7%	83	49.1%	52	30.8%	34	20.1%
Training services	95	25.7%	36	37.9%	33	34.7%	26	27.4%
VR counseling & guidance	94	25.4%	49	52.1%	14	14.9%	31	33.0%
Access to healthcare	91	24.6%	25	27.5%	36	39.6%	30	33.0%
Labor market & economy	89	24.1%	23	25.8%	48	53.9%	18	20.2%

\*Multiple needs can be identified from a single open-ended response.

### Transportation Services

This category was the most frequently mentioned, with 206 (56%) of the 370 VR staff members indicating this need. Of the 206 responses identifying this need, 94 (45.6%) identified it as the most critical need, 67 (32.5%) identified it as the second most

critical, and 45 (21.9%) as the third most critical VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities. Responses in this category address the need for transportation, especially with regard to accessibility and lack of public transportation availability in rural areas and when work shifts are not regular, and also with regard to the cost of private transportation, including the costs of maintaining a vehicle and insurance.

**Major service gaps or barriers DVRS experienced when fulfilling this need were:**

- Public transportation services: Lack of funding and no public transportation in rural areas. Many NC cities do not have public transportation available, and those that do, do not serve rural areas. In cities that do have transportation, the system only operates on a fixed schedule and doesn't meet the needs of consumers that have to work weekends or the night shift. Work locations may not be close to bus routes.
- Private transportation services: There is a lack of private providers willing to provide transportation at a reasonable rate, and consumers do not have the money to pay someone to drive them to and from work.
- Personal transportation: Many VR consumers don't have a license and/or vehicles, and have no family member or friend to provide transportation. They have lost their license due to previous substance dependence, cannot obtain a license due to their disabling condition, cannot drive due to their condition, and/or cannot drive due to the side-effects of necessary medications. Some VR consumers who are able to drive cannot afford to because they are on limited income (SSI, SSDI, etc.) or have not had income due to their condition.
- Vehicle modifications: The current policy regarding agency contribution toward the cost of vehicles for modification purposes is the major barrier to someone who needs to purchase a modified vehicle.
- VR policy isn't adjusted for geographical differences: Tighter policy controls on transportation costs/payment which disregard individual geographical needs. When cases are looked at for compliance and fiscal management it is with a critical eye toward this and other types of maintenance expenses which may or may not occur in other geographical or economic conditions/situations.
- VR sponsorship of transportation is a short-term solution: DVRS is not presently set up to provide ongoing transportation services for individuals after they have been employed. Sponsored transportation is meant as a short-term solution.
- VR sponsorship of transportation is a time-consuming process, and sometimes unreliable: Even when we can justify sponsorship of public or private transportation services, often the process is time consuming and the provider unreliable, thus creating a major delay in requested and agreed upon services.

**Recommended solutions** for DVRS to overcome a lack of transportation as a barrier to employment for people with disabilities included:



- Increase vendorships with private transportation companies: Engage in more vendorships with private transportation companies to assist in helping disabled employees get to/from work.
- Promote small business opportunities for consumers: Encourage clients who are interested in small business to invest in transportation to become VR vendors. Help consumers that are able to start their own business in supplying transportation services in those rural areas that are underserved. We could use state vehicles and pay consumers as drivers, and consumers could also be employed to do maintenance and repairs on the cars -- the process could be used for training clients.
- Collaborate with local transit authorities: The local areas will have to develop affordable transportation, so work closely with the local transit authority staff. Partner with local transportation authorities to provide free or reduced fares to people with identified disabilities to and from work, and to provide services at nights and on weekends. Advocate on behalf of people with disabilities regarding the need for accessible transportation. DVRS can serve on a task force or community forum to address concerns pertaining to transportation, and inform their counties of potential grants or express concerns pertaining to transportation for people with disabilities and see how the community can come up with a solution.
- VR Policy Changes: Separate transportation costs for clients from the general 'maintenance' category. This could be a more flexible expense that truly reflects a regional or local need. Make the policies specific and eliminate the gray areas so that they are consistently applied. Increase funding to expand the purchase of vehicles for modification purposes.
- Speed-Up the Process: Reduce time to approve special transportation requests.

### ***The Need for Community and Employer Education and Employer Willingness to Hire and Accommodate Workers with Disabilities***

One of the major themes for this question related to the issue of public and employer perceptions of VR and people with disabilities, and specifically with regard to their willingness to work with our agency and hire our consumers. Of the 370 VR staff members who responded to the survey, 169 (46%) indicated this need. Of these, 83 (49%) identified it as the most critical need, 52 (31%) identified it as the second most critical, and 34 (20%) as the third most critical VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities.

Responses in this category relate to employer attitudes towards people with disabilities, and their willingness to hire people with disabilities, including job creation, job carving and making accommodations. Responses in this category also address larger societal and cultural myths and stereotypes about people with disabilities. VR staff members

identified a need for public awareness and education regarding employment for people with disabilities; business relations; and the dual-customer approach

**Major service gaps or barriers DVRS experiences when fulfilling this need were:**

- Negative perceptions towards people with disabilities: VR staff members wrote that public and employer perceptions of individuals with disabilities were a major barrier. This included VR consumers with an obvious disability who can't get past human resources because they assume that individual can't perform the required functions of the position based on physical appearance. Other reasons included that people just don't see the disabled as normal and feel uncomfortable around them. This barrier of negative attitudes and perceptions is described in terms of *misinformation*, *myths*, *stigma* and *discrimination*, and also *risk* -- that employers feel that it's a risk to hire someone with a disability because the person may become a liability to their business. The issue of risk was said to be more applicable to smaller employers that were resistant to taking chances or making accommodations. The preference for an employee without a disability was also said to relate to higher job competition in areas where unemployment was higher, in which there were many applicants for one job opening, placing our consumers at a considerable disadvantage.
- Limited VR resources for dual customer approach, and employer outreach and education: VR staff members wrote that implementation of the dual customer approach, and other employer outreach and education efforts were limited by VR resources, including limited use of social media. Staff members wrote that the business relations representatives were essential to their efforts, but that their catchment areas were too large, and that they could not do it all themselves. VR staff wrote that they needed more assistance with the employer outreach and did not have enough time to market VR and services to employers as they should. They also wrote they needed more leadership for this function in DVRS, best practices in its implementation, and more effective management and teamwork in many offices to effectively use the resources they have. Currently, there is no outreach plan, unit offices have little or no funds for advertising to employers, and that the materials they do have are out-of-date. This sentiment wasn't across the board, as some staff members noted that some counselors are actively building relationships with employers and educating them, but that it was not being consistently done by everyone.

**Recommended solutions** for DVRS to reduce negative public and employer perceptions and attitudes toward people with disabilities, and increase employers' willingness to hire our consumer included:

- Having an outreach plan and expanding the outreach and disability awareness and education for employers and the community. Recommendations included educating policymakers, and increasing involvement with business associations, chambers of commerce, workforce boards, and other organizations;

- Marketing VR to employers through traditional and newer channels of communication, including social media; and
- Increasing outreach capacity through counselors and business relations representatives, including in-person and electronic networking activities. The means of increasing outreach capacity included paperwork reduction and increasing the number of counselors and casework technicians to reduce caseload size and allow counselors more time for outreach activities, in addition to increasing the number and availability of business relations representatives.

### ***The Need for More Jobs and Higher Paying Jobs in a Changing Economy***

Closely related to the need for employers to be willing to hire individuals with disabilities is the need for a better labor economy, with more job openings, full-time work, and higher wages. Of the 370 VR staff members who responded to the survey, 89 (24%) indicated this need. Of these, 23 (26%) identified it as the most critical need, 48 (54%) identified it as the second most critical, and 18 (20%) as the third most critical VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities.

Responses in this category relate to a lagging economy and shortage of jobs, particularly in rural areas, and that the jobs that are available are often part-time or low-wage positions. The imbalance between labor-market supply and demand allows employers to be more selective in their hiring, often bypassing VR consumers, and especially those with criminal backgrounds.

**Major service gaps or barriers** DVRS experiences when fulfilling this need were related to high unemployment and changes in the types of jobs that are available, which is often unfavorable for VR consumers with work limitation. VR staff members also reported that employers can be more selective in their hiring, and may be resistant to taking the time or assess the costs for job carving, on-the-job training, job coaches, or additional healthcare coverage. A common theme was that many of these factors were due to economic conditions.

**Recommended solutions** for DVRS to increase employment opportunities for our consumers in the face of a declining job market for low-skill workers and workers with employment limitations or who require accommodations:

- Employer incentives and advocacy for workforce development, including employer education on the value of hiring workers with disabilities and incentives, such as subsidized insurance, that would motivate employers to hire VR consumers and tax breaks that would attract new businesses to NC.
- Increased networking, outreach and business relations to make the connections between employers and VR consumers receiving job search assistance and placement services.

### ***The Need for Job Skills Training and Education for VR Consumers***

Of the 370 VR staff members who responded to the survey, 95 (26%) indicated job skills training and education were an unmet need. Of these, 36 (38%) identified it as the most critical need, 33 (35%) identified it as the second most critical, and 26 (27%) as the third most critical VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities.

Responses in this category are specific to vocational or job skills training and academic education, and do not include interpersonal or soft skills training, or employability training on how to self-market and search for jobs, which are included the category for job search and placement assistance.

**Major service gaps or barriers** DVRS experiences when fulfilling this need most generally in terms of:

- Lack of resources: funding, staff, and programs within DVRS to assist individuals with obtaining the necessary skills to transition into employment.
- Procedural barriers, mainly policies on transferrable work skills, the vendor approval process, and the approval process for training services, which was described as “layered.”
- The short-term measure of a successful outcome rather than a focus on career employment.
- Client motivation to participate in training programs.

**Recommended solutions** for DVRS to increase or improve training services included:

- Increase collaboration with community colleges and have a VR representative on campus.
- Expand training programs, including those administered through WorkSource East and WorkSource West.
- Sponsor GED completion for adult high-school dropouts, and provide assistance with mileage to for clients to travel to GED/HSD sites, and also assistance with loan of computer/laptop or assistance with onsite computers at VR offices for consumers to access training.
- Help consumers identify resources for training or companies that are willing to provide training.
- Review vendor approval policies and evaluate the criteria for vendor approval, especially schools or training sites.
- Develop business relationships with employers and provide incentives for on-the-job training and internships.

### ***The Need for Access to Healthcare and Mental Health Services***

Of the 370 VR staff members who responded to the survey, 91 (25%) indicated that access to healthcare and mental health services, including dental care and VR

sponsored restoration was a critical need. Of these, 25 (27%) identified it as the most critical need, 36 (40%) identified it as the second most critical, and 30 (33%) as the third most critical VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities. Responses in this category refer to medical and mental health treatment, including medications and treatment for substance abuse.

**Major service gaps or barriers** DVRS experiences when fulfilling this need most generally in terms of:

- Lack of resources, mainly community resources and the NC mental health system.
- The trend of employers hiring part-time workers to avoid having to provide medical insurance.
- VR policies and focus, which include limitations on the provision of restorative services, although staff members also reported an increased emphasis on placement over restoration.

**Recommended solutions** for DVRS to increase access to healthcare and mental healthcare services:

- VR staff training on restoration policies.
- Tele-psychiatry for lower cost mental health services.
- Advocacy.
- VR staff awareness about companies that assist with prescriptions, grant writing, and the newer processes/eligibility requirements for certain services through social services and local management entities.
- Increased collaboration with providers and the development of new programs.

### ***The Need for Counseling and Guidance, Including Benefits Counseling***

Of the 370 VR staff members who responded to the survey, 94 (25%) indicated that counseling and guidance, including motivational counseling and benefits counseling was one of the three most critical VR-related needs. Of these, 49 (52%) identified it as the most critical need, 14 (15%) identified it as the second most critical, and 31 (33%) as the third most critical VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities. Responses in this category refer to counseling and guidance by our VR counselors, including career counseling with referrals to other appropriate services, and also to the need for benefits counseling and motivational counseling to increase client motivation to return to work. Responses concerning client awareness of available services and willingness to return to work are also included in this category. Client motivation, awareness, self-esteem, cooperation, and work-willingness were most typically addressed as the need, gap or barrier to employment to which increasing VRs capacity for benefits counseling, VR

counseling and guidance, including motivational counseling, and referrals to other appropriate was presented as a solution.

**Major service gaps or barriers** DVRS experiences when fulfilling this need most generally in terms of: (a) consumers' needs for VR services, but lack of motivation to become employed, some of which is driven by disincentives to work, including the potential loss of SSI, SSDI or other public benefits; and (b) the lack of resources, including time, additional counselor positions, and expertise required for better counseling and guidance. The lack of resources was said to be in part due to counselor vacancies, lack of support staff, and attention to non-counseling related activities, such as focusing on meeting performance measures and processing paperwork.

**Recommended solutions** for DVRS to increase its capacity for counseling and guidance and help further motivate consumers to enter or reenter the workforce, particularly those receiving SSI or SSDI benefits included increasing VR counseling capacity through: (a) smaller caseloads; (b) paperwork reduction; (c) a decreased focus on performance measures and increase attention to holistic counseling; (d) hiring additional counselors and support staff; and increasing the quality of VR counselors through training and higher salaries. These were said to attract and retain high quality counselors and allow the counselors more one-on-one time with the consumer to provide counseling and guidance, including motivational counseling. The most frequently mentioned solution for increasing client motivation for our consumers receiving public benefits, such as SSI or SSDI, was to increase benefits counseling services.

### **Results of the Advocacy Key Informant CSNA Survey Regarding VR Needs**

In response to the question of what were the critical needs toward becoming employed or continuing employment for people with disabilities in North Carolina, the major categories of responses were:

#### ***The Need for Employer Willingness to Hire and Retain Workers with Disabilities***

This category had the most frequent responses, with 18 (82%) of 22 advocates indicating this need as the most critical (33%), second most critical (45%), or third most critical (22%) employment-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities. This category includes responses related to employer willingness to address physical and perceived obstacles; disadvantageous job competition between people with and without disabilities, especially in areas or during periods of higher unemployment; and social stigma or negatively biased attitudes towards people with disabilities by employers and peer employees without disabilities, including a response related to the "double whammy" of people with a disability having a criminal background.

#### ***The Need for Job Supports, Including Long-Term Supports***

This category had the second-most frequent number of responses, with 8 (36%) of 22 advocates indicating the need for additional job coaching and job supports, including peer supports was the most critical (62.5%), second most critical (25%), or third most critical (12.5%) VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities.

### ***The Need for Transportation Services***

This category also had the second-most frequent number of responses with 8 (36%) of 22 advocates indicating this need as the most critical (75%), second most critical (12.5%), or third most critical (12.5%) VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities. Responses in this category address the need for transportation, especially with regard to accessibility and lack of public transportation availability in rural areas, and when work shifts are not regular.

### ***The Need for Staff Development and More Empathy for VR Consumers by Providers***

This category was discretely identifiable with 3 (14%) of 22 advocates indicating a need for sensitivity and empathy among service providers, such as clinicians, and particularly with regard to consumers with addiction disorders. There was one response each (33%) as this being most, second most, or third most critical VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities.

### **Workforce Development Board Director Survey of VR Needs for People with Disabilities**

Workforce Development Board Directors were asked to identify the critical needs of people with disabilities in North Carolina toward becoming employed or continuing employment. The major categories of need, the average rating regarding how well the Workforce Development Boards respond to these needs, the barriers they face, and proposed solutions are summarized in the table below.

**Table x. Workforce Development Board Director Key Informant Responses**

<b>VR Need</b>	<b>Rating*</b>	<b>Barriers</b>	<b>Solutions</b>
Client Training and Job Skills Development	3.4	The system doesn't specialize in serving folks with disabilities.	Training for staff in the different types of disabilities.
		Getting employers who allow flexible working schedules.	Continue to market our services to employers.
		Lack of partnerships with Vocational Rehabilitation to serve people with disabilities.	One Stop Center staff can refer customers to VR. Continue to build rapport with our other Workforce partners. Bridge the gap with employers.
		Clients may not be aware of the other services available (WIA).	VR can present information about One Stop Centers (JobLink Career Centers) and WIA programs to customers.
More employers to hire and accommodate people with disabilities	3.0	Lack of funding to educate business on the hidden workforce available.	Continued partnerships with agencies that specialize in providing services for those with disabilities
		Lack of employer knowledge of available accommodations that can be made.	Train our staff, educate employers, and promote hiring of individuals with disabilities to employers.
Transportation and other Support Services	3.3	Insufficient public transportation.	Provide more assistance with transportation besides public transportation.
		Lack of funding for support services.	Provide funding.
		Lack of coordination of services.	Coordinate resources and have a coordinated plan.
Training and resources related to Assistive Technology for One-Stop Centers	3.0	Lack of funding and training.	Have funding to purchase, build infrastructure, and install technology that assist individuals with disabilities

\* Ratings are from the Workforce Development Board's response to these needs on a 5-point scale, with 5 being "excellent." Ratings between 3 and 4 indicate "average."

## **Minorities and Other Underserved Populations of Individuals with Disabilities**

This portion of the CSNA is an assessment of minorities and other populations of North Carolinians with disabilities that identified as unserved or underserved by the VR Program. The first subsection provides a comparison between eligible VR consumers served in federal fiscal year 2013 and the population of North Carolinians with disabilities, as identified through the 2012 American Community Survey (ACS). The second subsection identifies unserved and underserved populations through surveys with VR staff members and advocacy group key informants. The findings of the latter reveal some of the limitations inherent in the ACS data. Specifically, with ACS data, the population of people with mental illness, which was identified as an underserved



population by 76% of VR staff members, is not discernible from the population of people with intellectual disabilities, which, comparatively, was identified as an underserved population by 15% of VR staff members. Based on the wording of the disability questions on the ACS, which do not address interpersonal and behavioral impairments, including difficulty coping, the population of people with behavioral health issues may be significantly underreported in the ACS data.

Another limitation of the ACS data in defining the population frame for VR consumers is that the ACS questionnaire does not include any questions regarding criminal history, which was identified in the CSNA surveys as a key data point in defining barriers to employment and an underserved VR client population. The findings of the CSNA surveys, in this regard, are supported by VR client data: 22% of eligible VR clients eligible for services during the triennial CSNA period have a record of criminal conviction or a recent arrest with charges pending, 18% of eligible VR clients served over the past five years have a prior record with the NC Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice, meaning they were convicted of a violation of North Carolina law, with sentences ranging from probation served in the community to incarceration in one of the state's prison facilities; and 7.5% were on probation or parole at the time they apply for VR services.

### **DVRS and State Disability Demographics from the 2012 ACS**

This section provides comparisons between the NC population of individuals with disabilities, as defined on the 2012 ACS and eligible VR consumers served October 1, 2012 through September 30, 2013. The data from the ACS was obtained via the Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute (Retrieved from [www.disabilitystatistics.org](http://www.disabilitystatistics.org)). The ACS defines four broad categories of disability from a "yes" response to the following questions:

- Hearing Disability (asked of all ages): *Is this person deaf or does he/she have serious difficulty hearing?*
- Visual Disability (asked of all ages): *Is this person blind or does he/she have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?*
- Cognitive Disability (asked of persons ages 5 or older): *Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?*
- Ambulatory Disability (asked of persons ages 5 or older): *Does this person have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?*

Additionally, there are two separate questions that identify self-care and independent living disabilities. The category, *Any Disability*, includes a "yes" response to one or more individual disability types.

In developing comparable categories from the RSA-911 impairment codes, Hearing Disability included impairment codes 03-08; Visual Disability included impairment codes 01, 02, and 08; Cognitive Disability included impairment codes 09 and 17-19; and Ambulatory Disability included impairment codes 13-16. A significant limitation of this crosswalk is that it is somewhat of a forced fit of the RSA-911 impairment data. For example, there are physical impairments caused by chronic medical conditions included in the Ambulatory Disability category that may but do not necessarily cause serious ambulatory limitations, and there are psychosocial and expressive/receptive impairments included in the Cognitive Disability category that may but do not necessarily seriously impair memory, concentration, and decision-making.

### ***Comparison of VR Consumers and the NC Population by Age and Disability***

The following table shows a comparison of the 2013 American Community Survey (ACS) estimated population of North Carolinians with disabilities and eligible VR clients served during federal fiscal year 2013 by age group and disability type, and the percent of the state's population of individuals with disabilities served by the VR Program in federal fiscal year 2013, which is sometimes referred to as a population penetration rate.

In North Carolina, the estimated prevalence of disability increases with age, as was found in the 2010 CSNA. For 16 to 20 year-olds, prevalence is 5.8%, and among people ages 21-64 the prevalence rate is 12.0%. These rates are lower than were reported in the 2010 CSNA, but this is due to changes in the wording of ACS questionnaire items and not a reduction in the actual prevalence of disability.

Among 16-20 year-olds, the population penetration rate is 28.5% overall, and 34.6% for youth with cognitive disabilities, which is a large VR consumer population segment, accounting for 18% of all VR clients. The population penetration rate is less than 1% for youth with visual disabilities, though this may be due to services available through other programs, including the NC DHHS VR Program offered through the Division of Services for the Blind. The penetration rate is 6.5% for youth with hearing disabilities, which may suggest additional efforts could be made to serve this population, although services provided through the North Carolina School for the Deaf, and the NC DHHS Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing may also be available.

In the population of working age adults, ages 21-64, the penetration rate is much lower: 6.9% for any disability, and less than 5% for each of the individual disabilities types except cognitive disabilities, which was 12.2%, when including adults with psychosocial disabilities. Individuals with cognitive and psychosocial disabilities account for nearly 71% of all adult VR consumers. Although the population penetration rate was considerably lower for adults with other types of disabilities, this does not necessarily indicate that these groups are underserved. Excepting CRP services, most other direct cost services sponsored by the North Carolina VR Program are subject to a financial needs test, and so the program is more tailored toward providing CRP services

for individuals with cognitive and psychosocial impairments, and restoration and training to only the subgroup of people with physical and sensory impairments who are financially eligible for such services. Additionally, many people with physical disabilities find jobs for themselves independent of the VR Program. Other factors, such as a criminal history, which is more prevalent among VR consumers with cognitive and psychosocial disabilities, create additional barriers to employment.

**Table x. DVRS VR Consumers and ACS Population Estimates by Age and Disability Type**

Age Group <sup>1</sup>	Disability Type <sup>2</sup>	Estimated Population of North Carolinians with Disabilities (ACS 2013)				NC VR Clients Eligible for Services with Cases in Service, federal fiscal year 2013		Percent of NC Population Served by VR in federal fiscal year 2013
		Prevalence		Count	% Total	Count	% Total	
		Rate	MoE <sup>3</sup>					
Ages 16-20	Any Disability	5.8%	0.65%	39,400	100.0%	11,224	100.0%	28.5%
	Visual	1.1%	3.29%	7,100	18.0%	45	0.4%	0.6%
	Hearing	0.6%	3.29%	3,800	9.6%	248	2.2%	6.5%
	Ambulatory	0.8%	3.29%	5,200	13.2%	1,008	9.0%	19.4%
	Cognitive	4.5%	0.58%	30,500	77.4%	10,543	93.9%	34.6%
Ages 21-64	Any Disability	12.0%	0.31%	680,800	100.0%	47,216	100.0%	6.9%
	Visual	2.3%	0.14%	127,500	18.7%	428	0.9%	0.3%
	Hearing	2.3%	0.15%	130,500	19.2%	2,325	4.9%	1.8%
	Ambulatory	6.7%	0.24%	379,900	55.8%	17,044	36.1%	4.5%
	Cognitive	4.8%	0.21%	273,800	40.2%	33,346	70.6%	12.2%

<sup>1</sup> VR client age on 9/30/2013.

<sup>2</sup> Individuals can have more than one disability type.

<sup>3</sup> Margin of Error (MoE) is a measure of the degree of sampling variability at the 90% confidence level. This means that there is a 90% certainty that the actual value is between the reported rate plus or minus the margin of error. Smaller population estimates are less precise and will have a higher margin of error.

### ***Comparison of DVRS VR Consumers and the NC Population by Minority Background and Disability***

The following table shows a comparison of the 2012 ACS estimated population of North Carolinians with disabilities and eligible VR clients served during federal fiscal year 2013 by minority race and ethnicity, and disability type, and the population penetration rate or percent of the state's population of individuals with disabilities served by the VR Program in federal fiscal year 2013.

In federal fiscal year 2013 about 52% of all eligible VR consumers were of a minority race or ethnicity, and 90% of minorities were Black or African American. The prevalence of disability among African Americans, ages 16-64, is estimated at 13.9%. The penetration rate for the population of African Americans with disabilities is 14.7% for any disability; 27.7% for cognitive disabilities; 7.9% for ambulatory disabilities; and 3.9% for hearing disabilities.

Comparatively, the prevalence of disability among American Indians is the highest at 15.7%, and the penetration rate for this population is lower than for African Americans, with 9.6% for any disability; 16.2% for cognitive disabilities; 5.0% for ambulatory disabilities; and 2.7% for hearing disabilities.

The prevalence rates for Hispanics and Asians are considerably lower than for African Americans and American Indians, at 5% and 3.8%, respectively. The reason for this was explored in the 2010 CSNA, which identified US nativity as a factor associated with higher prevalence of disability. However, although the prevalence rates are low, the penetration rates for these populations are also very low. For Hispanics, the penetration rate is 6.4% for any disability; 11.3% for cognitive disabilities; 4.2% for ambulatory disabilities; and 2.1% for hearing disabilities. For Asians, the penetration rate is 5.1% for any disability; 12.5% for cognitive disabilities; 4.4% for ambulatory disabilities; and 4.6% for hearing disabilities. VR Staff members identified non-English speaking populations, including Hispanics and Asians, as unserved, and these data identify these groups has having the lowest population penetration rates.

**Table x. DVRS VR Consumers and ACS Population Estimates by Minority Race and Disability Type**

Race or Ethnicity <sup>1</sup>	Disability Type <sup>2</sup>	Estimated Population of North Carolinians with Disabilities Ages 16-64 (ACS 2012)				NC VR Clients Eligible for Services with Cases in Service, federal fiscal year 2013		Percent of NC Population Served by VR in federal fiscal year 2013
		Prevalence		Count	% Total	Count	% Total	
		Rate	MoE <sup>3</sup>					
Black or African American	Any Disability	13.9%	0.68%	192,800	100.0%	28,345	100.0%	14.7%
	Visual	2.9%	0.33%	40,300	20.9%	276.0	1.0%	0.7%
	Hearing	1.8%	3.29%	24,300	12.6%	938.00	3.3%	3.9%
	Ambulatory	7.7%	0.52%	106,300	55.1%	8,428	29.7%	7.9%
	Cognitive	5.7%	0.45%	78,200	40.6%	21,665	76.4%	27.7%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	Any Disability	15.7%	3.07%	11,500	100.0%	1,106	100.0%	9.6%
	Visual	3.5%	1.55%	2,600	22.6%	6	0.5%	0.2%
	Hearing	2.7%	1.38%	2,000	17.4%	53	4.8%	2.7%
	Ambulatory	10.2%	2.56%	7,500	65.2%	376	34.0%	5.0%

Race or Ethnicity <sup>1</sup>	Disability Type <sup>2</sup>	Estimated Population of North Carolinians with Disabilities Ages 16-64 (ACS 2012)				NC VR Clients Eligible for Services with Cases in Service, federal fiscal year 2013		Percent of NC Population Served by VR in federal fiscal year 2013
		Prevalence		Count	% Total	Count	% Total	
		Rate	MoE <sup>3</sup>					
		Cognitive	6.6%	2.10%	4,900	42.6%	793	71.7%
Asian	Any Disability	3.8%	1.09%	6,100	100.0%	314	100.0%	5.1%
	Visual	1.1%	3.29%	1,800	29.5%	2	0.6%	0.1%
	Hearing	0.4%	3.29%	700	11.5%	32	10.2%	4.6%
	Ambulatory	1.6%	3.29%	2,600	42.6%	114	36.3%	4.4%
	Cognitive	1.0%	3.29%	1,700	27.9%	212	67.5%	12.5%
Hispanic or Latino	Any Disability	5.0%	0.69%	26,100	100.0%	1,679	100.0%	6.4%
	Visual	1.0%	3.29%	5,200	19.9%	18	1.1%	0.3%
	Hearing	1.2%	3.29%	6,100	23.4%	126	7.5%	2.1%
	Ambulatory	2.0%	3.29%	10,300	39.5%	429	25.6%	4.2%
	Cognitive	2.2%	0.46%	11,200	42.9%	1,267	75.5%	11.3%

<sup>1</sup> Individuals can have more than one race and individuals of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity can be of any race.

<sup>2</sup> Individuals can have more than more disability type.

<sup>3</sup> Margin of Error (MoE) is a measure of the degree of sampling variability at the 90% confidence level. This means that there is a 90% certainty that the actual value is between the reported rate plus or minus the margin of error. Smaller population estimates are less precise and will have a higher margin of error.

## DVRS Staff Survey Part 2: Identifying Underserved Populations

Of the 370 VR staff members that completed the survey, 320 (86.5%) identified one or more specific populations of individuals with disabilities that were unserved or underserved, including 9 (2.4%) staff members who indicated that all populations of individuals with disabilities were underserved. The remainder included 16 (4.3%) that indicated that there weren't any underserved populations and 34 (9.1%) that either didn't answer the question or responded that they didn't know or were unsure. The following section shows the specific populations of North Carolinians with disabilities that staff members identified as underserved.

### ***People with Mental Illness***

Of the 370 staff respondents, 76 (21%) identified individuals with mental illness as an underserved population. This category includes mental illness, in general, and also individuals where mental illness is concurrent with another disabling condition, such as substance abuse disorder, or particular demographic characteristics, such as being of

younger or older age, having low income or being homeless, and having a criminal background.

The three most frequently mentioned **VR needs** specific to this population were identified as follows:

- Mental Health Services: 40 (53%) of the 74 VR staff members who identified people with mental illness as an underserved population indicated the need for additional mental health services. The NC mental health system was said to be both fragmented and limited, and clients may not receive ongoing treatment needed for stable employment. Mental healthcare is not always available for the client, and timeliness of services was said to be an issue: It can take months to get an appointment with another agency. Responses in this category included a need for community-based, outpatient care that is more comprehensive and affordable, with continuity of care, including medications and counseling from licensed professionals. This includes mental health evaluations by medical professionals; psychotherapy, as appropriate; and long-term monitoring and medication management to stabilize them so they can work and have productive lives.
- Support Services: 22 (29%) of the 74 VR staff members who identified people with mental illness as an underserved population indicated the need for additional support services, including support to their families and employers. Staff members indicated that this population often has basic needs that are unmet including housing, transportation, and food, but also that there was a need for long-term vocational supports.
- Willingness of Employers to Hire and Make Accommodations: 19 (26%) of the 74 VR staff members who identified people with mental illness as an underserved population indicated the need for overcoming the stigma of mental illness for employers. Responses in this category related stated a need for “open-mindedness” among employers, regarding their willingness to hire and flexibility in scheduling and other workplace accommodations. As one respondent put it, “too many employers see them as just “crazy.” Also included in these responses was the need for better trained client advocates and job coaches to help with job placement and to educate employers.
- Other:
  - Outreach: I have answered the phones with VR for over 21 years and I know what people say when they call. They call here because they have been referred to VR and a lot of referrals don't understand that depression, bipolar and other medical conditions are disabilities. They think you have to be in a wheelchair to be considered disabled. We need to target folks that have disabilities and are unaware of it. We need to educate our referral sources and the general public on what VR does. We need to use language that is easy to understand. The general public does

not understand language like disability, impairment, impediment, limitations to employment, and chronic conditions. We need to market these folks that have disabilities but don't understand that they have a disability.

### ***Individuals with Cognitive Impairments and Developmental Disabilities***

Of the 370 staff respondents, 55 (14.9%) identified people with cognitive impairments and developmental disabilities as an underserved population. This population was identified more often from casework supervisors (30.3%) than from VR managers, counselors, and specialists and consultants (group average = 16.9%). For the purpose of classification, this population includes people with autism and brain injuries, including individuals who are high functioning but still in need of support.

The **VR needs** specific to this population were fairly diverse, and inclusive of most every service provided or sponsored by the VR Program. This is likely because, as a few staff members indicated, the needs of this population “varied according to the nature of the disability,” and were highly individualized: “one size does not fit all.” The most frequently mentioned **VR needs** specific to this population are identified as follows:

- Education, training, job coaching and related supports: The need for training and training-related supports was the most common need mentioned: The needs in that category include traditional education, but also other types of training, including job skills development, work adjustment training services, and specialized cognitive training and interpersonal skills training.
- Supported Employment and increased CRP service capacity: Respondents wrote there was a need to continue existing programs and increase service capacity through additional programs.
- Employment Services, job availability and employer willingness to hire and make accommodations: Responses in this category related to the need for job placement services, the lack of availability of jobs for this population, the need to educate employers and have employers willing to hire and make accommodations for individuals with cognitive impairments and developmental disabilities, including autism and those resulting from brain injuries.
- Training for VR and CRP Staff, and more individual attention: There were a few responses that indicated a need for additional training and specialization for VR and CRP staff. This category also includes the related need of more individual attention.

### ***Offenders***

Of the 370 staff respondents, 36 (9.7%) of the 3 identified people with disabilities and criminal records, particularly those with felony convictions, inmates, and individuals on probation or parole as an underserved population. Descriptions of this population

included concurrence with mental illness and substance abuse disorder, but were not limited to these populations. The distribution of the staff members that identified this population is shown in the table below, which indicates that the perception that ex-offenders and inmates were an underserved population was considerably less frequent among VR managers, supervisors, and counselors than VR staff members in other roles.

The most frequently mentioned **VR needs** specific to this population were identified as follows:

- Willingness of Employers to Hire: 17 (47%) of the 36 VR staff members who identified people with disabilities and a criminal background as an underserved population indicated the need to find employers willing to hire them, regardless of their criminal history, which may require additional employment services, including additional job search assistance and selective placements.
- Training and job readiness: 13 (36%) of the 36 VR staff members who identified people with disabilities and a criminal background as an underserved population indicated the need for job skills training, education, and other skills development, including the need to develop interviewing and social skills.
- Other needs: Single responses indicating a need for case management assistance, peer supports, transition services, and support systems.

### ***People with Substance Abuse Disorder***

Of the 370 staff respondents, 27 (7.3%) identified people with a substance abuse disorder as an underserved population.

The specific needs of this population were not neatly identified because they were most frequently mentioned in concurrence with the needs of other the populations, such as individuals with mental illness, consumers that were homeless, those with a criminal backgrounds, or some combination of these. The most frequently mentioned **VR needs** that seemed most specific to this population were identified as follows:

- Treatment and relapse prevention services: These services include placing a priority on treatment first so that the client can pass a drug screening test, with mention of recovery houses and Narcotics Anonymous and Alcohol Anonymous meetings, counseling and relapse prevention.
- Support services: These include all types of support services provided through the VR program, including transportation services.
- Employment services and employer willingness to hire and provide accommodations: Examples of responses include:

### ***Ethnic Minorities***

#### **Particularly Hispanics/Latinos, Immigrants and Non-English Speaking**

**Consumers:** Of the 370 staff survey respondents, 26 (7.0%) identified people with disabilities of minority backgrounds as underserved, 24 of which identified Hispanic or



Latino non-English speaking individuals, although other racial and ethnic minorities, including individuals of Hmong, American Indian, and Muslim backgrounds were also mentioned in four of the responses. Examples of responses include:

The most frequently mentioned **VR needs** specific to this population were identified as follows:

- Language Communications: 13 (57%) of the 23 responses identified language communications, and the need for interpreter services or bilingual VR staff as the specific need for this population:
- Outreach Services: 4 (17.4%) of the 23 respondents responded that a cultural barrier existed and that there is not enough outreach to these populations. This relates to language communications in that one respondent wrote that it was the reason this population was overlooked.
- Other Needs: single responses indicating basic education, interviewing skills, transportation, and loss to follow-up due to seasonal work.

### **Advocacy Key Informant Survey Part 2:**

Of the 22 respondents, 16 (73%) identified one or more populations of people with disabilities they considered to be unserved or underserved in North Carolina.

#### ***People with Mental Illness***

Five respondents identified individuals with mental illness as an underserved population. The specific **VR needs** of this population were identified as follows:

- Job supports on a regular basis.
- Training on how to do task from start to finish; how to evaluate when task is done properly; how to receive judgment and criticism and redirection.
- Higher learning or high school/GED completion, job skills training, résumé writing, interview skills.
- Clear expectations, by VR, Community Rehabilitation Programs, other government agencies, parents, teachers, and employers. Then, a supportive philosophy, with accompanying policies, practices and funding.

#### ***People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities***

Five respondents identified people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including or especially those with profound or most significant disabilities and physical disabilities as an underserved population. The specific **VR needs** of this population were identified as follows:

- As with people with mental illness, clear expectations from VR, other involved agencies, parents, schools, and employers.
- Cost-effective, perhaps group services for those who with limited skills and the potential to work independently.

- Educating employers to help them understand that physical disabilities don't limit other abilities.
- Employment resources and training to find jobs that interest them.

#### *Other groups identified in single responses*

- People with brain injury: This population is challenging to service because of multiple needs and issues. These individuals often need job coach opportunities and help finding the right job match.
- People with autism: This population needs pre-vocational skills training, and training on how to find and keep a job, including proper workplace behaviors.
- People with substance abuse disorder: This population needs for providers to learn the most up-to-date treatment issues for this population
- High school students with disabilities: This population needs VR services while in school, and more VR training before the student becomes an adult.
- People with disabilities who qualify for Medicaid or state funded services: This population includes the uninsured working poor. Such individuals may need more education to be able to apply for jobs that can be more rewarding. Individuals in this category who are ex-offenders may need to be able to clean up criminal records at times. They need counselors who will believe in their aptitude and connect them with resources.

### **The VR Needs of Individuals with Disabilities Served through other Components of the Statewide Workforce Development System**

#### **State and Local Improvements Needed for Workforce Development System Integration and Accountability**

This section is named after the title of a complete evaluation of North Carolina's entire workforce development system, which was published in March 2012 by the North Carolina General Assembly Program Evaluation Division. NC DHHS and DVRS participated in the evaluation at various stages. The full document is accessible online through the North Carolina General Assembly website:

[http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/PED/Reports/documents/Workforce/WFD\\_Report.pdf](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/PED/Reports/documents/Workforce/WFD_Report.pdf).

The summary of the report's findings are that state and local program coordination of workforce programs have failed to create an integrated, effective workforce development system. Among its findings, the report notes that the services offered at local JobLink sites and level of integration varies across the state, and that the centers do not apply information technology to the extent available, and that despite investments in a data system to track participants, there are no statewide performance measures for the workforce development system. The recommendations were that the NC General Assembly should streamline the workforce development system, enhance accountability, strengthen the JobLink system (One-Stop Centers), require increased use of technology, and create a legislative oversight committee to oversee the reforms.

These changes would benefit all job seekers, of which individuals with disabilities are a disadvantaged subgroup. The recommendation toward increased use of technology was said to be particularly applicable to North Carolinians with disabilities in making services more accessible. For example, in the report (p.25), a Workforce Solutions administrator explained that JobLinks were conceptualized as a physical location but that remote access could facilitate the virtual presence of specialized staff that do not need to be at JobLink full time for customers with disabilities, thereby avoiding the need for a return visit on a day when staff is on site.

### ***North Carolina Common Follow-up System***

An important recommendation of the above reference Workforce Development System evaluation report was to improve the NC Common Follow-up System (CFS), which is currently undergoing implementation. Most recently, DVRS had the opportunity to test the NC Tower, a portal to an application that provides longitudinal information on labor market participation and earnings for individuals participating in a CFS program, such as the VR program. The testing, however, was limited to academic institutions, though it expected to be expanded to other programs during the next CSNA cycle.

The NC CFS is a database of the educational and employment outcomes of participants in publicly supported educational, employment, and training programs. The CFS was first developed in 1992 to longitudinally track the progress of workforce program participants, and has since been used to fulfill much of the collection, calculation, and reporting of performance and accountability measures for workforce training programs operated throughout the state, as mandated under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.

North Carolina's workforce development system was streamlined to some extent in 2011 through a consolidation of many services delivered through Workforce Investment Act, Trade Adjustment Assistance, and Wagner-Peyser Act programs that are now administered through the NC Department of Commerce in collaboration with NC DHHS, the NC Community College System, the NC Department of Public Instruction, the NC Department of Public Safety, and other partner agencies.

State legislation passed in 2012 further reformed the NC workforce development system by expanding the oversight authority of the NC Commission on Workforce Development (the state Workforce Investment Board) to develop and evaluate performance measures for all workforce programs in the state, including the VR Program. Part of this legislation requires the Department of Commerce to enhance the Common Follow-up System and work in collaboration with the State Commission on Workforce Development to utilize data from the Common Follow-up System in the development of performance measures for North Carolina's Workforce Development System. These efforts are still in their preliminary stages and will be covered in more detail in the 2016 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

The two tables show below include the number of VR Program consumers eligible for services with open and the number and proportion that were also served by at least one of the nine other participating entities that contribute to the Common Follow-up System. Data for the first table are released on an annual basis and provide the year-to-year change or trend. The second table shows the unduplicated total number of VR Program consumers and those served by at least one other participating entity over a five-year span to provide a big picture summary.

The first table shows a net 6.5% increase in the number of individuals served by the VR Program during an annual state fiscal cycle (SFY), from 57,473 in SFY 2009-10 to 61,207 in 2010-11. This increase is due to case accumulation and not to an increase in applications or newly active cases. To the contrary, there was a 5.4% net decrease in number of applications during this period, from 25,513 in SFY 2009-10 to 24,143 in 2011-12; and a 7.5% net decrease in newly signed individual plans for employment, from 14,620 in SFY 2009-10 to 13,528 in SFY 2011-12. With regard to change in the number of individuals served by the VR program and at least one other Common Follow-up System reporting entity, the percent of individuals served only by the VR Program declined from 62.7% in SFY 2009-10 to 59.7% in SFY 2011-12.

Over the past three state fiscal years (2010-2012), the proportion of VR consumers served by other workforce training programs has remained relatively consistent, with a three-year average of 60.8%: an average of 34.6% were served by one other agency or program; 16.9% by two other agencies or programs; and 9.3% by three or more other agencies or programs. Although there was a 6.5% net increase in the number of unduplicated individuals served by the VR program, from 57,473 in state fiscal year 2009-2010 to 61,207 in 2011-2012. The net increase in the number served by NC VR plus two other programs was 8.2%, from 9,809 in state fiscal year 2009-2010 to 10,600 in 2011-2012, and the net increase in the number served by three or more other programs was more than three times (204.5%), from 3,425 in state fiscal year 2009-2010 to 10,430 in 2011-2012. We also notice that during this three years period there was a net decrease in the number served by only one other program in addition to NC VR services and it was 32.3%, from 22,781 in state fiscal year 2009-2010 to 15,421 in 2011-2012. These double digit increases in multi-agency or multi-program participation may suggest a need for increased interagency collaboration towards identifying the service needs of participants.

**Table 1. VR Program Consumers Served by Other Agencies in the NC CFS: 2010, 2011 & 2012**

	SFY 2009-2010		SFY 2010-2011		SFY 2011-2012		Net Change (%)
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	
Total Unduplicated VR Consumers Eligible for Services	57,473	100	60,421	100	61,207	100	6.5
<b>Number of Agencies Providing Services</b>							
NC VR Program only	21,458	37.3	24,001	39.7	24,696	40.3	15.1
NC VR + 1 other agency	22,781	39.6	23,594	39.0	15,421	25.2	-32.3
NC VR + 2 other agencies	9,809	17.1	9,832	16.3	10,600	17.3	8.1
NC VR + 3 or more other agencies	3,425	6.0	2,994	5.0	10,430	17.0	204.5
<b>Individuals Served by Each Agency</b>							
JobLink Career Center	13,691	23.8	10,492	17.4	11,174	18.3	-18.4
Dept. of Public Safety, Division of Adult Correction	5,636	9.8	5,456	9.0	5,456	8.9	-3.2
Dept. of Labor	17	<0.1	10	<0.1	<10	<0.1	N/A
Dept. of Public Instruction	5,629	9.8	5,106	8.5	4,678	7.6	-16.9
Dept. of Health and Human Services, Division of Services for the Blind	64	0.1	76	0.1	67	0.1	4.7
Dept. of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services	6,975	12.1	7,481	12.4	8,401	13.7	20.4
Dept. of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions	18,014	31.3	17,639	29.2	18,686	30.5	3.7
NC Community College System	14,023	24.4	14,545	24.1	14,700	24.0	4.8
University of North Carolina Constituent Universities	991	1.7	953	1.6	856	1.4	-13.6

Source: NC Department of Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division

As the second table shows, of the nearly 118,714 individuals served by the VR program, in an eligible case status, 82% were provided services or participated in a program provided through another CFS agency. Nearly 1 in 5 VR consumers was served through the Division of Adult Corrections, which is slightly more than those in the Department of Public Instruction. More than half of VR Consumers are served through the Division of Workforce Solutions, and just under half receive services through the JobLink Career Center System, and just under half were enrolled in the NC Community College System. The need for collaboration in service provision is suggested by the volume of our VR consumers served through one or more of these other agencies.

**Table x. DVRS VR Consumers Served by Other Agencies in the NC CFS: 5-Year Total**

<b>Individuals Served by Each Agency, SFY 2007-2012</b>			<b>Number of Agencies Providing Service</b>		
<b>Agency</b>	<b>Individuals</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Number of Agencies</b>	<b>Individuals</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Dept. of Public Safety, Division of Adult Corrections	21,341	18.0%	NC VR Program only	21,311	18.0%
Dept. of Labor	157	0.1%	NC VR + 1 other agency	34,856	29.4%
Dept. of Public Instruction	20,106	16.9%	NC VR + 2 other agencies	33,487	28.2%
DHHS, Division of Services for the Blind	280	0.2%	NC VR + 3 or more other agencies	29,060	24.5%
DHHS, Division of Social Services	33,812	28.5%	Total Unique Individuals	118,714	100.0%
Dept. of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions	64,127	54.0%	Individuals Receiving Services through the JobLink Career Center System	54,210	45.7%
NC Community Colleges	54,073	45.5%			
UNC Constituent Universities	3,247	2.7%			

Source: NC Department of Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division

### **Challenges the NC Workforce Development System on Whole Experiences When Fulfilling the Needs of Individuals with Disabilities**

This section reprints the second component of the survey of Workforce Board Directors. The three survey items were:

- (a) Identify challenges the NC Workforce Development System as a whole faces when fulfilling the needs of people with disabilities;
- (b) Identify what they thought could be done to overcome these challenges;
- (c) Identify what they thought DVRS and the State Rehabilitation Council could do to help in overcoming these challenges.

**Table x. Challenges and Solutions for the Workforce Development System**

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Possible Solutions</b>	<b>What can VR and the SRC do?</b>
Need more employers that are hiring, and overcoming employers' fears and concerns, along with the social stigma, that inhibits employers from hiring people with disabilities.	Continue to market our services. We need to re-educate employers on the advantages of hiring individuals with disabilities and ensure business outreach is conducted.	More staff and get more employers involved. Have more job developers working with employers. Increasing advertisements and media regarding the advantages and incentives for employers to hire people with disabilities, and build partnerships and train staff in the One Stop Centers.
Lack of education, awareness, funding, and a coordinated plan.	More coordination among state agencies.	Increase collaboration, education and outreach.

Challenges	Possible Solutions	What can VR and the SRC do?
There is such a large range of disabilities that we could encounter and without being specialists or trained to identify and handle these disabilities; One Stop Career Centers are under-skilled at handling these situations. They may not even be able to identify that a client has a barrier to be able to refer to other agencies for support.	Have the state require training on disabilities for One Stop Career Center managers and staff members.	DVRS and the State Rehabilitation council could provide the training for One Stop Career Centers.

### **Assessing the Need to Establish, Develop, or Improve CRPs**

The Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) directly provide, or facilitate the provision of one or more vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities as one of their major functions. The purpose of these services is to enable those individuals to maximize their opportunities for employment. DVRS extends its services for people with disabilities through partnerships with the CRPs. The CRPs provide one or more of the following services to people with disabilities to help them prepare for and obtain employment: community-based assessment, vocational evaluation, work-adjustment training, supported employment, and job coaching. Toward the start of federal fiscal year 2013, DVRS held contracts or memoranda of agreement with 133 CRPs in 197 locations across the state. For an organization to become a CRP with DVRS, the organization must be accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), the Council on Accreditation (COA), or the Council on Quality Leadership (COL) in the area of service provision and adhere to criteria set forth in rules by the Division. CRPs are periodically reviewed by DVRS Regional CRP Specialists, which are located throughout the state. The DVRS directly administers two community rehabilitation programs WorkSource East in Goldsboro and WorkSource West in Morganton.

In federal fiscal year 2012, 10,399 consumers received services from a CRP, of which 4,382 (42%) received supported employment (SE) services. Of those provided CRP services that year, 2,502 achieved their employment objectives in the same year, including 1,023 individuals that were placed in employment in an integrated setting with supports, while many others continued to progress towards employment.

The mandated 34 CFR §361.29 requirement that the CSNA include an assessment of the need to establish, develop or improve Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) is not satisfied by an individual, isolated activity. Rather, DVRS hold regularly scheduled DVRS/CRP Steering Committee meetings expressly for this purpose. Members include DVRS staff, including rehabilitation program specialists, office managers, the Chief Accountant for CRP services, and representatives from the NC DHHS Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services (MH/DD/SAS), and

representatives from the CRP community appointed by DVRS, NC Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE), and the NC Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (NCARF). The steering committee meets on a quarterly basis and focuses on budgetary and program issues and makes recommendations to the DVRS Director. The overall goal of the committee is to help ensure the delivery of quality services with informed choice by our consumers. The committee's goals and recommendations along with the Division Director's feedback are posted on the DVRS public web site.

Examples of activities carried out during the past three years included:

- Review and ongoing revisions to rules and standards, including qualifications standards for CRP staff providing or supervising direct services to consumer, which were developed to address the need for service quality and uniformity.
- The development of a new evaluation instrument to assist with monitoring the quality of services being provided by CRPs, and also address the need for service quality and uniformity.
- The development of a website specific to CRP resources, such as vendor applications and rules and standards, which now includes a description of the process for becoming an approved vendor. This was done to address the need to communicate this information and make it more accessible to the public. The website with this information is: <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dvrs/employ/rehab.htm>.
- An evaluation of fair rates and methods of compensation for CRPs and supporting activities such as transportation services provided to consumers, which addressed the need for fiscal responsibility in providing these services efficiently, yet fairly.
- The development of effective collaborative efforts with the NC DHHS-Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services (DMHDDSAS) to provide consistent funding for extended supported employment addressed the need for VR Program participants to receive follow-along services, even after their case was successfully closed.
- Information provided by CRPs and the steering committee was assimilated to help identify innovative activities and expansion projects using ARRA funding, including the maintenance of the CRP infrastructure during periods of high unemployment.

### ***Milestone System***

The most impactful changes with regard to the need to establish, develop or improve Community Rehabilitation Programs have so far resulted from a structured service delivery model that replaced the VR purchase of hourly-rate fee-for-services for work adjustment and supported employment with contracted outcome-based milestone system. Although some CRP services were already being purchased on performance-based contracts, most were not. The need for a milestone system arose from a



combination of inconsistent or incomplete placement records for some providers; billing irregularities; feedback from VR staff on surveys pertaining to CRP services, the documentation and level of accountability required, and constraints on the resources required for monitoring and processing authorizations for hourly rate services. Having a milestone system was to address these issues: reduce billing irregularities, paperwork, and the need for documentation and monitoring, and to hold CRPs accountable for VR consumer outcomes.

Implementation of a milestone payment for work adjustment and supported employment job development and placement services was first initiated October 2012, following stakeholder input, internal cost analyses, and an evaluation of how other state VR programs had successfully implemented similar milestone payment systems.

Once the job development milestone was in place, a sample of 62 VR counselors who used CRP services were surveyed on their level of understanding of VR policy as it pertained to the CRP services. Of the 62 respondents, 23 (37%) indicated that they have excellent understanding while 36 (58%) indicated they had a good understanding, and 3 (5%) indicated an average understanding. In this survey, the counselors were asked about their current training needs as related to different CRP services categories, and about 24% indicated that they need training in policy and procedures; 21% said that they need training in follow-along services; and 19% wanted to have training in job development. Individual responses also indicated that DVRS should have more qualified staff working with the CRP so they can stay abreast of changes and the need for their services, and that there was a communication gap between the CRP and DVRS. Regarding their relationship with the CRPs in their catchment area 40% indicated that they have "excellent" relationship with the CRPs while 48% rated "good" relationship. This study resulted in the greater clarification of policies, a practice that carried over to the full implementation of the milestone system.

The complete milestone payment system for SE and work adjustment services was developed collaboratively with CRPs through the CRP Steering Committee and became effective November 1, 2013. As applicable, there are payments at the point of intake; for supplemental evaluation; job development and retention; training and stabilization; and successful case closure after at least 90 days employment. Evaluations of the new milestone payment system as it pertains to the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs will continue through the next CSNA cycle.

### ***Individual Placement and Supports (IPS)***

Another recent initiative is the Individual Placements and Supports (IPS) model of supported employment for individuals with serious mental illness (SMI), serious persistent mental illness (SPMI) and co-occurring disorders. Research into this model began in July 2012 and initiated discussions to become a part of Dartmouth Psychiatric Research Center's IPS learning collaborative. In August 2012, the *Transitions to*

*Community Living* (TCL), the US Department of Justice (DOJ) Settlement Agreement with North Carolina, further established that people with SMI must be provided evidenced-based practice Supported Employment services. The Dartmouth research on IPS shows that implementing IPS to fidelity doubles the number of people in competitive employment at a rate of up to 60%, and the initiative is expected to provide NC additional resources to help overcome some of the barriers to employment for individuals with SMI and increase their participation in the labor market. The between DVRS and DMHDDSAS for collaboration for its implementation began in July 2013.

DMHDDSAS is the agency responsible for the Long Term Vocational Supports (LTVS), which provides assistance with maintaining a job for participants, age 16 and over, who no longer need the intense level of Supported Employment Services. LTVS are provided because of specific needs of the consumer, including medical and behavioral needs, and supports regarding the social or environmental issues that are a part of successful employment.

North Carolina's state definition of supported employment (SE) is now based on the SE-IPS model, and SE/Behavioral Health providers that have since signed contracts with their Local Management Entity/ Managed Care Organization (LME/MCO) will be providing the IPS model of evidence-based SE as part of the TCL/DOJ initiative. These include the more than 130 VR supported employment providers throughout North Carolina.

There will be an ongoing assessment of the impact of the IPS model, and all sites providing evidence-based SE will be evaluated with a research-based fidelity measure, and will receive a rating and quality improvement report, not duplicative of monitoring; meaning that for the next needs assessment, VR will know the level of fidelity each site as implemented to guide further training, technical assistance, and quality improvement measures, and will be able to quantify the number of CRPs providing evidence-based supported employment to people with serious- or severe and persistent mental illness.

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

The North Carolina Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) is a division of the Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS). DSB's mission is to enable people who are blind, visually impaired or deaf blind to reach their goals of independence and employment. Eligible individuals are served in all 100 counties of North Carolina. DSB is the designated state unit recognized by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to deliver vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to individuals who have significant visual disabilities. Consistent with the mandates of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, DSB conducts a comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) every three years. The State Rehabilitation Council collaborated with DSB in the completion of the DSB 2013 CSNA. The Division contracted the services of the

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Department of Allied Health Sciences, and the Division of Rehabilitation Counseling & Psychology to conduct the assessment that was completed on October 31, 2013. The following research questions were addressed.

- Who are the unserved and underserved groups of individuals that are blind or visually impaired in North Carolina who do not receive the services they need from DSB?
- What are the VR service needs of minorities with visual disabilities?
- What are the VR needs of individuals with visual disabilities, particularly the vocational rehabilitation services needs of individuals with the most significant visual disabilities, including their need for supported employment services?
- What are the vocational rehabilitation service needs of individuals with visual disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system?
- What is the need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs within the state?

## **Methodology**

Strategies identified in the VR Needs Assessment Guide (Shell, 2010), were used, including a review and analysis of archival data and literature consisting of the following sources.

- 2012 DSB Annual Report
- NC DSB's 2011 federal fiscal year State Plan
- Customer Satisfaction Survey Results
- CSNA reports from NC DSB and NC DVRS
- CSNA reports from Kentucky and Virginia
- NC DSB agency data (RSA-911) or Case Service Report for FYs 2009-2012
- American Community Survey, Center for Disease Control, Current Population Survey
- State Center for Health Statistics, NC Division of Public Health, NC Department of Health and Human Services
- Prevent Blindness America
- U. S. Bureau of the Census Data for the State of North Carolina

Various stakeholders participated in surveys, key informant interviews and focus groups. The participants included current and former DSB consumers, DSB staff, eye care providers, community rehabilitation program representatives, workforce development system partners, the State Rehabilitation Council, employers and advocacy group representatives. A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data was conducted.

## **NC Demographic Profile**

North Carolina had 9,752,073 residents in 2012 of which 64.7% were non-Hispanic White, 22% Black/African American, 8.7% Hispanic or Latino, 2.5% Asian, 1.5% American Indian and Alaska Native and 2.0% multiracial with 30% of the population living in rural areas. The median household income was \$46,291 in North Carolina. The average annual income from Social Security was \$16,695 and 16.1% of the population was below the poverty line (<\$15,000).

No specific group(s) of individuals were identified as unserved in the assessment. However, statistically more females than males have vision problems such as cataracts, glaucoma, low vision, age-related macular degeneration, or blindness yet still DSB serves equal number of males and females annually. This may suggest that women are underserved by DSB. Minorities, individuals who have limited incomes and individuals living in rural areas are also underserved by DSB. Consumers of Hispanics/Latino, Black/African-American, and American Indians/Alaska Native racial/ethnic background are underserved as well. One out of three DSB consumers is African American, meaning this group does access and receive services from DSB but was found to be less successful in securing employment than the non-Hispanic White group.

Older adults, transition-age-youth/adolescents, individuals who are deaf-blind or have other multiple disabilities were also noted to be underserved.

## **Employment and Community Participation**

The employment rate of individuals with disabilities in North Carolina is 36.7% (American Community Survey, 2011). Thirty-nine percent of DSB consumers who participated in the CSNA reported being unemployed and unemployment is higher in some minority groups (e.g., African Americans). Of the unemployed group who participated in the study (n=119), 47% said they would like to find a job, 37% said that they had been actively searching for a job, 21% sought out vocational services in the past year (primarily through DSB or DVRS) and 43% (n=132) of all consumers who participated said they would need more assistance to participate in the community.

Barriers to employment identified by DSB consumers included the following:

- lack of jobs
- lack of transportation
- lack of state funds or budget restrictions
- lack of information regarding disability resources
- health concerns
- the lack of qualified service providers

## **Services Needs/Gaps identified by Consumers**

- post-employment services
- supported employment

- vocational services
- assistive technology
- information and supports in accessing public transportation
- medical services
- services to improve independent living

## **Recommendations**

### Outreach to Unserved and Underserved Groups:

- Increase awareness of DSB services in the underserved communities; facilitate innovative outreach activities and events that target women, transition age youth, minorities, older adults, individuals living in rural areas and individuals with low income
- Educate the public about the presence and role of DSB in the community. Post flyers, brochures about DSB in doctor's offices, schools, hospitals, and community agencies.

### Strategic Activities to Address Employment Needs:

- Improve the retention and rehabilitation rates for individuals who are underserved (women, transition age youth, minorities, older adults, individuals living in rural areas, and individuals with low income)
- Implement evidence-based practices in vocational rehabilitation and assistive technology
- Counselors need to help consumers better understand labor market demands and select suitable job goals

### Specific Service Areas:

- Improve post-employment services and supported employment and ensure better access for consumers who could benefit from them
- Educate consumers about advancements in assistive technology, available free applications that could be of use, as well as assistive technology services and resources available through DSB
- Ensure that counselors and field staff stay current regarding new technologies and continually upgrade staff members' skills
- Advocate for improved/expanded access to public transportation and develop informational resources pertaining to public transportation for consumers.
- Identify and provide consumers community resource information such as computer classes at the local community colleges, medical consultation services, housing supports.
- Improve collaboration between NC DSB, NC DVRS and community partners.

## Section (k) Annual Estimates

(k) Annual Estimates. Describe:

- (1) The number of individuals in the State who are eligible for services.
- (2) The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under:
  - (A) The VR Program;
  - (B) The Supported Employment Program; and
  - (C) Each priority category, if under an order of selection.
- (3) The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and
- (4) The cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an order of selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category.

### Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

DVRS estimates **52,250** individuals with a disability who have been determined eligible for VR services will be in-service with the VR program during program year 2016. This estimate includes (a) cases where *purchased* services were provided in accordance with the consumer's individualized plan for employment; (b) cases where *purchased* services were provided toward the development of the consumer's individualized plan for employment (e.g., diagnostic and assessment services provided by a community rehabilitation program); and (c) cases where *non-purchased* services were provided (e.g., vocational counseling and evaluations provided by DVRS staff).

Of this population of 52,250 individuals determined eligible for VR services, DVRS estimates a subgroup of **23,500** individuals will receive direct cost services provided with funds under the basic support grant during the fiscal year.

For federal fiscal year 2015, DVRS estimates total service expenditures of approximately **\$118,762,308**. This includes administrative costs, counseling and placement, and all purchased services, including supported employment provided under the Title VI-B.

DVRS does not expect to implement an order of selection process during federal fiscal year 2015. Services will be available for all client service categories.

In federal fiscal year 2014, DVRS paid for **3,979** individuals to receive supported employment (SE) services at total cost of **\$7,776,314** and an average cost of about **\$1,950** per case. For federal fiscal year 2015 an estimated **4,000** individuals with most significant disabilities (MSD) will receive supported employment services funded through Title VI Part B supplemental grant (**\$587,032**) and Title I Part B (basic support grant), for a projected total cost estimate of **\$8,000,000**.

Category	Title I or Title VI	Estimated Funds	Estimated Number to be Served	Average Cost of Services
Title I (Except Supported Employment)	Title I	\$110,762,308	52,250	\$2,120
Title VI SE Grant + Title I Supported Employment	Title VI	\$8,000,000	4,000	\$2,000
				—
Totals		\$118,762,308	56,250	\$2,111

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

During FFY 2015, DSB estimates that 3,990 individuals will receive vocational rehabilitation services using Title I funds. Projected costs of services are estimated to be \$4,800,000 without implementation of order of selection.

During FFY 2013, DSB served 3,981 individuals with Title I case service funds with expenditures of \$4,771,104. (In DSB's FFY2014 State Plan, DSB estimated that 3,535 individuals will receive vocational rehabilitation services using Title I funds, with expenditures of \$4,261,442 during FFY 2014.)

During FFY 2015, DSB estimates that 36 individuals identified as most significantly disabled will receive supported employment services with Title VI, Part B, funds at a projected cost of \$250,000.

During FFY 2013, DSB served 30 individuals with the most significant disabilities (MSD) with supported employment services using Title VI, Part B funds of \$227,754.

(In DSB's FFY2014 State Plan, DSB estimated that 35 individuals identified as MSD will receive supported employment services with Title VI, Part B, funds at a projected cost of \$130,000 during FFY 2014.)

Individuals receiving supported employment services through Title VI, Part B, funds are eligible for use of Title I funds for other services such as medical, training, guidance, and counseling, or other required services. Therefore the individuals who receive

supported employment services through Title VI funds are included in the estimated number of individuals who may receive Title I funds.

DSB provides vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals. While DSB has established an Order of Selection Plan for eligibility determination under the Rehabilitation Act as amended, it has not been implemented.

## **Section (I) State Goals and Priorities**

(I) State Goals and Priorities. The designated State unit must:

- (1) Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the State has a Council, and jointly agreed to any revisions.
- (2) Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs.
- (3) Ensure that the goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the following areas:
  - (A) the most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates;
  - (B) the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and
  - (C) other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107.

## **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

### **Priority 1. Improve Client Outcomes**

**Goal 1.1.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 1.1.1.** The total number of individuals exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 1.1.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 50.4% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 55.8% in program year 2017.

**Goal 1.2.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with significant or most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.



- **Objective 1.2.1.** Maintain that at least 75% of VR consumers who achieved competitive employment will be individuals with significant or most significant disabilities.

**Goal 1.3.** Increase earnings for individuals exiting the VR program in employment.

- **Objective 1.3.1.** Increase average hourly earnings for individuals who exit the VR program in competitive employment from 48% the statewide average for all North Carolinians in federal fiscal year 2013 to at least 52% in program year 2017.
- **Objective 1.3.2.** Increase the proportion of clients exiting the VR Program in competitive employment whose own income is their primary source of support at closure compared to the percentage whose own income is the primary source of support when they applied for VR services from 62.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to at least 65% in program year 2017.

## **Priority 2. Improve Outcomes for Minorities and Populations Identified as Underserved or Hard to Place in Employment**

**Goal 2.1.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *mental illness* and *substance abuse disorder* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.1.1.** The total number of individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.1.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 47.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in program year 2017.

**Goal 2.2.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *most significant disabilities* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.2.1.** The total number of individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.2.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 44.8% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 50% in program year 2017.

**Goal 2.3.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities of *minority racial backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.3.1.** The total number of individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.3.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 50.1% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 55.8% in program year 2017.

**Goal 2.4.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities with *criminal backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.4.1.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities and criminal backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 47% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in program year 2017.

### **Priority 3. Increase Client Satisfaction**

**Goal 3.1.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor's understanding of their VR needs.

- **Objective 3.1.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied with their counselor's understanding of their VR needs from 84.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 90% in program year 2017.

**Goal 3.2.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of being easy to contact.

- **Objective 3.2.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor was easy to contact from 86.0% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 90% in program year 2017.

**Goal 3.3.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of *working with them as an equal partner*.

- **Objective 3.3.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor worked with them as an equal partner from 85.3% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 88% in program year 2017.

**Goal 3.4.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of *offering options that meet their work-related needs*.

- **Objective 3.4.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor offered options that met their work-related needs from 79.9% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 84% in program year 2017.

**Goal 3.5.** Increase client satisfaction with their *level of involvement* in their VR program.

- **Objective 3.5.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied with their level of involvement in their VR program from 81.5% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 85% in program year 2017.

**Goal 3.6.** Increase client satisfaction with *response time for services* provided by VR staff.

- **Objective 3.6.1.** Increase the percent of clients who rate the response time for services provided by VR staff as *above average* or *excellent* from 63.4% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 67% in program year 2017.

**Goal 3.7.** Increase client satisfaction with their *overall experience* with the VR program.

- **Objective 3.7.1.** Increase the percent of clients who rate their overall experience with the VR program as *above average* or *excellent* from 66.3% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 71% in program year 2017.

## **Division of Services for the Blind**

**Priority 1:** Increase the average wages and benefits of individuals closed with successful wage-earning employment outcomes

**Goal 1.1.** Individuals who are blind or visually impaired in North Carolina will have access to employment opportunities that provide good wages and level of benefits through use of expanded internships, work experiences, community based work adjustment, and expanded relationships with employer portals. Goal will be to increase successful employment outcomes with benefits by 2% (baseline 2013 - 72) and to increase average wage at closure by 1% (baseline 2013 - \$11.97 per hour).

**Goal 1.2.** Increase staff knowledge about careers, employment opportunities, and business relationship development. Goal will be measured by staff reports to supervisors, who in turn will share with program specialist for job development.

**Goal 1.3.** Increase the use of supported employment services to facilitate successful employment outcomes for persons with the most significant disabilities. Goal will be measured by availability of vendors in areas where there are none at this time, increased authorizations for supported employment services, and increased number of individuals

closed in successful employment after receiving supported employment services.

**Goal 1.4.** Provide a holistic approach to service provision that will better enable individuals to obtain employment and maintain it after DSB VR case closure. Goal will be measured by feedback from individuals closed with successful employment on the satisfaction survey, increase in success rate, and a decrease in the number of cases referred back to the agency within 36 months of successful employment outcome.

**Priority 2.** Eligible individuals will have access to assistive technology required for employment

**Goal 2.1.** Provide assistive technology and training in its use for all eligible individuals who require specific equipment and software to obtain, maintain, and regain employment. Measurement criteria will be to increase the numbers of individuals who receive assistive technology services (equipment and/or training) by 1% (baseline 2013 – 429 individuals).

**Goal 2.2.** Assistive technology staff in all seven District Offices will receive training on latest software and hardware to enhance placement opportunities. Each field staff member will attend at least two training sessions (either on-line or in classroom) during the year on new technology.

**Priority 3.** Transition services will be available in all counties of North Carolina for students who are blind or visually impaired.

**Goal 3.1.** DSB will continue to provide transition services to students who are blind or visually impaired attending schools in all 115 Local Education Agencies (LEA's) of North Carolina. The goal will be to increase the number of individuals, ages 14-21, served by 2% (baseline for FFY2013 – 310).

**Goal 3.2.** DSB will provide continuing education training for transition program staff.

**Goal 3.3.** Rehabilitation Counselors will increase their awareness of opportunities for internships and work experiences for transition age students.

**Priority 4.** Quality and knowledgeable outreach to individuals with disabilities, family members, and individuals who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities will be provided by DSB.

**Goal 4.1.** DSB's services will be provided to individuals, families, minority populations and those experiencing health disparities through targeted outreach activities. Data for the objectives will be captured and managed in DSB's new case management system called BEAM.

**Goal 4.2.** DSB will develop marketing opportunities to targeted audiences regarding specific agency programs.

**Goal 4.3.** DSB will identify ways by which DSB can assist veterans with disabilities to become able to obtain, maintain or regain employment. DSB will meet with officials working with veterans who are visually impaired, blind or deaf blind to educate them regarding services that are available to veterans with disabilities through DSB.

**Goal 4.4.** DSB will continually seek and identify ways in which to reach the growing minority populations across North Carolina.

**Priority 5.** Over the next two fiscal years, implementation of systematic program evaluations and consistent quality assurance methods will ensure the agency is meeting the mission of enabling individuals who are blind or visually impaired to achieve their goals of independence and employment.

**Goal 5.1.** To provide consistent and accurate data using the new case management system, BEAM, to assess program performance. Measureable criteria are the program will be in place and staff will have received training by the end of FFY2015.

**Goal 5.2.** To provide holistic, consistent, and accurate methods of quality assurance and program evaluation. Measureable criteria will be that as the program goes "live", the rehabilitation program team and supervisors will evaluate the data as it becomes available, and will identify specific methods of quality assurance that can be done through use of BEAM.

## **Section (m) Order of Selection**

(m) Order of Selection. Describe:

- (1) The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services.
- (2) The justification for the order.
- (3) The service and outcome goals.
- (4) The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order.

- (5) How individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and
- (6) If the designated State unit has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of any established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

The North Carolina VR Programs are not under an order of selection, and the North Carolina designated state units do not plan to implement an Order of Selection during the period covered by the Unified State Plan.

## **Section (n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds**

### **(n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of title VI Funds.**

- (1) Specify the State's goals and priorities for funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services.
- (2) Describe the activities to be conducted, with funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities, including :
  - (A) the provision of extended services for a period not to exceed 4 years; and
  - (B) how the State will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.

## **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**

Title VI, Part B funds are distributed to supported employment programs with the North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS). These community rehabilitation programs provide services to consumers with severe and persistent mental illness, mental retardation, traumatic head injury, autism, cerebral palsy, and other developmental disabilities. In addition, other eligible individuals determined to be most significantly disabled, and who require intensive training and long-term support (extended services) in order to obtain and maintain successful employment outcome are also served. The Division annually serves approximately 4,000 consumers with the most significant disabilities within the supported employment (SE) program. The goals and priorities for the distribution of funds received under Section 622 of the Act are to promote the expansion of new supported employment programs and to address the unmet and underserved areas of the state as it relates to supported employment services by the expansion of new programs where needed. More specifically, goals for the supported employment program for federal fiscal year 2015 include:

**Supported Employment Goal 1:** Increase the number of individuals with most significant disabilities who receive supported employment services.

**Supported Employment Goal 2:** Identify and begin implementing practices that can increase the successful closure rate of individuals receiving supported employment services.

**Supported Employment Goal 3:** Fully implement a performance-based milestone payment system focusing on outcomes versus process to produce quality, meaningful employment outcomes for consumers requiring supported employment services.

**Supported Employment Goal 4:** Support increased training/qualification requirements for job coaches and their supervisory staff. Collaboratively increase supported employment training to DVRS rehabilitation counselors and Community Rehabilitation Program direct service staff.

**Supported Employment Goal 5:** Continue collaboration with the Division of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services to optimize coordination of services at the local service level to improve ease of service access for consumers requiring supported employment services.

**Supported Employment Goal 6:** Collaborate with the Division of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services with the implementation of the Individual Placement and Support Model of Supported Employment.

**Supported Employment Goal 7:** Collaborate with the Division of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services in developing a funding mechanism that utilizes supported employment dollars from Vocational Rehabilitation, state funds from the Local Management Entities, and Medicaid dollars from the Managed Care Organizations to fund supported employment for those needing the individual placement and support model of supported employment.

**Supported Employment Goal 8:** Collaborate with the Division of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services in training Vocational Rehabilitation field staff as well as Community Rehabilitation Program providers in the Individual Placement and Support Model of Supported Employment.

**Supported Employment Goal 9:** Collaborate with the Division of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services in fidelity reviews of providers who contract to provide the Individual Placement and Support Model of Supported Employment.

**Supported Employment Goal 10:** Collaborate with the Division of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services in increasing pilot sites across the state to be a part of the Individual Placement and Support Model of Supported Employment research grant through the Johnson & Johnson Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program.

**Supported Employment Goal 11:** Develop supported employment contracts with all community rehabilitation programs that are pilot sites for the Johnson and Johnson

Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program grant for the Individual Placement and Support Model of Supported Employment.

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

DSB subscribes to the following FY 2015 supported employment goals:

In all 100 counties, DSB plans to identify individuals with disabilities that have traditionally been underserved and not served, who will require Supported Employment services in order to achieve a successful employment outcome by using the following objectives:

1. Provide training to new rehabilitation counselors that will assist in their ability to identify and to refer individuals with the most significant disabilities for supported employment services.
2. DSB's program specialist for supported employment will provide training to community rehabilitation program staff, as requested, on information about working with individuals who are blind or visually impaired to assist in job development and placement.
3. Community rehabilitation programs will identify individuals with the most significant disabilities who want to work, and refer them to DSB for vocational rehabilitation services, which may include supported employment services.
4. During Fiscal Year 2015, DSB plans to close ten (10) individuals indicating successful employment outcomes after receiving supported employment services.

### **Section (o) State's Strategies**

(o) State's Strategies. Describe the required strategies and how the agency will use these strategies to achieve its goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion activities, and overcome any barriers to accessing the VR and the Supported Employment programs (See sections 101(a)(15)(D) and (18)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act and section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)):

- (1) The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities.
- (2) How a broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process and on a statewide basis.
- (3) The outreach procedures that will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities, as well as those who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program.



- (4) The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services).
- (5) If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State.
- (6) Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.
- (7) Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals with disabilities.
- (8) How the agency's strategies will be used to:
  - (A) achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment;
  - (B) support innovation and expansion activities; and
  - (C) overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program.

## **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**

- (1) The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities.

The North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) is partnering with the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services (DMHDDSAS) and other divisions and departments in developing competitive, integrated employment opportunities. These include the implementation of the individual placement and support supported employment (IPS SE) throughout the state. Currently, there are 31 IPS SE programs throughout the state. DVRS offers supported employment contracts to many of the providers and offers them a way to become a supported employment vendor. DVRS also works alongside DMHDDSAS staff to conduct onsite fidelity reviews of the IPS SE programs, training of CRP and VR field staff, statewide IPS learning collaborative, provider steering committees, monthly calls with Dartmouth Supported Employment Center, as well as the annual IPS SE Dartmouth Learning Collaborative. DVRS also works with DMHDDSAS to inform providers and beneficiaries on the impact of employment on federal and state benefits.

DVRS is also implementing a new milestone contract for traumatic brain injuries beginning October 1, 2015 that will offer services in Charlotte, Winston-Salem, Raleigh, Greenville, and Wilmington. DVRS will re-issue another Request for Applications (RFA) to provide brain injury services in early 2016 in order to prepare new contracts by October 1, 2016.

- (2) Describe how a broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process and on a statewide basis.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Response**

Assistive Technology services and devices are provided to eligible individuals statewide who require them. Rehabilitation technology and assistive technology services are sponsored and provided to the degree necessary to complete the rehabilitation program. Included are services and devices which can supplement and enhance an individual's functions such as adapted computer access, augmentative communication, specialized seating and mobility, vehicle modifications, and services which can have an impact on the environment, such as accessibility, job re-design, work site modification and residence modification. Application of the available engineering and assistive technology services and technologies is important when making determinations of eligibility particularly for individuals with significant and most significant disabilities. Rehabilitation engineering evaluations and services are not subject to an individual's financial eligibility; however, devices, equipment and modifications recommended by the engineer are subject to financial eligibility. Applicants during the assessment phase, and consumers determined to be eligible for services in need of and who can benefit from rehabilitation engineering services, devices and assistive technology services can be referred to providers of these services, and these services can assist to assist with assessment processes. Presently within the state, these services are made available statewide through 17 Rehabilitation Engineers in addition to 14 Assistive Technology Consultants, a Funding Specialist, and a Consumer AT Resource/Information Specialist, Program Director, Vehicle Modification Engineer, and Program Specialist for Rehabilitation Technology, all of which comprise the DVRS Rehabilitation Technology Program. Additional assistive technology services are available through outside Assistive Technology Suppliers and Providers.

The Division is fortunate to have the North Carolina Assistive Technology Program as a vital program component. The program increases access and the provision of services to individuals served within the VR program and supports the Division mission of increasing independence for clients in the home, post-secondary school and work setting. In addition, this affords clients of the Division with fast access to the programs array of services which includes: technical expertise in selecting the most appropriate device; hands-on demonstration and try-out of low tech and high tech devices for people with disabilities; information on a variety of technology options; funding resource information and strategies; short-term loan of equipment to consumers, families and professionals who serve them; training to consumers, families and professionals; technical assistance to local organizations, schools, and programs to

expand assistive technology local service delivery capacity; awareness and outreach activities to inform the public about equipment and devices people with disabilities can use for greater independence.

DVRS collaborated with the North Carolina Assistive Technology Program (NCATP) to purchase iPads to train DVRS and community rehabilitation program (CRP) field staff in the use of technology to overcome specific barriers to employment. Staff learned different software applications (apps) as well as different ways to communicate to employers during job development. A team member from the Employment and Program Development Section will present at the National TASH Conference in Portland, Oregon in December 2015 where NC's project with the iPads will be highlighted. NCATP provides a professional development program available to all VR staff who provide evaluation, assistive technology equipment and assistive technology services for the consumers they are serving. NCATP has twenty staff serving the state of North Carolina, which includes the Director, Funding Specialist, AT Information and Referral Specialist, Intake Coordinator, 2 Processing Assistants, 4 Speech Language Pathologists( SLP) and 10 Assistive Technology Consultants. The 10 AT Consultants and 4 SLPs provide direct one-on-one services in the Assistive Technology Centers.

Additionally, the current interagency agreement between DVRS and education agencies, including the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and Local Educational Agencies (LEA)/School Boards, stipulate the financial responsibilities of education agencies, which include the provision of assistive technology required and included in an individual's IEP, without cost to the DVRS. Both DVRS and DSB share information about provides technical assistance and consultation to DPI, LEAs, and schools regarding accommodations and assistive technology that will help facilitate the education and vocational rehabilitation of students with disabilities, including students who are deaf or hearing impaired, blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired.

- (3) The outreach procedures that will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities, as well as those who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program.

DVRS employs several strategies to increase outreach activities to various minority groups with the goal of also reaching those individuals with the most significant disabilities. The major thrust of activities is to go where the minority individuals and groups are contrasted with expecting them to come to Vocational Rehabilitation or to know how to access services without assistance. Management and staff on the local, regional, and state levels continue to identify minority or ethnic groups in their community along with identifying group leaders, common meeting places, and preferred

ways to access information, and also neighborhood and community resources that can be used and developed to bring rehabilitation services to more minority individuals with the most significant disabilities.

As there are numerous diverse cultures throughout North Carolina, staff are encouraged to concentrate on the groups in their particular area. The specific groups of considerable interest include: North Carolina Native Americans, Hispanic/Latino populations, African and Asian populations. The Division has created a staff position that is dedicated to developing and furthering initiatives for outreach to Hispanic/Latino populations. This individual routinely travels to the communities where there are high concentrations of the targeted populations and provides marketing information to their meetings and carnivals. The Division also has active program specialists who provide outreach to advocacy organizations serving individuals in the following areas: Mental Illness and Substance abuse, Disabled Veterans, Developmental Disabilities, Traumatic Brain Injuries, and Deaf/Communication Disorders.

Specific Objectives and Strategies Pertaining to these activities are included within the State Plan Goals effective federal fiscal year 2015-2017:

## **Priority 2. Improve Outcomes for Minorities and Populations Identified as Underserved or Hard to Place in Employment**

**Goal 2.1.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *mental illness* and *substance abuse disorder* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.1.1.** The total number of individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.1.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 47.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in program year 2017.

**Goal 2.2.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *most significant disabilities* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.2.1.** The total number of individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.2.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 44.8% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 50% in program year 2017.

- **Strategy 2.1.** Continue collaborations with programs and partners to implement evidence-based practices that will increase employment outcomes for individuals with mental illness and substance disorder, including the Individual Placements and Supports (IPS) model, as appropriate.

**Goal 2.3.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities of *minority racial backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.3.1.** The total number of individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.3.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 50.1% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 55.8% in program year 2017.
  - **Strategy 2.2.** Increase cultural competence among staff, methods and resources that can help staff to effectively reach and serve individuals with disabilities of minority backgrounds and/or Hispanic ethnicity who qualify for VR services.
  - **Strategy 2.3.** Encourage hiring of Spanish speaking staff members in areas with high concentrations of people of Hispanic ethnicity.

**Goal 2.4.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities with *criminal backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.4.1.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities and criminal backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 47% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in program year 2017.
  - **Strategy 2.3.** Partner with agencies, including NC Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice, associations, and employers to develop viable pathways to employment for consumers with criminal backgrounds.
  - **Strategy 2.4.** Identify and apply current best practices that will increase employment success of individuals with disabilities transitioning from a corrections environment or have experienced difficulties obtaining employment because of previous convictions.

(4) The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition

of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services).

DVRS will revise and renew its state level memorandum of agreement (MOA) with NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) upon issuance of the final federal regulations on Title IV of WIOA. The purpose of the MOU is to outline a collaborative partnership between the two agencies to provide state level approval and support for enhanced transition services to students with disabilities. The revised MOA with DPI will also specify the manner in which Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) will be coordinated and provided within NC schools as well as how students with disabilities, including those who are potentially eligible for VR services, will be identified and served in compliance with federal regulations.

In addition to a state level MOA, the DVRS VR unit offices and local education agencies (LEA) customize a local Third Party Cooperative Agreement (TPCA) to outline how the agencies will work together to ensure that vocational rehabilitation services are administered to students with disabilities. The TPCA stipulates administrative funding to support VR staff, outlines procedures for information sharing, and requires a process for referring students with disabilities to VR in order for the Division to carry out the vocational rehabilitation process. DVRS TPCAs with 99 of the 115 LEAs in North Carolina contribute funding towards 202 positions including VR counselors, business relations representatives, vocational evaluators and additional VR support staff including casework assistants and casework technicians available to provide VR transition services in the local community. In areas where a TPCA has not been established, the local manager has designated a VR counselor to directly serve the students with disabilities in the local schools. Since 2003, DVRS has implemented strategies for serve transition-aged youth. Under WIOA and as the Title IV regulations are finalized, DVRS will be enhancing programs and services to transition-aged youth with increased focus on students with disabilities and PETS. New programs are intended to align the Division with federal requirements under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, namely PETS, as well as provide improved transition services to students while they are in high school. DVRS expects that NC public schools will see a value-add for investing in the VR partnership.

DVRS plans to maintain and strengthen its programmatic relationships with school transition services through its continued active participation by the Division's Transition Program Specialist on the State Capacity Building Team for Transition. This team, including NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) leadership, NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, University Center for Development and Learning, Parent/Child Advocacy Agency, Career and Technical Education, and NC Community

Colleges System representation was formed in recent years to develop statewide goals and provide better coordinated transition activities for students with disabilities to achieve better results with post-school outcomes, including obtaining employment or attending post-secondary education. Currently, NC's Capacity Building Plan is focused on improving student involvement in the individualized education program (IEP) process so that planning is more meaningful and associated with a student's post-school goals. The state is continuing to work on a Transition Toolkit for teachers and anticipates the development of toolkits for parents, students, and agencies that will be individualized at the local level. DPI consultants are providing transition training to LEAs to promote student-led IEPs, and NC DVR plans to provide training to VR counselors and LEA representatives in the Spring of 2016 to focus on the role of the VR Counselor in the IEP process.

DVRS plans to continue collaboration with DPI leadership on technical assistance grants that focus on improving transition services and employment outcomes for transition-aged youth, including re-submission for the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) Intensive Technical Assistance grant.

- (5) If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State.

DVRS continues to utilize two advisory workgroups or committees comprised of supported employment, other community rehabilitation program providers along with Division staff as an effective method to identify and update the needs, goals, and priorities as they pertain to community rehabilitation programs. This group annually establishes goals and makes recommendations to the DVRS Director regarding the directions in which the community rehabilitation programs should continue to develop and grow. Another venue that has effectively promoted healthy dialog between the community rehabilitation programs and the Division is the regional CRP summit. Typically annually or semi-annually, as funding permits, regional summits are held where training and discussion of topics of mutual interest to both the CRP community and the Division.

Community rehabilitation programs are evaluated annually by the Division's local, regional, and state management in order to determine the appropriate level of service outcomes for purchase for the next funding cycle. The decision is based primarily upon need of consumers and availability of financial resources. The programs are also evaluated annually by the Division's local, regional, and state management relative to program capital and staffing needs for new and innovative programs. Priorities are developed and many of these needs are met through the Establishment Authority (the

authority which makes funds available for the establishment of community rehabilitation programs) contingent upon the Division having funds available to do so.

The need for new community rehabilitation programs is also assessed continually, with special emphasis as part of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment process. New community rehabilitation programs are created, at least in part, to assist the Division in meeting identified needs and are typically generated through local and sometimes legislative initiatives. In these cases, the Division can help expand and improve the programs through establishment projects as funds permit.

One important activity the Division is currently working on which will launch during federal fiscal year 2014 is migrating from older legacy systems to a new electronic case management system which will require a lot of effort on behalf of the Division's fiscal and program staff, community rehabilitation program representatives, and developers. The Division is looking to make the process of receiving documentation and invoicing for services as paperless as possible.

(6) Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.

At this time, DVRS and DSB are entering into the baseline year for the performance accountability measures under section 116 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

The Divisions realize that in order to perform better on the indicator concerning median quarterly earnings, they must help consumers to prepare higher paying positions, typically obtained through increased education, specifically through more individuals successfully completing their post-secondary degrees, then following through with jobs that match their employment potential. DVRS and DSB are currently looking for ways to adjust programs, services, and supports to accomplish this in a fiscally-responsible manner.

Further, DVRS' commitment to increasing client earnings is reflected in the elevated standing of importance that obtaining quality jobs for its consumers has and has made pursuit of this goal/priority 1: Employment Outcomes: Increase quantity and quality of employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with significant/most significant disabilities through a dual customer approach. Beyond increasing consumers' participation in career-oriented post-secondary education/training, some of the other strategies that DVRS has established under this goal are to develop and build quality relationships with businesses that offer strong salaries and benefits and to continue offering the internship services, which, compared to an OJT experience, are geared more toward individuals who have completed their specialized training and need work experience to get their careers established. This



service has been very well received by staff and consumers and we expect to continue the service.

Another strategy that DVRS is employing to increase the earning potential of individuals who have entrepreneurial skills is through the support the Division has made available through a dedicated Small Business Specialist on staff who helps support staff and consumers in their assessment of this option as a fit and when it is mutually determined as such, coordination of local resources and ongoing supports for the consumer pursuing this option.

In 2013, DVRS participated in a NIDRR-funded Learning Collaborative administered by the Institute for Community Inclusion. DVRS submitted a proposal to focus on strategies that can be employed to increase the average hourly wage in two offices within the Western region with different economic climates and resources. Asheville, which is the larger economic environment, will employ different strategies and approaches to the Forest City office, which is largely manufacturing-based and rural. The project concluded in February 2014, and successful strategies were reviewed to determine whether they may have application to other economic areas in North Carolina.

(7) Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals with disabilities.

DVRS has relatively strong ties with other components of the statewide Workforce Development System. The partnerships and linkages that were established prior to the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act amendments of 1998 have served as a stable and effective foundation for effective service delivery. Cooperative agreements or memorandum of agreements have been established with all local area workforce boards. The agreements provide for the following strategies:

Provision of inter-component staff training and technical assistance with regard to:

- the availability and benefits of, and information on eligibility standards for vocational rehabilitation services; and
- the promotion of equal, effective, and meaningful participation by individuals with disabilities receiving workforce development system services in all of the states JobLink Career Centers in the state through the promotion of accessibility; the use of non-discriminatory policies and procedures; the provision of reasonable accommodations; auxiliary aids and services, and rehabilitation technology for persons with disabilities.

Identification of service delivery strategies by the Division within the JobLink Career Centers and other components of the workforce development system.

Development and implementation of information systems that link all components of the statewide workforce development system; that link the components to other electronic networks including non-visual electronic networks; and that relate to such subjects as employment statistics and information on job vacancies, career planning, and workforce development activities.

Further development and use of customer service features such as common intake and referral procedures when feasible, customer databases, resource information, and human services hotlines.

Establishment of cooperative efforts with employers to facilitate job placement and carry out any other activities that Vocational Rehabilitation and the employers determine to be appropriate.

Identification of staff roles, responsibilities, and available resources, along with specification of the financial responsibility of each component of the statewide workforce development system with regards to paying for certain services (consistent with state law and federal requirements).

The rehabilitation needs of individuals who are served through components of the statewide workforce development system other than through the public vocational rehabilitation program will be updated and reassessed through the methodology outlined in that section of the VR portion of the Unified State Plan. One of the ongoing goals for both the vocational rehabilitation and JobLink system is to continue to refine the processes and procedures for JobLink staff to better determine which consumers with disabilities utilizing the centers should be referred to DVRS rather than being served through the JobLink. First it is necessary to determine which consumers served by the JobLink system have a disability. Strategies to improve this will be further explored via mutual collaboration between the Division and JobLink Career Centers to establish training for its staff.

The Division enthusiastically participated in the development of JobLink Career Centers and continues to be an active partner throughout North Carolina to ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access core workforce services. Vocational Rehabilitation staff are represented on the state level as well as on local boards. The Division remains an active partner with the workforce development system and supports the JobLinks concept to provide more universal access to placement and training services; to integrate programs by offering a common core of information and services; and by offering consumers more choices regarding where and how they get services. Through local agreements, direct service delivery staff within the Division have gained more access to comprehensive Division of Employment Security data, which enables faster service delivery and cross-agency collaboration. Nearly all DVRS offices have obtained access to these databases to date.

In every community where there are JobLink Career Centers, local Vocational Rehabilitation offices provide counseling staff, vocational evaluators, human resource placement specialists and other staff as appropriate to meet the needs of those individuals who enter a JobLink Career Center and require the specialized services offered by Vocational Rehabilitation. Specific arrangements and staffing patterns by Vocational Rehabilitation staff vary from site to site depending on local needs and agreements. Enhanced working relationships with key partners of the workforce development system such as Social Services, NC Division of Employment Security, NC Community College System, and other local partnerships allow all the agencies to better meet the needs of the individual.

The number of individuals served or identified through components of the workforce development system is increasing. Local Division management represents Vocational Rehabilitation on the local workforce development boards while staff also actively participate in planning, development, and service delivery with both individual component agencies or within the JobLink Career Centers already established.

State Level meetings with identified partners of the workforce development system continue to promote effective collaboration and equal access to services by individuals with disabilities.

(8) How the agency's strategies will be used to:

- (A) achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment;
- (B) support innovation and expansion activities; and
- (C) overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program

Following a thorough analysis of the results of the 2013 Statewide Comprehensive Needs Assessment, the Division and its SRC, jointly established the prioritized goals below for the period 2015-17:

### **Priority 1. Improve Client Outcomes**

**Goal 1.1.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 1.1.1.** The total number of individuals exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 1.1.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 50.4% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 55.8% in program year 2017.

**Goal 1.2.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with significant or most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 1.2.1.** Maintain that at least 75% of VR consumers who achieved competitive employment will be individuals with significant or most significant disabilities.

**Goal 1.3.** Increase earnings for individuals exiting the VR program in employment.

- **Objective 1.3.1.** Increase average hourly earnings for individuals who exit the VR program in competitive employment from 48% the statewide average for all North Carolinians in federal fiscal year 2013 to at least 52% in program year 2017.
- **Objective 1.3.2.** Increase the proportion of clients exiting the VR Program in competitive employment whose own income is their primary source of support at closure compared to the percentage whose own income is the primary source of support when they applied for VR services from 62.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to at least 65% in program year 2017. (RSA standard = 53%)
  - **Strategy 1.1.** Develop and maintain effective working relationships with businesses in a variety of industries across the state directly and through expanding participation in forums to include US and NC Business Leadership Networks, The Net, local chambers of commerce, and local chapters of Society of Human Resource Managers, and local workforce development partners. Support information sharing and talent pool exchanges such as the Talent Acquisition Portal.
  - **Strategy 1.2.** Equip and train Counselors, Vocational Evaluators and Business Relations Representatives to better identify the workforce needs of businesses and accurately meet them.
  - **Strategy 1.3.** Expand and improve job development, placement and employment as recommended in the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.
  - **Strategy 1.4.** Increase consumer participation in on-the-job training services, internships, and apprenticeships.
  - **Strategy 1.5.** Coordinate efforts at the state, regional, and local level to improve work-related transportation options for consumers and awareness of existing options.
  - **Strategy 1.6.** Increase access to and understanding of caseload and local/regional labor market data and how it can be used to improve outcomes.
  - **Strategy 1.7.** Increase knowledge and understanding of VR and its services through systematic outreach to groups such as referral sources,

employers, consumers, advocates, school systems, and workforce development partners.

## **Priority 2. Improve Outcomes for Minorities and Populations Identified as Underserved or Hard to Place in Employment**

**Goal 2.1.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *mental illness* and *substance abuse disorder* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.1.1.** The total number of individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.1.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 47.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in program year 2017.

**Goal 2.2.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *most significant disabilities* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.2.1.** The total number of individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.2.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 44.8% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 50% in program year 2017.

- **Strategy 2.1.** Continue collaborations with programs and partners to implement evidence-based practices that will increase employment outcomes for individuals with mental illness and substance disorder, including the Individual Placements and Supports (IPS) model, as appropriate.

**Goal 2.3.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities of *minority racial backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.3.1.** The total number of individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.3.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 50.1% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 55.8% in program year 2017.

- **Strategy 2.2.** Increase cultural competence among staff, methods and resources that can help staff to effectively reach and serve individuals with disabilities of minority backgrounds and/or Hispanic ethnicity who qualify for VR services.
- **Strategy 2.3.** Encourage hiring of Spanish speaking staff members in areas with high concentrations of people of Hispanic ethnicity.

**Goal 2.4.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities with *criminal backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.4.1.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities and criminal backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 47% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in program year 2017.
  - **Strategy 2.3.** Partner with agencies, including NC Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice, associations, and employers to develop viable pathways to employment for consumers with criminal backgrounds.
  - **Strategy 2.4.** Identify and apply current best practices that will increase employment success of individuals with disabilities transitioning from a corrections environment or have experienced difficulties obtaining employment because of previous convictions.

### **Priority 3. Increase Client Satisfaction**

**Goal 3.1.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor's understanding of their VR needs.

- **Objective 3.1.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied with their counselor's understanding of their VR needs from 84.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 90% in program year 2017.

**Goal 3.2.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of being easy to contact.

- **Objective 3.2.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor was easy to contact from 86.0% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 90% in program year 2017.

**Goal 3.3.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of *working with them as an equal partner*.

- **Objective 3.3.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor worked with them as an equal partner from 85.3% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 88% in program year 2017.

**Goal 3.4.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of *offering options that meet their work-related needs*.

- **Objective 3.4.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor offered options that met their work-related needs from 79.9% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 84% in program year 2017.

**Goal 3.5.** Increase client satisfaction with their *level of involvement* in their VR program.

- **Objective 3.5.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied with their level of involvement in their VR program from 81.5% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 85% in program year 2017.

**Goal 3.6.** Increase client satisfaction with *response time for services* provided by VR staff.

- **Objective 3.6.1.** Increase the percent of clients who rate the response time for services provided by VR staff as *above average* or *excellent* from 63.4% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 67% in program year 2017.

**Goal 3.7.** Increase client satisfaction with their *overall experience* with the VR program.

- **Objective 3.7.1.** Increase the percent of clients who rate their overall experience with the VR program as *above average* or *excellent* from 66.3% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 71% in program year 2017.
  - **Strategy 3.1.** Identify areas where improved customer friendly practices are needed.
  - **Strategy 3.2.** Improve consumers' understanding of the rehabilitation process with emphasis on the eligibility determination process, comprehensive assessment, and plan development.
  - **Strategy 3.3.** Improve use of methods and techniques to improve the active management of eligibility determination timelines.
  - **Strategy 3.4.** Investigate, develop and expand methods to effectively maintain contact between service staff and consumers while protecting consumers' privacy.
  - **Strategy 3.5.** Optimize policies, rules, processes, and related aides for ease of use for improved delivery of services, including rehabilitation technology services.
  - **Strategy 3.6.** Increase the amount and quality of information available through the Division's online presence.

## Division of Services for the Blind

**Priority 1:** Increase the average wages and benefits of individuals closed with successful wage-earning employment outcomes

**Goal 1:** Individuals who are blind or visually impaired in North Carolina will have access to employment opportunities that provide good wages and level of benefits through use of expanded internships, work experiences, community based work adjustment, and expanded relationships with employer portals. Goal will be to increase successful employment outcomes with benefits by 2% (baseline 2013 - 72) and to increase average wage at closure by 1% (baseline 2013 - \$11.97 per hour).

**Strategy (a)** DSB's staff will utilize the internship program to obtain placements for eligible individuals who have recently completed post-secondary training or occupational education. The internship training program gives eligible individuals who are recent graduates a competitive edge with the number of experienced individuals in the current job market due to company closings and layoffs. DSB reimburses an employer up to 100% of the individual's wages and benefits contribution without requiring a commitment of hiring at the completion of the internship. The use of Internship will remain a strategy through September, 2015, with the goal of seven (7) internship placements that result in three (3) successful employment outcomes during FFY2015. Tracking will be done through monthly feedback to the Program Specialist for Job Placement from office supervisors.

**Strategy (b)** DSB staff will build upon the use of "Work Experiences without Pay" to obtain opportunities where employment is more likely to be offered at the conclusion of the work experience agreement. The goal will be to enter into 80 Work Experience without Pay agreements that result in 12 placements during FFY2015. DSB will continue to provide worker compensation coverage for consumers participating in work experiences, since the employer cannot cover them unless they are paid. Tracking will be done through monthly feedback to the Program Specialist for Job Placement from office supervisors and information made available through the agency's new case management system BEAM.



**Strategy (c)** DSB staff will have resources of community-based work adjustment services through community rehabilitation programs for eligible individuals who require this service for successful employment. It is a resource for individuals who need short-term job coaching to be successful on the job, but do not require long-term support services afforded by supported employment services. The goal for FFY2015 will be five successful employment closures with use of this program. Tracking will be done through monthly feedback to the Program Specialist for Job Placement from office supervisors and information made available through the agency's new case management system BEAM.

**Strategy (d)** DSB will participate in the talent acquisition portal designed exclusively for VR individuals, which will permit increased access to local, statewide, and national job openings and direct exposure to business customers seeking to employ individuals from the talent pool of people with disabilities. A pilot project has been completed in one office that was determined to be successful, and will now be implemented in all offices during FFY2015. Tracking will be done through the agency's Program Specialist for Job Development and Placement.

**Goal 2.** DSB will increase staff knowledge about careers, employment opportunities, and business relationship development. Goal will be measured by staff reports to supervisors, who in turn will share with program specialist for job development.

**Strategy (a)** DSB will provide ongoing training experiences for all VR counselors, business representatives, and community employment specialists to include detailed knowledge of DSB work experiences, DSB Business Services, and evidence based practices related to achieving optimal employment outcomes. Each rehabilitation counselor, business representative, community employment specialist, and supervisor will attend at least one agency-sponsored event regarding best practices for placement services per year. Each new counselor, business representative, and community

employment specialist will receive additional training regarding these subjects within the first six months of employment. Tracking will be done through the agency's staff development program specialist.

**Strategy (b)** DSB will provide staff with information on local and state labor markets, especially careers in high demand and the skills and training required to enter those careers. Each rehabilitation counselor, business representative, community employment specialist, and supervisor will attend at least two events about local commerce or job fairs in their service area, and report these to their supervisor as to how the event may influence their employment activities. Tracking will be done through reports made to the office supervisor, to be submitted monthly to the chief of rehabilitation field services.

**Strategy (c)** DSB will increase the awareness of staff as to how assistive technology can increase placements in job settings, especially high demand careers. Each rehabilitation counselor, business representative, community employment specialist, and supervisor will visit at least one modified job setting to see how individuals are using the latest assistive technology on the job, and will accompany the local assistive technology consultant or rehabilitation engineer to one job site modification evaluation. Tracking will be done through reports made to the office supervisor, to be submitted monthly to the chief of rehabilitation field services.

**Goal 3:** DSB will increase the use of supported employment services to facilitate successful employment outcomes for persons with the most significant disabilities. Goal will be measured by availability of vendors in areas where there are none at this time, increased authorizations for supported employment services, and increased number of individuals closed in successful employment after receiving supported employment services.

**Strategy (a)** DSB will provide training to all DSB VR counselors regarding the definition of most significant disabling conditions that present impediments to employment and regarding supported employment

services. Each office will be provided success stories of individuals in supported employment and will have a representative that meets with the program specialist for Job Development and Placement to promote SE services in their local offices. These will be coordinated by the program specialist for supported employment services, program specialist for Job Development and Placement and the area or district supervisor in each office. The occurrence and outcome of these meetings will be reported to the chief of rehabilitation field services on a quarterly basis.

**Strategy (b)** Each district office will identify the availability of supported employment vendors for their coverage area and report this information to the program specialist for supported employment by December, 2014. The program specialist will identify potential vendors for areas not covered, and will contact them regarding the provision of services. This will be measured by number of new vendors contacted with a goal of 7 new vendors contacted during FFY 2013.

**Goal 4:** DSB staff will be able to increase an individual's ability to maintain employment after

DSB VR closure by providing holistic evaluations and service provision while active cases in areas related to secondary disabilities, independent living skills, support systems, etc. Goal will be measured by feedback from individuals closed with successful employment on the satisfaction survey, increase in success rate, and a decrease in the number of cases referred back to the agency within 36 months of successful employment outcome.

**Strategy (a)** Training in areas of the most common secondary disabling conditions and associated services will be provided to all DSB VR counselors. Based on availability of training funds, this will need to occur through FFY2017. Supervisors will be trained on assisting staff to find vendors and resources for payment (if needed) for treatment of these conditions.

**Strategy (b)** Counselors will partner with other DSB staff, including DSB social workers for the blind, Rehabilitation Center for the Blind staff, and independent living rehabilitation counselors, and with local private non-profit organizations to assist consumers in acquiring skills, resources and assistance needed to obtain the necessary level of employment stability. This will include, but not limited to, instruction in independent living skills, financial assistance for medical costs through the Affordable Health Care Act, resources for a stable living environment, locating local support groups, understanding protection through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other employment-related laws, etc. Outcome of this strategy will be measured by decreasing the number of cases reopened during a fiscal year by 10% that had been closed with a successful employment outcome during the three previous years. (Baseline will be established by number of cases reopened in FFY2014 that were successful outcome closures during FFY2011, FFY2012 and FFY2013.)

**Goal 5.** DSB will investigate evidence-based practices for the purpose of integrating them into DSB rehabilitation processes that will apply to all cases, make policy adjustments as needed, and train counselors in their use over the next three fiscal years.

**Strategy (a)** DSB will establish a committee to study the incorporation of evidence-based practices in rehabilitation that will include study of other states and consultation with individuals in the academic institutions during the first year of this goal. The committee will consist of selected individuals from the agency leadership team, Rehabilitation Center for the Blind staff and field staff. The outcome will be recommendations to the chiefs of rehabilitation regarding changes in practice needed. Tracking will be the report of the study.

**Strategy (b)** During the second year, the chiefs of rehabilitation will establish criteria and will work with the staff development specialist to determine training needs to achieve the recommended practice changes. Training will be provided to staff regarding the practice changes. Quality assurance methods will be established for

assurance that the practices are implemented. Tracking will be that all staff with direct consumer contact have received training.

**Strategy (c)** During the third year, use of the recommended evidence-based practices will be monitored by supervisors and the chief of rehabilitation field services for field staff, and by the Rehabilitation Center director and chief of programs and facilities for the Rehabilitation Center. Tracking will be results of the quality assurance reviews regarding use of the criteria and feedback from office supervisors to the chief of rehabilitation field services, and by feedback from the Rehabilitation Center staff to the chief of programs and facilities.

Priority 2: Eligible individuals will have access to assistive technology required for employment

**Goal 1.** DSB will provide assistive technology and training in its use for all eligible individuals who require specific equipment and software to obtain, maintain, and regain employment. Measurement criteria will be to increase the numbers of individuals who receive assistive technology services (equipment and/or training) by 1% (baseline 2013 – 429 individuals).

**Strategy (a)** DSB will maintain the policy to purchase of technology for eligible individuals without regard to financial eligibility when required for success in reaching their vocational goal. The individual must be working toward an employment goal that requires specific technology to attain, regain, or maintain employment and have the capacity to use the equipment.

**Goal 2.** Assistive technology staff in all seven District Offices will receive training on latest software and hardware to enhance placement opportunities. Each field staff member will attend at least two training sessions (either on-line or in classroom) during the year on new technology.

**Strategy (a)** DSB will provide training for the Rehabilitation Engineer, Assistive Technology Consultants, and Assistive Technology teachers and instructors about new and innovative products. All staff attending the training sessions will provide a written report and copies of materials obtained to their supervisors, the program specialist for AT and Deaf/Blind, and the staff development program specialist.

**Strategy (b)** DSB will partner with the NC Assistive Technology Project and the NC Rehabilitation Association to sponsor the 2014 "NCRA/NCATP Training Conference and Exhibitor Showcase" (formerly the NC Assistive Technology Expo) October 22-25, 2014, in Greenville, NC, and identify at least two presentations about assistive technology for individuals who are blind or who have visual impairments.

**Priority 3:** Transition services will be available in all counties of North Carolina for students who are blind or visually impaired.

**Goal 1:** DSB will continue to provide transition services to students who are blind or visually impaired attending schools in all 115 Local Education Agencies (LEA's) of North Carolina. The goal will be to increase the number of individuals, ages 14-21, served by 2% (baseline for FFY2013 – 310).

**Strategy (a)** Current cooperative agreements with thirteen LEA's will be maintained. School budget shortfalls are predicted to continue into the next fiscal year so expansion of this program is not anticipated. However, staff will continue making contacts with LEA's to offer opportunities for such programs. Area supervisors and program specialist for transition will make at least one contact with each LEA during the year. The program specialist for transition and supported employment will be responsible for tracking these contacts through the office supervisors.

**Strategy (b)** Transition services to students attending schools without DSB Cooperative Agreements are served by DSB VR counselors

covering those counties where the schools are located. Rehabilitation counselors will contact the lead teacher for the visually impaired for the LEA's in their counties at least twice per year. The program specialist for transition and supported employment will be responsible for tracking these contacts through the office supervisors.

**Strategy (c)** The program specialist for transition and supported employment will establish contact with state level associations for private schools, charter schools, and home-schools to share information about transition services available through DSB for distribution to their members statewide. Referrals resulting from contact with state level associations will be shared with the appropriate field VR counselor for contact by the program specialist for transition and supported employment as received.

**Goal 2:** DSB will provide continuing education training for transition program staff.

**Strategy (a)** The program specialist for transition services will conduct transition staff meetings and provide ongoing trainings quarterly to increase staff awareness and knowledge about transition issues and policy.

**Goal 3:** Rehabilitation Counselors will increase their awareness of opportunities for internships and work experiences for transition age students.

**Strategy (a)** The program specialist for transition and supported employment will provide current information about opportunities for transition age individuals by email distribution and by staff meeting presentations.

**Strategy (b)** Training about transition services and their responsibilities of outreach in their coverage area will be provided to all new rehabilitation counselors. Training will be provided by the program specialist for transition and in Best Practices for New DSB VR

Counselors. It is important that this training be provided through the state rehabilitation program staff as local supervisors to increase consistency to reaching all school-age individuals with visual impairments regarding the availability of transition services from DSB.

**Strategy (c)** Program Specialist for Transition Services and the Transition Counselors in each area will continue to be available for consultation regarding transition services.

**Priority 4:** Quality and knowledgeable outreach to individuals with disabilities, family members, and Individuals who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities will be provided by DSB.

**Goal 1:** DSB's services will be provided to individuals, families, minority populations and those experiencing health disparities through targeted outreach activities. Data for the objectives will be captured and managed the program specialist for AT/Deaf Blind.

**Strategy (a)** Outreach activities will result in the increase of total consumers served who are Hispanics/Latinos by 1% during the period October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015. (The baseline for FFY 2013 was 159.)

**Strategy (b)** Outreach activities will result in the increase of total consumers served who are African American by 1% from October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015. (The baseline for FFY 2013 was a total of 1614 individuals who are African-American.)

**Strategy (c)** Outreach activities will result in the increase of total consumers served who are Native American by 1% during the period October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015. (Baseline unable to be established due to delays in BEAM, and tracking the increase will begin in FFY 2015.)



**Strategy (d)** Outreach activities will result in the increase of total consumers served who are veterans by 1% during the period October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015. (Baseline data needs to be collected for this population for the first time using BEAM. The existing data collection system provides that nine individuals who are veterans were served in FFY2013; however the reliability of this data may be low.)

**Strategy (e)** Outreach activities will result in the increase of total consumers served who have diabetes by 1% during the period October 1, 2014 to September 30, 2015. (The baseline for FFY 2013 was 1857, with 109 of these being consumers with cases initiated in FFY2013.)

**Goal 2:** DSB will develop marketing opportunities to targeted populations regarding specific agency programs.

**Strategy (a)** DSB will develop individualized program/service brochures (Vocational Rehabilitation Program, Independent Living Rehabilitation, Independent Living Services, Deaf-Blind, Rehab Center, Business Enterprise, Assistive Technology and Assistive Technology Instructors, Evaluation Unit and for individuals with Diabetes, medical providers and Veterans) to be placed on the agency's website and be used at outreach events. The program specialist for AT/Deaf Blind services will coordinate the development of these brochures that will be done by the individual programs. Due to funding issues, it is anticipated this strategy will be completed accomplished in FFY2016.

**Strategy (b)** DSB staff will develop presentations to other state agencies and to organizations who work with individuals within the targeted populations regarding opportunities for persons with blindness and visual impairments and about services available through DSB. Tracking will occur by reports to the chief of rehabilitation field services regarding presentations made and the targeted population.

**Goal 3:** DSB will identify ways by which DSB can assist veterans with disabilities to become able to obtain, maintain or regain employment.

**Strategy:** DSB will meet with officials working with veterans who are visually impaired, blind or deaf blind to educate them regarding services that are available to veterans with disabilities through DSB.

**Goal 4:** DSB will continually seek and identify ways in which to reach the growing minority populations across North Carolina.

**Strategy (a)** DSB will increase the number of DSB employees who are of an ethnic or racial minority by 1.5 percent for FFY 2015 (baseline – FFY2013 is 85).

**Strategy (b)** DSB will encourage staff to participate in local training programs, either on-line or in community college system, in other languages. The program specialist for staff development will track and report the number of individuals who request and acquire this type of training.

**Priority 5:** Over the next two fiscal years, implementation of systematic program evaluations and consistent quality assurance methods will ensure the agency is meeting the mission of enabling individuals who are blind or visually impaired to achieve their goals of independence and employment.

**Goal 1:** DSB will increase their ability to provide consistent and accurate data using the new case management system, BEAM, for assessment of program performance. Tracking will be that the program is in place, staff has received training, and strengths and deficiencies of the reporting capabilities are determined by the end of FFY2015.

**Strategy (a)** DSB will provide refresher training, support, and problem-solving after the initiation of the agency's new case management

system, BEAM. All issues regarding BEAM use by staff using assistive technology will be resolved during the first year of its use.

**Strategy (b)** Monthly reviews of outcome data by rehabilitation program chiefs and managers will be completed with supervisors and other program staff.

**Goal 2:** DSB provides holistic, consistent, and accurate methods of quality assurance and program evaluation. Measureable criteria will be that as BEAM goes “live”, the rehabilitation program team and supervisors evaluates the data, and identifies specific methods of quality assurance that can be done through use of BEAM.

**Strategy (a)** The chief of rehabilitation field services, with consultation of supervisors, will develop an up-to- date Quality Assurance Manual outline identifying areas requiring specific methods of quality assurance based on outcome measures with consideration of BEAM. The manual will be completed and in place with staff during FFY2016.

**Strategy (b)** DSB quality assurance team (chief of rehabilitation field services, program specialists, and office supervisors) will use Quality Assurance methods to achieve holistic, consistent, and accurate measures of case reviews.

**Strategy (c)** DSB will provide feedback and training to counseling staff using the results of the quality assurance reviews to improve best practices in providing services to individuals. Tracking will be done by a meeting with counselor staff in each office at least annually to review the quality assurance review by the chief of rehabilitation field services or by the office supervisor with report to the chief.

## Section (p) Evaluation and Reports of Progress

### (p) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals.

Describe:

- (1) An evaluation of the extent to which the VR program goals described in the approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year were achieved. The evaluation must:
  - (A) Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.
  - (B) Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.
- (2) An evaluation of the extent to which the Supported Employment program goals described in the Supported Employment Supplement for the most recent program year were achieved. The evaluation must:
  - (A) Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.
  - (B) Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.
- (3) The VR program's performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA.
- (4) How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized.

## Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

### Priority 1: Improve Client Outcomes

**Goal 1.1.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 1.1.1.** The total number of individuals exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

Measure for Objective	Federal Fiscal Year					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
The number of persons achieving employment outcomes will equal or exceed the previous year.	5,961	6,303	6,758	6,723	6,310	6,317

### *Performance Assessment*

During federal fiscal year 2015, the number of individuals exiting the Division's VR program in employment decreased by 7 employment outcomes from the previous year, and there was net gain of 356 since federal fiscal year 2010, the baseline year. The

increase in employment outcomes from that of the baseline year is largely due to successful partnerships with community rehabilitation programs, and an emphasis on vocational counseling and guidance, benefits counseling, rehabilitation services, and an emphasis on matching employers' workforce needs with the skillsets of VR consumers through a Dual Customer Approach. Placements through community rehabilitation programs account for approximately a third of the clients who exited in employment. Other strategies employed to improve performance on this indicator are summarized in the strategies section of the Unified State Plan. The Division continues to utilize on-the-job training and internship services, though wage subsidies are funded at a reduced amount relative to when additional funding for these services was available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

- **Objective 1.1.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 50.4% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 55.8% in federal fiscal year 2017.

Measure for Objective	Federal Fiscal Year					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
The percentage of all individuals who have achieved an employment outcome after exiting the program having received services will equal or exceed 55.8%.	56.6%	56.5%	56.4%	50.4%	58.1%	55.1%

### ***Performance Assessment***

The DVRS VR Program met this indicator in federal fiscal year 2014 but fell short by less than 1% in 2015. Success in 2014 was partially due to filling the previously higher than expected number of counselor vacancies. However, a significant number of cases that would have been closed in the prior year remained open as a residual effect of these vacancies. Having increased staff provided the capacity to review and close these cases in 2015. The agency will continue monitoring this indicator with increased emphasis of its importance by management. In addition, group orientation at the larger offices should better inform VR clients on the program's expectations of employment prior to provision of planned services. DVRS expects this will be a gauge of the WIOA performance accountability measures related to the employment rate at the second and fourth quarter following case closure.

**Goal 1.3.** Increase earnings for individuals exiting the VR program in employment.

- **Objective 1.3.1.** Increase average hourly earnings for individuals who exit the VR program in competitive employment from 48% the statewide average for all North Carolinians in federal fiscal year 2013 to at least 52% in federal fiscal year 2017.

Measure for Objective	Federal Fiscal Year					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
The average hourly earnings of all individuals who exit the program in competitive employment as a ratio to the average hourly earnings for all employed North Carolinians will equal or exceed 0.52.	0.50	0.48	0.48	0.47	0.44	0.43

### ***Performance Assessment***

For federal fiscal year 2015, DVRS was not able to meet this RSA indicator, which continues to present a challenge, despite strategies to encourage additional education and training to increase client earnings. DVRS attributes its current performance on this indicator primarily as a result of two main factors: the large number of transition-age youth whose exit the VR program in entry-level positions and the number of individuals served through supported employment, which comprise 17% of the VR program's employment outcomes. These individuals exit the VR program with earnings that are closer to minimum wage. Despite the impact on performance for this measure, the DVRS maintains a strong commitment to supported employment and providing VR services for transition-age youth. In federal fiscal year 2013, DVRS participated in a learning collaborative sponsored by the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, to study strategies for increasing consumer wages, including a team-based approach with a focus on employer relations and job matching. The pilot study included the Asheville and Forest City offices, which represent different types of local economies. During the period of the study, average hourly earnings for clients at the pilot offices had increased while wages had decreased for clients served at other offices throughout the state.

- **Objective 1.3.2.** Increase the proportion of clients exiting the VR Program in competitive employment whose own income is their primary source of support at closure compared to the percentage whose own income is the primary source of support when they applied for VR services from 62.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to at least 65% in federal fiscal year 2017. (RSA standard = 53%)

Measure for Objective	Federal Fiscal Year					
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Of the individuals who achieve competitive employment, the difference between the percent who reported their own income as the largest single source of economic support at closure compared to the percent at application.	62.3	63.8	63.8	62.8	63.7	66.4

### ***Performance Assessment***

During federal fiscal year 2015, DVRS exceeded the performance standard for this indicator, and expects continued performance. Approximately 78% of VR clients that

exited in employment had their own income as their primary source of support. Of these, about 11.6% were retention cases where the individual with a disability was employed at the time of application with their own earnings as their primary source and the other 66.4% were primarily dependent on another source of income, such as public support or family and friends. This latter group moved towards self-sufficiency at the time of case closure and had reduced dependence on other sources of support to where they primarily depended on their own earnings.

## **Priority 2. Improve Outcomes for Minorities and Populations Identified as Underserved or Hard to Place in Employment**

**Goal 2.1.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *mental illness* and *substance abuse disorder* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.1.1.** The total number of individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.1.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 47.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in federal fiscal year 2017.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year	
	2014	2015
The total number of individuals with mental illness and/or substance abuse disorder exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.	2,298	2,861
Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with mental illness and/or substance abuse disorder exiting the VR program after receiving services	52.8%	52.8%

### ***Performance Assessment***

Since the last comprehensive statewide needs assessment was conducted, Individuals with mental illness have comprised an increasing proportion of the employment outcomes and in 2015 accounted for about 45% of all employment outcomes. Success in this area is largely attributed to expanded use of community rehabilitation programs through the milestone system and collaborative interagency efforts, including those that specifically target this population such as the individual placement and supports model of supported employment.

**Goal 2.2.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *most significant disabilities* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.2.1.** The total number of individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.2.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 44.8% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 50% in federal fiscal year 2017.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year	
	2014	2015
The total number of individuals with Most Significant Disabilities exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.	1,575	1,713
Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with Most Significant Disabilities exiting the VR program after receiving services	54.8%	51.4%

### ***Performance Assessment***

Since the last comprehensive statewide needs assessment was conducted, Individuals with most significant disabilities have comprised an increasing proportion of the employment outcomes and in 2015 accounted for about 27% of all employment outcomes. Many of these individuals are individuals with severe- or severe and persistent mental illness or transition-age youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Success in this area is largely attributed to a focus on services for transition-age youth with I/DD and expanded use of community rehabilitation programs through the milestone system and collaborative interagency efforts, including those that specifically target this population such as the individual placement and supports model of supported employment.

**Goal 2.3.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities of *minority racial backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.3.1.** The total number of individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.3.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 50.1% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 55.8% in federal fiscal year 2017.



Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year	
	2014	2015
The total number of individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.	3,097	3,182
Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services.	57.3%	54.6%

### **Performance Assessment**

Individuals of minority backgrounds accounted for more than 50% of all employment outcomes in federal fiscal year 2015. Success in this area is largely attributed to a focus on services for transition-age youth with I/DD and expanded use of community rehabilitation programs through the milestone system, consumer outreach initiatives and collaborative interagency efforts.

**Goal 2.4.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities with *criminal backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.4.1.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities and criminal backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 47% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in federal fiscal year 2017.

Note: Data for the measure of this objective are pending.

### **Priority 3. Increase Client Satisfaction**

**Goal 3.1.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor's understanding of their VR needs.

- **Objective 3.1.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied with their counselor's understanding of their VR needs from 84.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 90% in federal fiscal year 2017.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year		
	2013	2014	2015
Percent of clients satisfied with their counselor in terms of understanding their VR needs	84.7%	83.2%	83.1%

**Goal 3.2.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of being easy to contact.

- **Objective 3.2.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor was easy to contact from 86.0% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 90% in federal fiscal year 2017.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year		
	2013	2014	2015
Percent of clients satisfied with their counselor in terms of being easy to contact	86.0%	84.3%	84.0%

**Goal 3.3.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of *working with them as an equal partner*.

- **Objective 3.3.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor worked with them as an equal partner from 85.3% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 88% in federal fiscal year 2017.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year		
	2013	2014	2015
Percent of clients satisfied with their counselor in terms of working with them as an equal partner	85.3%	83.6%	83.9%

**Goal 3.4.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of *offering options that meet their work-related needs*.

- **Objective 3.4.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor offered options that met their work-related needs from 79.9% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 84% in federal fiscal year 2017.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year		
	2013	2014	2015
Percent of clients satisfied with their counselor in terms of offering options to meet their needs related to work	79.9%	78.0%	77.0%

**Goal 3.5.** Increase client satisfaction with their *level of involvement* in their VR program.

- **Objective 3.5.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied with their level of involvement in their VR program from 81.5% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 85% in federal fiscal year 2017.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year		
	2013	2014	2015
Percent of clients satisfied or very satisfied with their level of involvement in their VR program.	81.5%	80.9%	81.8%

**Goal 3.6.** Increase client satisfaction with *response time for services* provided by VR staff.

- **Objective 3.6.1.** Increase the percent of clients who rate the response time for services provided by VR staff as *above average* or *excellent* from 63.4% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 67% in federal fiscal year 2017.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year		
	2013	2014	2015
Percent of clients satisfied or very satisfied with the response time for services provided by VR staff.	63.4%	62.2%	57.6%

**Goal 3.7.** Increase client satisfaction with their *overall experience* with the VR program.

- **Objective 3.7.1.** Increase the percent of clients who rate their overall experience with the VR program as *above average* or *excellent* from 66.3% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 71% in federal fiscal year 2017.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year		
	2013	2014	2015
Percent of clients satisfied or very satisfied with their overall experience in the VR Program.	66.3%	64.3%	60.5%

### ***Performance Assessment for Goal 3.***

For federal fiscal year 2014, the percentages on the measures of customer satisfaction were across all indicators except client involvement with their program were slightly lower than the previous year. Although the decrease is relatively small, it speaks to the need to emphasize the importance of, and need for, continued emphasis on the counselor-client relationship, consumer involvement, consumer satisfaction and work towards improving services for VR consumers.

### **Supported Employment Goals and Strategies**

- (2) An evaluation of the extent to which the Supported Employment program goals described in the Supported Employment Supplement for the most recent program year were achieved. The evaluation must:
  - (A) Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.
  - (B) Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.

**Response:** Goals for the supported employment program included:

**Supported Employment Goal 1:** Increase the number of individuals with most significant disabilities who receive supported employment services.

<b>Measures for SE Goal 1: Objective 1.</b> Increase the number of individuals with most significant disabilities who receive supported employment services.		<b>Federal Fiscal Year</b>					
		<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
<b>Measure SE.1.</b>	Number of individuals receiving supported employment services.	4,385	4,372	4,305	3,979	3,217	2,960
<b>Measure SE.2.a.</b>	Number of individuals exiting the VR program in employment in an integrated setting with supports.	923	968	1,023	989	939	1,110
<b>Measure SE.2.b.</b>	Of the individuals who receive supported employment services, the percent who exit the VR program with an employment outcome.	50.7%	49.0%	49.8%	43.3%	55.8%	54.4%

**Performance Assessment for SE Goal 1:** *Increase the number of individuals with most significant disabilities who receive supported employment services.*

The reported number of VR consumers receiving supported employment services through the Division has decreased year-over-year while the number of SE employment outcomes in 2015 is at a 5-year high. This is largely attributed to the implementation of the pay-for-performance milestone system toward the end of 2013. Prior to implementation of the milestone system, services were paid at an hourly rate and many SE clients accrued many hours of job development prior to or without being placed in employment. With the implementation of the milestone payment system, SE clients progressed through job development to placement and stability more quickly. This decreased the total volume of clients receiving such services in a given year and increased both the number of employment outcomes and the success rate. Services might be further expanded, however, this is limited by a longstanding shortage of funds dedicated to long term vocational supports (LTVS) for this population.

**Supported Employment Goal 2:** Identify and begin implementing practices that can increase the successful closure rate of individuals receiving supported employment services.

**Performance Assessment for SE Goal 2:** *Identify and begin implementing practices that can increase the successful closure rate of individuals receiving supported employment services.*

During federal fiscal year 2015, 1,110 individuals who received supported employment services exited the VR program successfully employed in an integrated setting with supports. The issues identified in the assessment of SE Goal 1, regarding the availability of supported employment services, also adversely impact the ability of service providers to achieve employment outcomes for VR consumers. To adapt to the

changing and challenging economy, the Division has since implemented an outcome-based milestone payment system for community rehabilitation programs that were previously billing at an hourly rate for supported employment job development and intensive training services. This change impacted services on a systems level to the benefit of VR consumers in that the payment to the CRP is contingent on the consumers' success. The Division expects services will become more efficient and simultaneously result in increased outcomes for VR consumers.

**Supported Employment Goal 3:** *In search of improved supported employment services delivery models and practices, continue assessing the positive components gained through experience with the ARRA-funded innovative collaborative projects that concluded with federal fiscal year 2011.*

**Performance Assessment:** During federal fiscal year 2012, the Division worked to establish two programs as an extension of programs that were funded under the ARRA contracts that the Division had established during federal fiscal year 2010-11 to help meet the needs of consumers with significant and most significant disabilities in areas of employment training, employment-related transportation, and the creation of CRP-based enterprises for purposes of training. Two of the programs that were extended follow the "Project Search," a nationally known model, to provide training for transition-aged students in the Durham and Charlotte areas. These programs are described as business-led one-year school-to-work programs provided entirely at a workplace. The host sites for the expanded program, where were selected through a collaborative planning process, include Durham Regional Hospital in Durham, NC and Mercy Hospital in Charlotte, NC. These programs are based on a concept that employs total workplace immersion which facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations. The two programs entered performance-based contracts July 1, 2012 and remain in place.

**Supported Employment Goal 4:** *Support increased training/qualification requirements for job coaches and their supervisory staff. Collaboratively increase supported employment training to DVRS rehabilitation counselors and Community Rehabilitation Program direct service staff through the addition of a web-based (and other forms of) curriculum development.*

**Performance Assessment:** The CRP-DVRS steering committee has established a subcommittee to focus on this area and are assessing the current training needs of CRP staff. The committee will continue to work with the regional TACE to implement components of the training effort addressing this area as resources allow. The Division's rules addressing these requirements are also in process.

**Supported Employment Goal 5:** *Continue collaboration with the Division of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services to secure reporting of the*

*expenditures of the Long Term Support service definition in order to ensure consistent administration of these funds.*

**Performance Assessment:** The Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services' (DMHDDSA) employment specialist has been instrumental in bridging a communication gap that existed in previous years. This individual has been very involved improving Local Management Entity/Managed Care Organization (LME/MCO) funding agreements to provide emphasis on effective utilization and accounting of extended services funding for recipients of supported employment services. The individual is also providing regular education to the service provider community. DMHDDSA is developing a state definition for supported employment and long term vocational support. Through this definition, if an individual with disabilities chooses NCDVRS as their supported employment provider, and the person is served through the (LME/MCO) system, they will be able to receive long term vocational supports (LTVS).

**Requirement:**

2. The VR program's performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA.

	Projecte d Baseline	PY 2016 / FY 2017			PY 2017 / FY 2018		
		Propose d	Negotiat ed	Proposed Final Change  in Performanc e	Propose d	Negotiat ed	Proposed Final Change  in Performan ce
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services							
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	35%						
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	32%						
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$2,800						
Credential Attainment Rate	TBD						
Measureable Skill Gains	TBD						
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	TBD						

**Requirement:**

- (3) How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized.

The areas where funds were utilized include:

- In order to promote consumers' ability to access current assistive technologies for increasing employment capabilities, innovation and expansion funds were utilized during FFY 2014-15 to purchase demonstration devices for use with the North Carolina Assistive Technology Program to expand their device loan and assistive technology assessment capabilities using more current employment-related assistive technologies.

- Specialized Supported Employment Demonstration Project: In collaboration with NC Easterseals/UCP, a demonstration program that targets the provision of extensive wrap around support services for dually-diagnosed individuals with mental and mobility impairments that have not been successful with traditional supported employment programs was funded. During SFY 2013, the demonstration program reported that 14 individuals were successfully placed, reached stabilization or achieved a successful employment outcome.
- Beginning October, 2015, innovation and expansion funds are being utilized through a financial assistance contract with the Statewide Independent Living Council to further their progress in achieving goals and strategies within the current State Plan for Independent Living.
- Support of Activities of the State Rehabilitation Council

During federal fiscal year 2012, the Division worked to establish two programs as an extension of programs that were funded under the ARRA contracts that the Division had established during federal fiscal year 2010-2011 to help meet the needs of consumers with significant and most significant disabilities in areas of employment training, employment-related transportation, and the creation of CRP-based enterprises for purposes of training. Two of the programs that were extended follow the "Project Search" nationally known model to provide training for transition-aged students in the Durham and Charlotte areas. These programs are described as business-led, one year school-to-work programs that are embedded within an actual workplace. The host sites for the expanded program selected through a collaborative planning process were Durham Regional Hospital in Durham, NC and Mercy Hospital in Charlotte, NC. The differentiation component of these programs is that it follows a concept that employs total workplace immersion which facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training through worksite rotations. The two programs entered performance-based contracts July 1, 2012 and remained in place during federal fiscal year 2013. There are initial plans in place to expand this model to four additional locations distributed across the state during federal fiscal year 2015, should adequate funding remain available.

## **Division of Services for the Blind**

**Priority 1:** Increase the average wages and benefits of individuals closed with successful wage-earning employment outcomes

**Goal 1:** Individuals who are blind or visually impaired in North Carolina will have access to employment opportunities that provide good wages and level of benefits.



**Objective (a):** The Division's staff will obtain placements for eligible individuals who have recently completed post-secondary training or occupational education through a specialized on-the-job training program called the "Intern Program". The "Intern Program" replaces a similar on-the-job training program funded through ARRA called ARRA On-The-Job Training (ARRA OJT). This training program gives newly trained eligible individuals a competitive edge with the number of experienced individuals in the current job market due to company closings and layoffs. The Division reimburses an employer up to 100% of the individual's wages and benefits contribution without requiring a commitment of hiring for a specific period of time agreed upon in a written agreement with the employer and The Division. The economy recovery in North Carolina has been slower than anticipated, especially in the more rural areas of the state. Therefore, this will remain a strategy through September, 2013, with the goal of seven placements that result in five permanent job offers and four successful employment outcomes.

During FFY2013, DSB experienced multiple changes in personnel and state government state hiring freezes by those responsible for tracking these numbers. As a result, accurate numbers are not available. However, all offices are aware of the Internship and similar opportunities made available for clients. In one situation, an individual received an internship from an employer, but the employer was then unable to offer the individual a job. However, due to the experience gained in the internship, the individual was hired by another company doing the same work due to their experience acquired during the internship. Therefore, this program is considered to be very successful and will be closely monitored in the future, not only by staff but through the new case management system, BEAM to allow for a more reliable reporting mechanism.

**Objective (b):** Division staff will have resources of community-based work adjustment services through community rehabilitation programs for eligible individuals who require this service for successful employment. It is a resource for individuals who need short-term job coaching to be successful on the job, but do not require long-term support services afforded by supported employment services. The goal for FFY2013 will be five successful employment closures with use of this program.

During FFY2013, DSB experienced multiple changes in personnel and state government state hiring freezes by those responsible for tracking these numbers. As a result, accurate numbers are not available. However, all offices are aware of this opportunity. It has been noted that several individuals have received the first milestone; Community Based Assessment, and have gone on to employment without needing the full program of services.

**Goal 2:** Increase staff knowledge about careers and employment opportunities in the State and the requirements of these positions.

**Objective (a):** Provide ongoing training experiences for all Division VR counselors, business representatives and community employment specialists about career opportunities in North Carolina's changing economy to include a segment on job analysis and use of assistive technology.

DSB VR counselors were provided ongoing information and training about career opportunities and specific position requirements consistent with employer needs in NC. Many of these opportunities were the result of business relationships developed through CSAVR's National Employment Team. Some of these business relationships were developed through referrals from OFCCP to Vocational Rehabilitation, and it is anticipated that both sources of business referrals and subsequent knowledge of employer needs will grow in importance for educating VR counselors on NC career opportunities. Meeting the assistive technology needs of consumers was addressed through training VR counselors to both utilize referrals to the Division's Assistive Technology Consultants and to use the Job Accommodation Network to identify AT accommodations as a means to educate themselves and employers. During job development and placement trainings, assistive technology solutions used by consumers to achieve successful employment were shared between VR counselors to advance knowledge of AT solutions. The emphasis on assistive technology as a vital component for successful employment is a practice supported by the Division's management, and information on new AT products and solutions is routinely shared across the agency with all VR counselors.

**Objective (b):** Expand the use of the office plan in each seven district offices for contacting businesses in the locations that targets employers offering higher wages and career advancement.

Each office did complete an office plan for targeting employers that offered higher wages and advancement opportunities. This objective will be continued into next year with more supervision by the Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services and technical assistance from the program specialist for job development and placement.

**Objective (c):** Provide targeted one-on-one training by the Program Specialist for Job Development and Placement to each rehabilitation counselor and business representative that will consist of job coaching through an employer interview. In those areas and for those staff with lower numbers of business contacts and successful placements, a follow-up session will be held.

Targeted one-on-one training has been offered to each new counselor and business representative and to those who have lower numbers of business contacts and successful placements. Not all took advantage of this training. During FFY2013, changes in management staff and lengthy vacancies in field positions, as well as time spent to initiate BEAM, created barriers to the needed emphasis. However, this is an established practice at this point and will be continued and maintained as a high priority in the coming year.

**Goal 3:** Increase community rehabilitation counselor awareness of opportunities for internships and other work experiences for transition age students, especially in areas where specialized transition programs are not available.

**Objective (a):** Maintain a section on the agency's web page that will include information about opportunities for transition-age and college age students for job internship opportunities, work experiences, conferences and ideas, to be maintained by the Program Specialist for Transition with contributions made by the specialized transition programs staff.

The agency's web page has a targeted area for services available for transition age students. However, due to changes in the state's regulations and policies regarding web-page content and maintenance, other ways of intra-agency information sharing and presentations outside the agency are being developed. Internship opportunities through employers or national and local organizations, including unique requirements

and deadlines, were provided to all VR counselors who shared that information with their transitioning students.

**Objective (b):** Provide training workshops for community new rehabilitation counselors on transition services that needs to be provided to students attending schools where the Division does not have a formal Transition Program.

Training for new counselors, called Best Practices for New DSB VR Counselors, includes a major section on provision of services to students in secondary schools. During FFY2013, it was revamped by the Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services to ensure it included definitions and acronyms used within schools, to identify key individuals to whom contact is to be made, and to denote the importance of reaching individuals at an early age.

**Priority 2:** Eligible individuals will have access to assistive technology (at) required for employment

**Goal 1:** Provide accessible technology for all eligible individuals who require specific equipment and software in order to obtain maintain and regain employment.

**Objective:** Purchase of technology for eligible individuals without regard to financial eligibility when required for success in reaching their vocational goal. The Division changed the procedure for purchasing required AT from a service provided only to those who meet financial need criteria, to a service provided to eligible individuals without regard to financial need in FFY2010. During FFY2010 and FFY2011, ARRA funding was used to fund this policy change through September 30, 2011. Due to advancements in AT over the past three years, new training opportunities and jobs have opened to individuals who are blind or visually impaired with use of AT. Therefore, the agency recommended that the practice of purchasing required AT without regard to economic remain in place after the expiration of ARRA funds, which was approved by the State Rehabilitation Council.

DSB now provides assistive technology to individuals who require it for employment without regard to income. During FFY2013, 429 individuals were provided assistive

technology services, and case service funds of \$188,813 were spent on technology devices to include hardware and software.

**Goal 2:** Assistive technology staff in all seven District Offices will receive training on latest software and hardware to enhance placement opportunities.

**Objective (a):** Provide training for the Rehabilitation Engineer, Assistive Technology Consultants, and Assistive Technology teachers and instructors about new and innovative products.

During FFY2013, DSB field AT staff and Rehabilitation Center for the Blind AT staff attended the NC Assistive Technology Project/NC Rehabilitation Association Conference for 2012 in December, 2012, and for 2013 in August, 2013. This conference provided numerous presentations about use of AT with persons with blindness and visual impairments as well as about use with other disabling conditions. The largest vendor hall available in North Carolina is provided at these conferences, allowing staff to meet and talk with vendors from multiple companies and areas of specialty.

**Objective (b):** Partner with the NC Assistive Technology Project and the NC Rehabilitation Association to sponsor the 2012 "GREAT" (Global Rehabilitation Enhanced by Assistive Technology) (formerly the NC Assistive Technology Expo) to be held December 5-7, 2012, and identify at least two presentations about access technology for individuals who are blind or who have visual impairments.

DSB partnered with other sponsors of this event by submitting a contribution in excess of \$2,500 to each conference and by providing presenters for three concurrent sessions. Participation in this program reach numerous individuals outside DSB that reach persons from a variety of targeted populations, as it is attended by other vocational rehabilitation agencies, private non-profit organizations and private individuals.

**Priority 3:** Transition services will be available in all counties of North Carolina for students who are blind or visually impaired.

**Goal 1:** The Division will continue to provide transition services to students who are blind or visually impaired attending schools in all 115 Local Education Agencies (LEA's) of North Carolina. The goal will be to increase the number of individuals, ages 14-21, served by more than 2% (baseline for FFY2011: 290)

**Objective (a)** Current Cooperative Agreements with fifteen LEAs' will be maintained, as economic instability continues and projected budget shortfalls are projected to increase in the next fiscal year. LEA's in North Carolina are searching for programs to cut in order to preserve their own staffs.

Despite significant budget cuts for school systems, the cooperative agreements with the 15 local education agencies (LEA) were maintained. The number of students served in these programs during FFY2013 is 288 students, which is a 6.7% increase from FFY2011 (270 served).

**Objective (b)** Transition services to students attending schools without Division cooperative agreements will be served by Division VR counselors in the counties where the schools are located.

The number served by community counselors in LEA's not covered by cooperative agreements significantly decreased during FFY2013. Due to state personnel initiated hiring freeze effects, several counselor positions that normally provided services remained vacant. The work load prevented outreach to students in these LEA's, as well as to private schools and home schooled individuals within the 14 to 21 age range. This will remain as these freezes have slowly been lifted during FFY2014.

**Goal 2:** The Division will provide continuing education training for transition program staff.

**Objective (a)** Transition Staff that have enrolled in Certificate in Transition with Winston-Salem State University will complete the program.

Two individuals enrolled into this program. However, due to funding streams, program changes occurred and Winston-Salem State temporarily suspended this

program. When it is reinitiated, the Program Specialist for Staff Development will distribute information regarding this opportunity with intent to have individuals participate.

**Objective (b)** All Transition Staff will complete training in the Discovery Process provided Southeast Regional TACE program, so they can begin to use the process with the students in their programs during this Fiscal Year.

All transition staff participated in this training. Reports from staff indicate that some of the information was found to be useful. However, other information included in this training was found to not be appropriate for students being served who are blind or visually impaired but otherwise independent.

**Objective (c)** The Program Specialist for Transition Services will continue to have transition staff meetings and/or provide ongoing trainings quarterly to increase staff awareness and knowledge about transition issues and policy.

Due to the state imposed hiring freeze, the program specialist position has remained vacant for over a year. Meetings were limited, although the transition staff across the state shared information throughout the year.

**Goal 3:** Each Rehabilitation Counselor in areas where specialized transition programs are not available will increase awareness of opportunities for internships and work experiences for transition age students.

**Objective (a)** Provide current information about opportunities for transition age individuals on the agency's web-page or other media

The agency's web page has a targeted area for services available for transition age students. However, due to changes in the state's regulations and policies regarding web-page content and maintenance, other ways of intra-agency information sharing and presentations outside the agency are being developed.

**Objective (b)** Provide training to new Rehabilitation Counselors on Transition Services available to eligible students on their caseloads

Training for new counselors, called Best Practices for New DSB VR Counselors, includes a major section on provision of services to students in secondary schools. During FFY2013, it was revamped by the Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services to ensure it included definitions and acronyms used within schools, to identify key individuals to whom contact is to be made, and to denote the importance of reaching individuals at an early age. It was last held in March, 2013.

**Objective (c)** Program Specialist for Transition Services and the Transition Counselor in each area will continue to be available for consultation regarding transition services

While the Program Specialist for Transition Services position remained vacant most of the year, the Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services was available to work with staff regarding transition services. The Chief and the Transition Counselors worked with the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind in development of the SAVVY summer program for students (Summer Adaptation Vital to Visually-impaired Youth). This program provided a four-week in-house training that was divided into three segments. First, for the younger students who need more independent living skills training, the Summer Adjustment Vision for Youth was held. Secondly, for students wanting to learn more about employment, the WOW (World of Work) program provided paid internships for them to explore work interests. Thirdly, for students who are rising seniors and heading for colleges, the Summer College Prep program is offered that enhances their assistive technology skills and allows them to experience a true college classroom with the assistance of the Center staff. During the summer of FFY2013, 84 youth participated in these Rehabilitation Center training programs.

**Priority 4:** Quality and knowledgeable outreach to individuals with disabilities, family members, and individuals who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities will be provided by the division.

**Goal 1:** The Division's services will be provided to individuals, families, and minority populations through targeted outreach activities.



**Objective (a):** Outreach activities will result in the increase of total consumers served who are Hispanics/Latinos by more than 2% during the period October 1, 2012 to September 30, 2013. (The baseline for FFY 2011 was 140). During FFY2013, DSB provided services to 159 individuals who stated they are of Hispanic ethnicity. This represents a 13% increase over the number served during FFY2011. This goal is met, but the goal will need to continue as these efforts must be continued due to change in the state's population.

**Objective (b):** Outreach activities will result in the increase of total consumers served from the African American, Native Americans and other minority groups by more than 2% from October 1, 2012 to September 30, 2013. (The baseline for FFY 2011 was a total of 1526, 1446 African-American, 80 Native American) During FFY2013, DSB provided services to 1633 individuals who stated they are African American, Native American or other minority group, with 1,614 being African American and 19 as from other minority groups. This represents a 7% increase over the number served during FFY 2011. Due to the limitations of existing data collection systems, these groups cannot be broken into further detail; the new data collection system that was anticipated to be in operation for this reporting is not operational at this time. This goal is met, but the goal will need to continue as these efforts must be continued due to change in the state's population.

**Goal 2:** The Division will develop marketing opportunities to targeted audiences.

**Objective (a):** The Division will utilize social media as a method for Division VR Counselors to communicate with employers with the goal of establishing relationships with five new employers through this network. Due to state and department policies and procedures, involvement and use of social media is not allowed. Therefore this objective is removed.

**Objective (b):** The Division will use the available employer portal in BEAM, the new case management system, to establish contact with employers who would like to post job opportunities, with the goal of having ten job opportunities posted after the initiation of the system in October, 2012.

Due to complications in the development of this system, BEAM is not operational at this point. This strategy will be continued until BEAM is in place.

**Goal 3:** The Division will identify ways by which the Division can assist veterans with disabilities to become able to obtain, maintain or regain employment.

**Objective:** Through contacts with the Veterans Administration, Disabled Veterans of America, and the American Legion, the Division will educate these organizations on ways the Division can assist veterans through a continuum of independent living and employment services.

During FFY 2013, DSB collaborated with organizations who serve veterans to provide information about how veterans can access DSB VR and Independent Living services. Specific events included participating in the Charlotte Army Reserve conference (10/2012), Gaston Co. Blind Veterans Group (10/2012), Asheville VA Job Placement staff (10/2012), Asheville VA Medical Center Healthy Living staff (10/2012, 01/2013, and 02/2013), Asheville VA Project Connect/Homeless Veterans (10/2012), Durham VA Homeless Veterans Program (07/2013), Charlotte VA VIST Program (07/2013), and Stand Down Day for Veterans in Guilford Co (09/2013). DSB developed a PowerPoint presentation entitled "DSB: Part of the Continuum of Care for Veterans" designed to specifically target veterans with diabetes who are losing vision, as well as those with glaucoma, cataract and macular degeneration.

DSB has visited VA offices/facilities across the state to actively collaborate and partner with them to improve services to veterans without duplication.

**Goal 4:** The Division will continually seek and identify ways in which to reach the growing minority populations across North Carolina.

**Objective (a):** Increase the number of The Division employees who are of an ethnic or racial minority by more than 2.5 percent for FFY 2013.

During FFY2013, the agency actually experienced a decrease in the number of staff members who state they are of an ethnic or racial minority. In FFY2012, 88 staff members reported they are of an ethnic or racial minority (81 African American, 3 Native American, 2 Hispanic, and 2 other). In FFY2013, the number dropped by 3% to 85 staff members (79 African American, 2 Native American, 1 Hispanic, and 3 other). During FFY2013, the agency experienced an increased number of retirements and a hiring freeze, which decreased the number of active staff. This goal will continue to be monitored.

**Objective (b):** During FFY 2013, eight Division staff will utilize the Spanish training modules to acquire some level of proficiency in speaking and/or understanding Spanish.

During FFY2013, DSB had 26 registered users of the Spanish training modules.

**Priority 5:** Over the next three fiscal years, development of systematic program evaluations and consistent quality assurance methods will ensure the agency is meeting the mission of enabling individuals who are blind or visually impaired to achieve their goals of independence and employment.

**Goal 1:** To provide consistent and accurate data for use for assessing program performance.

**Objective (a):** The agency will provide refresher training, support, and problem-solving upon the scheduled "go-live" of October 1, 2012, for the agency's new case management system, BEAM. All issues regarding BEAM used by staff using assistive technology will be resolved during the first year of its use.

Due to complications in the development of this system, BEAM is not operational at this point. This strategy will be continued until BEAM is in place.

**Objective (b):** Monthly reviews of outcome data by rehabilitation program chiefs and managers was completed with supervisors and other program staff.

Reviews of outcome data from the agency's archaic system continues to be reviewed on monthly basis by management staff and local supervisors, examining it for trends or problems indicated by the data.

**Goal 2:** To provide holistic, consistent, and accurate methods of quality assurance and program evaluation.

**Objective (a):** Develop an up-to- date Quality Assurance Manual outline identifying areas requiring specific methods of quality assurance based on outcome measures

with consideration of BEAM. The manual will be written and in place with staff during FFY2013.

Due to complications in the development of this system, BEAM is not operational at this point. This strategy will be continued until BEAM is in place.

**Objective (b):** To obtain reviews and input from all program managers to develop draft methods to achieve holistic, consistent, and accurate measures.

Due to multiple personnel changes, mostly initiated by retirements, reviews are done and input regarding implications for change is recorded. This will continue throughout FFY2015, as a new Chief of Field Services who is responsible for quality assurance will be in place and can initiate input into measures and methodology.

### **Section (q) Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services**

(q) Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services. Include the following:

- (1) The quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.
- (2) The timing of transition to extended services.

### **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services:**

The North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services in cooperation with the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services, provided grant funding in 1985 to 6 service providers in North Carolina to implement supported employment services. In 1986 the Division was awarded funding from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services to create a systems change approach to implementing supported employment services in North Carolina. Since 1987 the Division's effort has grown to a statewide system of approximately 118 supported employment programs. During federal fiscal year 2013, nearly 4,000 individuals received supported employment services and 986 of these individuals achieved a successful employment outcome. Supported employment providers receive vendorship funding through the utilization of Title VI, Part B funds and General services fund (110). Title VI, Part B funds will continue to be utilized to supplement funds under Part B of Title I for the cost of supported employment services to persons with the most significant disabilities. However, the extent of services offered to a particular individual is determined on an individual basis incorporating the individual's informed choice pertaining to their need to achieve and to maintain a vocational goal. Examples of

populations that will be served include (but are not limited to) individuals with severe and persistent mental illness, significant cognitive impairments, cerebral palsy, autism, and traumatic head injury. Supported employment services will be provided on a time-limited basis to individuals with the most significant disabilities. These services may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- development of and placement in jobs based on client informed choice in an integrated setting for the maximum number of hours possible based on the unique strengths, resources, interests, concerns, abilities, and capabilities of individuals with the most significant disabilities;
- intensive on-site job skills training and other training provided by skilled job trainers, co-workers, and other qualified individuals, including fading and stabilization;
- extended follow along services, including regular contact with employers, trainees, parents, guardians, or other suitable professional and informed advisors, in order to reinforce and stabilize the job placement; and
- post-employment services may be funded under Title I of the Act following the individual's transition to extended services if the required services are unavailable from the extended service providers and if they are necessary to maintain the job placement.

In addition to the individual and group models of supported employment, the transitional employment model will continue to be funded on a demonstration basis. These programs will provide transitional employment services to persons with severe and persistent mental illness and will serve as model sites for future transitional employment programs. Under federal regulations, the time-limited vocational rehabilitation supported employment services to be provided are not to exceed 18 months funding unless the individualized plan for employment indicates that more than 18 months of services is necessary in order for the individual to achieve job stability prior to transition to extended services. The transition process from vocational rehabilitation services to the extended service phase begins during the stabilization phase of supported employment. During this phase, the counselor documents the individual's adjustment to the job environment and job duties. Some indicators of stabilization include, but are not limited to, employer satisfaction, client satisfaction and minimal job coach intervention. The extended services phase continues during the 90 days after the end of the stabilization phase. Interagency involvement begins from the point of referral for vocational rehabilitation services provided by the Division and continues until the stabilization phase is completed and the long-term support provider begins providing extended services.

## **Division of Services for the Blind**

DSBs supported employment services program is more cost effective since it was converted to performance-based outcomes, and eligible individuals are able to achieve their employment goals more quickly.

DSB's supported employment services program through policy changes, purchase of supported employment services from private nonprofit Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP's), good practice guidelines, updated training and technical assistance to DSB staff, and training to private nonprofit CRP staff, employers, eligible individuals, families and advocates, has moved the program towards an improved quality of services.

Quality outcomes emphasize achievement of a successful stable employment outcome as determined by the individual, DSB's VR counselor, the CRP job coach, and the employer. Stable employment is achieved when all four parties agree that stabilization has occurred. The individual is encouraged to exercise informed choice in determining if a quality outcome has been achieved. DSB's objective is for the individual to make employment choices consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, and interests in the most integrated setting possible.

DSB ensures that the extended long term support services identified on the Individualized Plan for Employment are provided by the contracted private nonprofit organization to begin when stabilization has been determined and to continue for as long as the individual requires the service.

### **Scope**

The scope of supported employment services includes all of DSB's services provided under Title I, and in addition, the coordination of extended long term support services and the development of natural supports. The expanded scope of supported employment long term supports requires a continuation of DSB's involvement in the coordination and collaboration with the private nonprofit CRP's, employers and families. Post-employment services are provided when supports and services needed by the individual exceed the responsibility of the extended long term support services provider.

### **Extent**

DSB purchases supported employment services from private nonprofit CRP's in the individual's locality, and offers supported employment services to eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities in all 100 counties of the state. In addition, supported employment services are available to high school students participating in the DSB's transition programs in all 100 counties if required for successful employment outcomes.

DSB continues to identify more private nonprofit CRP's for the development of contracts to provide supported employment services. This will allow eligible individuals to have

more choices available to them for supported employment services that can assist them in reaching their employment goals.

DSB's extended long term services are provided in three phases to allow the individual choices in the level of service desired and required to achieve longevity of employment. The individual makes the final decision about their movement through the phases of extended services. The phases of extended long term services are:

**Phase 1:** The CRP providing the extended services meets with the individual twice monthly at the place of employment for at least 6 months. When the six month period ends, the CRP, the individual, and the employer review the individual's progress. If all parties agree that the individual is performing the job without any difficulties and no other problems are present with the placement, the individual can move to the next phase. This action requires the individual's signature on a waiver for this change in level of service. If the individual feels that they are not ready to move to the next phase, then they remain in Phase 1. An individual can remain in any phase indefinitely.

**Phase 2:** The CRP meets with the individual at the place of employment at least once every six months for at least 2 years to review progress of placement. The meetings can take place more often if necessary to resolve any minor problems. After 2 years, another review is conducted with the individual, the CRP, and the employer. If all agree that the individual remains stable in the placement, they can move to the last phase. The movement requires the signature of the individual on a waiver agreeing to the move.

**Phase 3:** The individual and employer understand that if a problem occurs, the CRP will be contacted to meet and to complete an assessment of the problem. If the problem can be resolved quickly with short-term intervention such as a few visits, the individual will remain in this phase. If the problem is new or difficult to resolve without DSB's intervention, the individual will be referred back to the DSB for further assistance. The goal of this action is to allow the individual to either retain the job or to begin the process for obtaining new employment in the quickest and most effective manner as to minimize the interruption of employment. DSB will, at the time of the referral, make a determination whether the problem can be resolved in Status 32 Post Employment Services or whether a new case will be required.

DSB is continually striving towards improving its supported employment program to provide the best service possible to the individual. Therefore, DSB uses the following strategies to work towards this objective.

- Identify additional private nonprofit CRP's with supported employment service programs to expand its supported employment program and to provide eligible individuals with more choices of service providers available to them.

- Provide training to new CRP vendors with DSB's supported employment program to assist them in working with individuals who are blind or visually impaired.
- Provide ongoing training to CRP staff already working with DSB's supported employment program.
- Develop natural supports for its individuals to assist them in becoming more independent in their communities, to include self-pay, co-workers, employers, and family/friends.

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