NORTH CAROLINA PYS 2022-2023 (MOD)

# CONTENTS

North Carolina PYs 2022-2023 (Mod) ..... 1
I. WIOA State Plan Type and Executive Summary ..... 3
a. WIOA State Plan Type ..... 3
b. Plan Introduction or Executive Summary ..... 3
II. Strategic Elements ..... 4
a. Economic, Workforce, and Workforce Development Activities Analysis ..... 4
b. State Strategic Vision and Goals ..... 26
c. State Strategy ..... 29
III. Operational Planning Elements ..... 39
a. State Strategy Implementation ..... 39
b. State Operating Systems and Policies ..... 77
IV. Coordination with State Plan Programs ..... 118
V. Common Assurances (For All Core Programs) ..... 119
VI. Program-Specific Requirements for Core Programs ..... 120
Program-specific Requirements for Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Activities under Title I-B ..... 120
Program-Specific Requirements for Wagner-Peyser Program (Employment Services) ..... 167
Program-specific Requirements for Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Programs ..... 181
Program-Specific Requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation (Combined or General) ..... 199
Program-Specific Requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation (Blind) ..... 274
VII. Program-Specific Requirements for Combined State Plan Partner Programs ..... 345
Performance Indicator Appendix ..... 345
All WIOA Core Programs ..... 345
Additional Indicators of Performance ..... 345

# I. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## A. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE

This is a unified plan

## B. PLAN INTRODUCTION OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

North Carolina's Unified State Plan is comprised of both strategic and operational planning elements. Strategic planning elements include analyses of North Carolina's economic conditions, workforce characteristics, and workforce development activities. These analyses lay the groundwork for the state's workforce development system's vision and goals and provide a framework for the delivery of workforce development programs and services that assist North Carolina's citizens and businesses with achieving economic prosperity.

Operational planning elements identify efforts that support the State's Workforce Development strategic vision and goals. The operational planning sections provide descriptions of the state's infrastructure, policies, and activities that are in place to help deliver workforce services to individuals and businesses and help the state's workforce development system to achieve its strategic goals.

**Introduction**

North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper's mission is to ensure North Carolinians are better educated, healthier, and have more money in their pockets so that they can live more abundant, purposeful lives. The cornerstone to achieving this goal is to help people get good-paying jobs to support themselves and their families. Through NC Job Ready, Governor Cooper's workforce development initiative, North Carolina is working to build a stronger and better workforce. NC Job Ready is built on three core principles: education and skills attainment are the foundation to a strong and resilient workforce; an employer-led workforce development system is key to the growth of a highly skilled and job ready workforce; and local innovation is critical to a dynamic and effective workforce system. While the NC Job Ready initiative was rolled out prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus on education, an employer-led workforce, and local innovation are now essential in promoting a strong, equitable recovery.

Through targeted investments and strategies in workforce development and job training, NC Job Ready is helping people obtain good-paying jobs that support themselves and their families. North Carolina's workforce development system is helping to implement NC Job Ready by connecting workers with career services and job training and helping employers by providing a pipeline of skilled workers they need to grow and succeed.

North Carolina's State Workforce Development Board, the NCWorks Commission, developed and adopted a new strategic plan in February of 2021 and incorporated the Governor's vision into its strategic plan. The plan was developed with input from partners at the state and local level and sets forth a vision and strategic goals for North Carolina's workforce development system, providing a framework for the delivery of workforce development services in North Carolina. The plan focuses on the coordination and alignment of the state's workforce programs and partners to ensure an equitable recovery for all North Carolinians affected by the pandemic. The plan also provides the foundation for the development of North Carolina's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Unified State Plan.

Through its strategic planning efforts, the NCWorks Commission developed a vision and mission for North Carolina's Workforce System. This vision is to build a job-ready workforce to strengthen North Carolina companies, attract new businesses, and ensure our state can adapt to a changing economy during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The mission of the state's workforce development system, 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, and to ensure North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow by increasing access to education and skills training, fostering employer leadership to prepare workers, and supporting and scaling local innovation.

The state's workforce development system is comprised of partners at the state and local level and is collectively referred to as the NCWorks system. The North Carolina Unified State Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Plan provides a description of the state's strategy and operational elements for the delivery of workforce development programs and services through its NCWorks system.

# II. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

## A. ECONOMIC, WORKFORCE, AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

### 1. ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE ANALYSIS

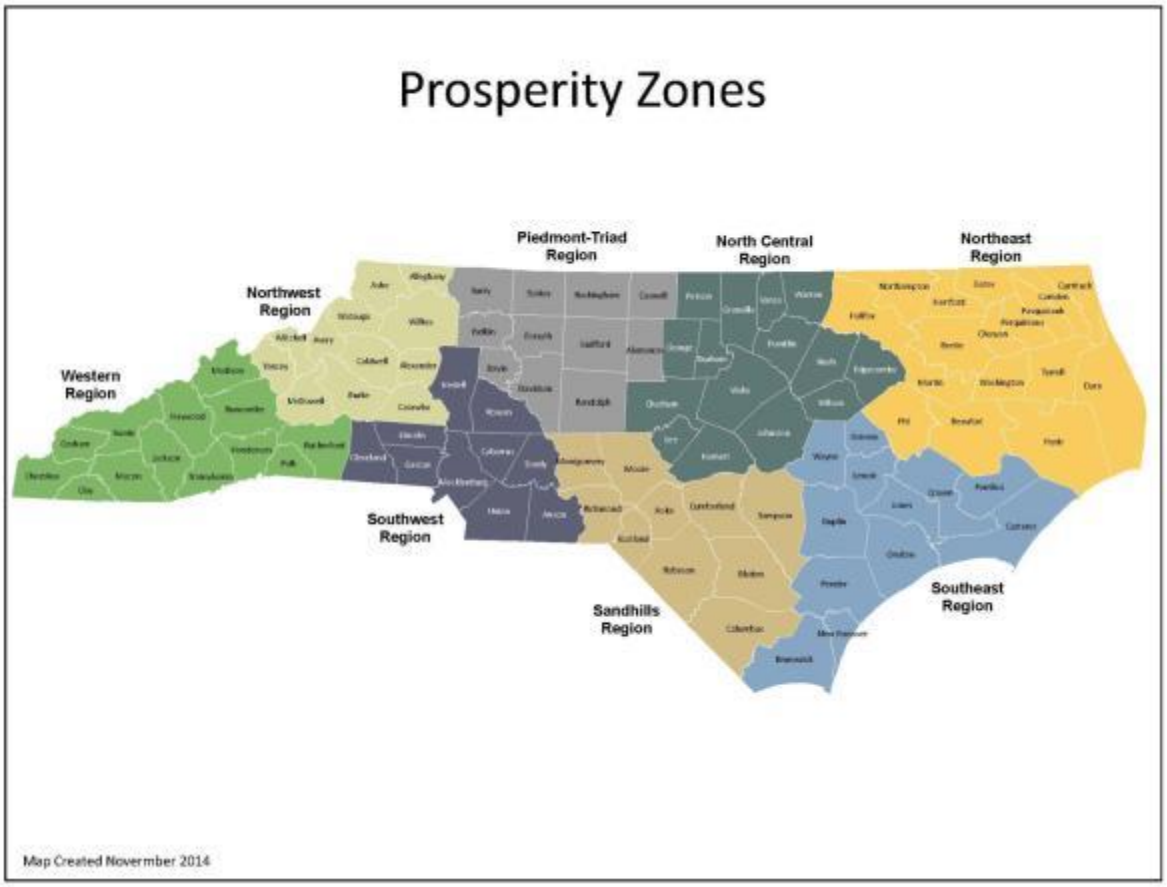
II. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

**(A) Economic Analysis**

North Carolina is defined by an expansive geography that covers over 53,000 square miles and spans from the mountains in the west, to the piedmont region in the state's center to the coastal plain region in the east. This expansive geography contributes to the state's diverse mix of rural communities, small towns, cities, metropolitan areas, and regional economic centers, each with its own unique industrial composition. Part of North Carolina's economic development strategy includes organization of the state's 100 counties into eight multi-county economic development regions called Prosperity Zones, which are intended to help ensure economic growth across all areas of the state, by leveraging regional economic, workforce and educational resources. Overlaying the eight prosperity zones are North Carolina's 23 Local Workforce Development Board (WDB) areas that help facilitate the delivery of workforce services to the state's citizens and employers. In the Western Prosperity Zone: Southwestern WDB, Foothills WDB and Mountain Area WDB. In the Northwest Prosperity Zone: High Country WDB, Western Piedmont WDB and Foothills WDB. In the Piedmont Triad Prosperity Zone: Piedmont Triad Regional WDB, GuilfordWorks WDB, DavidsonWorks WDB and Regional Partnership WDB. In the Southwest Prosperity Zone: Centralina WDB, Foothills WDB, Charlotte Works WDB and Gaston County WDB. In North Central Prosperity Zone: Kerr-Tar WDB, Durham WDB, Triangle South WDB, Turning Point WDB, Regional Partnership WDB and Capital Area WDB. In the Sandhills (South Central) Prosperity Zone: Lumber River WDB, Cape Fear WDB, Cumberland County WDB, Regional Partnership WDB and Triangle South WDB. In the Northeast Prosperity Zone: Rivers East WDB, Northeastern WDB, and Turning Point WDB. In the Southeast Prosperity Zone: Eastern Carolina WDB and Cape Fear WDB.

Currently, the NCWorks Commission is conducting a study to understand the opportunities to realign the workforce board system to better support economic development in the state. Authorized by Governor Cooper's office, the study is exploring data focused on commuting patterns, labor and economic trends, and stakeholder perspectives from numerous sources including the NC Department of Commerce Labor and Economic Analysis Division, and the Division of Workforce solutions. In addition, the commission conducted in-depth interviews and surveys with workforce, economic development, and education leaders across the state. The NCWorks Commission will provide recommendations on realignment in March 2022.

Map of North Carolina Workforce Development Boards




Map of North Carolina Prosperity Zones

**(i) Existing Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations.**

As the state's leader for economic development, Governor Roy Cooper charged the North Carolina Department of Commerce with targeting the following industries for recruitment, expansion of existing business, and the development of new companies: Aerospace Manufacturing, Automotive Manufacturing, Information Technology, Life Sciences/Biotechnology, Clean Energy, Food and Beverage Processing, as well as Defense-related and Tourism-related industries. Since 2014, The Department of Commerce has contracted with a public-private partnership called the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina to carry out many of these activities. In July 2021, the Department of Commerce released a new strategic economic development plan for the state. Entitled "First in Talent," the focus of the plan is on talent and workforce development instead of traditional aspects of economic development such as industry specific strategies. The plan recognizes that North Carolina is well positioned to remain competitive for economic development opportunities in our targeted industry sectors and calls for a renewed focus on recruiting and retaining the talent necessary to meet current and future workforce needs.

Assessment of the state's industry and occupational demand can be accomplished through a variety of informational resources including current employment trends, industry, and occupational projections, "real time" job postings information and feedback from the state's employers.

North Carolina like the rest of the nation experienced significant impacts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Prior to the beginning of the pandemic, in February of 2020, North Carolina's Seasonally Adjusted Total Nonfarm Employment level was 4,626,600 and the state's

seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 3.6%. The COVID-19 pandemic had widespread impacts on all aspects of the state's economy. This included the loss of 575,200 Total Non-Farm jobs, which represented a 12.4% decline in employment. The state's unemployment rate peaked at 13.5% in April and May of 2020 and the number of unemployed workers reached over 647,000 in May of 2020.

Since April of 2020, North Carolina's economy has been rebounding and as of December 2021, North Carolina's Total Non-Farm employment reached 4,579,300 and the economy has gained back 527,900 jobs or 91.8% of the total number of jobs lost, while the state's private sector employment gained 538,300 or 97.7% of the 551,200 jobs lost during the pandemic.

While the state's total employment level has significantly rebounded, job growth has varied across the state's industrial sectors. The state's goods producing industries experienced an increase of 68,200 jobs between April 2020 and December 2021, with total employment in the goods producing sector reaching 723,700 in December of 2021 and exceeding its pre-pandemic employment level of 716,500.

The rise in goods producing employment has been fueled by the growth of 19,900 jobs within the state's Construction industry which lost 12,000 jobs. The December 2021, Construction industry employment level of 243,700 represents 7,900 jobs above its pre-pandemic levels. While the construction industry has fueled much of the job growth in the state's good producing industries, North Carolina's Manufacturing industries experienced the growth of 48,300 jobs since April of 2020 and the industry's employment level is 600 jobs below the February 2020 level. The state's Mining and Logging industry employment level in December 2021 was 5,700 just 100 jobs below its pre-pandemic employment level.

North Carolina's Service providing industries experienced significant employment declines during the pandemic with the loss of 514,200 jobs between February and April of 2020. The service providing industries as a group have gained back 459,700 or 89.4% of the total jobs lost, however there has been large variation in the employment trends within the industrial sectors. The Leisure and Hospitality Services sector experienced the largest decline in employment with the loss of 235,400 jobs or a decline of 45.1%. As of December 2021, this industrial sector has gained 83.3% of the total jobs lost but is 39,400 jobs below its pre-pandemic employment level.

The state's Trade, Transportation and Utilities sector has experienced the growth of 99,800 jobs since April of 2020 and its December 2021 employment level of 879,700 is 23,300 jobs above its pre-pandemic level, North Carolina's Professional and Business Services sector has added 85,200 jobs and its current employment level of 685,000 exceeds is pre-pandemic levels by 27,700 jobs. The Financial Activities industry has gained 7,500 jobs since April of 2020 and its current employment level of 258,900 is 1,000 jobs above its pre-pandemic level. North Carolina's Information sector experienced a decline of 3,800 jobs during the pandemic and has gained 6,900 jobs and its December 2021 employment level of 79,300 is 3,100 jobs above its pre-pandemic level.

North Carolina's Education and Health Services industry experienced a decline of 66,1000 jobs between February and April of 2020 and the industry's December 2021 employment level was down 39,400 jobs or 7.5% below its pre-pandemic levels. North Carolina's Other Services industry lost 44,400 jobs during the pandemic, a loss of 26.2%. As of December 2021, the industry has gained 36,300 jobs or 81.8% of the jobs lost within the industry.

North Carolina's government employment has experienced significant volatility during the pandemic. The industry lost 24,000 jobs between February and April of 2020 and has experienced employment challenges over the several months. Much of these challenges have been fueled by fluctuations in State and Local Government employment include variability in State and Local Government Education employment. As of December 2021, North Carolina's government employment is down 34,400 jobs from its pre-pandemic levels.

North Carolina's current (December 2021) industry mix is concentrated in four industry super-sectors: Trade, Transportation and Utilities (879,700 jobs, 19.2% of total jobs); Government (703,800, 15.4%); Professional and Business Services (685,000, 15.0%) and Education and Health Services (604,500, 13.2%). These four sectors combined account for more than 62% of total jobs in the state.

Dispersed across the state's industry sectors are a diverse set of occupations which help to fuel the state's economic diversity. North Carolina's occupational employment is concentrated across seven major occupational groups: Office and Administrative Support Occupations account for 12.5% of total jobs in the state, followed by Sales and Related Occupations (10.6%); Transportation and Material Moving Occupations (9.1%); Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations (8.5%); Production Occupations (7.5%); Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations (6.4%); and Education, Training and Library Occupations (6.1%). These major occupational groups represent over three-fifths (61%) of total jobs in the state.

**(ii) Emerging Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations.**

**Industry Projections**

While assessment of the current industry and occupational trends provides some indication of the state's economic conditions, additional information regarding industry and occupational projections is needed to help guide the efforts of North Carolina's workforce development system. North Carolina's Labor and Economic Analysis Division produces both Industry and Occupational Employment Projections. Long-term projections are based on a 10-year period and are available at the statewide level and at 16 prosperity zone sub-regions. Each prosperity zone sub-region is comprised of multiple counties which helps to emphasize major regional labor markets within each of the prosperity zones.

Based on the latest industry projections, North Carolina's industry employment is expected to reach nearly 5.1 million jobs by 2028, a projected growth of 302,000 jobs compared to the state's 2018 employment level (4.8 million). Nearly two-thirds (65%) of all projected net job growth will be concentrated in four major industry sectors: Health Care and Social Assistance; Accommodation and Food Services; Professional, Scientific & Technical Services; and Construction.

By 2028, Health Care and Social Assistance industries are expected to add 81,000 jobs. The sector will account for over one quarter of the state's total net job growth. Changes in health care policies, the state's aging population as well as technological advances are expected to continue to spur employment growth in this sector. This industry is expected to have the second highest percentage growth in the state at 13.7%.

The Professional, Scientific & Technical Services industry is projected to add over 40,000 jobs and will be the fastest growing industry in the state at 15.8%. Accommodation and Food Services are projected to add over 46,000 jobs (10.8%), while Construction is projected to add nearly 30,000 jobs (13.5%).

While most of North Carolina's major industry groups are expected to gain jobs, Manufacturing, Agriculture, and Utilities are projected to experience employment declines. Over the last several decades, job losses in North Carolina's Manufacturing industry have been well documented and this trend is expected to continue. By 2028, employment in the state's Manufacturing sector is projected to be 19,300 jobs lower than its 2018 employment levels and its share of statewide total employment will continue to decline. However, manufacturing is still a large component of North Carolina's economy and is expected to account for over 455,000 jobs by 2028.

The state's overall projected employment expansion of 302,000 jobs corresponds to a 6.3% growth rate, however, not all regions of the state are expected to grow at the same rate. Among the 16-prosperity zone sub-regions, Charlotte is expected to experience the fastest job growth

(11.3%), followed by Wilmington (11.0%), Raleigh-Durham (8.9%), and Asheville (6.4%). The remaining 12 regions are projected to grow at a slower rate than the state, with the Greensboro region expected to experience the slowest job growth at 1.9%. Additionally, both the Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham regions will continue to lead the state in total employment and net job growth.

While total projected job growth provides a measure of the relative strength of the regional economies, changes in the underlying industry sectors will continue to drive the economic diversification within each of the prosperity zones and prosperity zone sub-regions. For example, service-providing industries are projected to gain jobs across each region while goods-producing industries are expected to decline in 4 out of the 16-prosperity zone sub-regions, largely due to declines in manufacturing. The largest declines in goods-producing employment are expected to occur in Greensboro (-1,257 jobs) and Hickory (-423). Of the areas that are anticipated to add goods-producing jobs, the largest gains will be in the Charlotte region (14,518) and the Raleigh-Durham region (6,632), followed by Greenville (912), Jacksonville-New Bern (609), and Asheville (609).

Digging deeper into the goods-producing industries, 11 of the 16 sub-regions are expected to lose Manufacturing employment by 2028, with the largest declines projected in the Greensboro (-2,879), Raleigh-Durham (-2,482), Hickory (-1,003) and Fayetteville-Lumberton regions (-981). These declines will be offset in many cases by the large projected growth in in Construction, which is projected to increase in every region, with the largest growth rates projected in the Charlotte (20.2%), Wilmington (17.3%), and Raleigh-Durham (17.0%) areas.

Within the service-providing industries, some regions will experience faster growth than the state in certain industries. Health Care and Social Assistance, the industry projected to add the most jobs statewide, will grow faster than the state in the Wilmington (18.7%), Charlotte (17.7%), Raleigh-Durham (16.1%), Asheville (14.2%) and Pinehurst-Rockingham (14.1%) areas. Accommodation and Food Services will also add large numbers of jobs, with faster growth projected in the Charlotte (16.6%), Wilmington (15.8%), Jacksonville-New Bern (13.9%), Goldsboro-Kinston (12.0%), Asheville (11.4%), and Rocky Mount-Wilson (11.1%) areas. Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services, the third largest contributor to projected jobs statewide, will grow faster in the Charlotte (21.8%), Wilmington (21.7%), and Raleigh-Durham (16.1%) areas. Finally, jobs in Administrative Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services will grow faster than the state in the Boone-Wilkesboro (13.6%) and Elizabeth City (12.0%) areas.

**Occupational Projections**

While a diverse set of industry sectors are expected to contribute to both state and regional economic transformation, demand for workers will also be driven by projected growth among various occupations. Three-quarters of the net job growth is expected to come from eight broad occupational groups: Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations; Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations; Business and Financial Operations Occupations; Construction and Extraction Occupations; Management Occupations; Healthcare Support Occupations; Computer and Mathematical Occupations; and Personal Care and Service Occupations. While growth will be spread across several major occupational groups, three occupational groups—Production; Office and Administrative Support; and Farming, Forestry and Fishing—are projected to experience overall job declines.

In addition to job demands that stem from employment growth, North Carolina will experience demand for workers due to worker separations from individuals exiting the labor force as well as individuals transferring to different occupations. These worker separations are driven by several factors including employee turnover, job successions, and worker retirements due to an aging workforce. Several of the state's major occupational groups are projected to experience demand for workers due to both job growth and separation needs, including Food Preparation

and Serving Related Occupations as well as Sales and Related Occupations – with projected job openings above 730,000 from 2018 to 2028. Office and Administrative Support Occupations are also projected to have large numbers of openings (770,000) due to replacement needs. Furthermore, while overall employment in Production Occupations is expected to decline, the state will continue to experience demands for production workers due to separations. Production occupations are projected to experience over 392,000 openings between 2018 and 2028.

Across the 16 prosperity sub-zone regions, several occupational groups will experience growth in employment. While Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations are projected to have the highest net new jobs and openings across most regions, Healthcare Support Occupations, Computer and Mathematical Occupations, as well as Personal Care and Service Occupations are projected to be among the fastest growing occupational groups in most areas. Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations are projected to grow by approximately 258 jobs in the Greenville area to more than 18,500 in the Charlotte area by 2028, while total openings in these occupations will range from 11,700 openings in the Pinehurst-Rockingham area to almost 217,000 in the Charlotte area. Growth in Healthcare Support Occupations across the state will range from a low of 6.2% in the Goldsboro-Kinston area to 22.1% in Wilmington. Growth in the Computer and Mathematical Occupations is expected to range from 4.8% in the Fayetteville-Lumberton area to 21.3% in Wilmington. Meanwhile, growth in Personal Care and Service Occupations is projected to range from 7.4% in the Waynesville-Franklin area to 19.3% in Wilmington.

**(iii) Employers' Employment Needs.**

**Employer Needs Survey**

North Carolina's workforce development system is committed to providing the state's employers with a highly skilled workforce. Part of this commitment includes working with employers to continually assess their workforce needs. As part of this effort, North Carolina's workforce partners have implemented a biennial Employer Needs Survey, designed to gauge employers' hiring plans, recruitment strategies, hiring experiences and workforce challenges. The first survey was implemented in 2014, with additional surveys and reports completed in 2016, 2018, and 2020.

Preliminary results from the 2022 survey (collected during the fall of 2021) indicate high levels of hiring difficulties, with 80 percent of employers who tried to hire in the past year reporting difficulties, up from 56 percent of employers in 2019. Employers from a variety of industries reported similar levels of difficulty, including Construction (80%), Healthcare (84%), Hospitality (89%), Manufacturing (79%), and STEM (72%) industries.

When asked about reasons for hiring difficulties with entry-level positions, the most frequently selected explanations were low numbers of applicants (82% of employers), a lack of basic employability skills (such as work ethic) among jobseekers (53%), and applicants unwilling to accept the level of offered pay (51%). For more experienced positions, employers reported low numbers of applicants (88%), low pay issues (48%), and a lack of educational degree or credential (42%). As in previous surveys, a lack of work experience, technical skills, and soft skills on the part of jobseekers were also frequently reported by employers.

In response to these hiring challenges, employers reported increasing offered wages (63% of employers), increasing training (43%), and using the workforce development system (31%). Among those employers who did *not* use workforce system resources, 42 percent said they were unaware of the services available to them, suggesting a potential target area for workforce development efforts.

Employers were also asked about changes they had made to their businesses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Employers reported increasing wages for existing workers (62% of

employers) and new hires (55%), offering flexible schedules (48%) and signing bonuses (31%), and implementing remote work in response to the pandemic. About one quarter of employers reported changing hiring practices, making scheduling changes, and investing in technology including automation. In addition to existing benefits, twelve percent of employers had added or expanded paid leave benefits and nine percent had added or expanded health insurance in response to the pandemic.

Despite the current hiring challenges, employers were largely optimistic about the future, with over half (52%) saying they were "very confident" and another 30 percent saying they were "confident" about their businesses' success in the following year. In addition, over half (56%) expected their employment levels to increase in the next year, while only two percent expected their employment to decrease.

**Online Job Postings**

Occupational and Industry projections provide a critical component for assessing North Carolina's job demand landscape; however, they do not permit an assessment of the current demand for workers. Information about current labor market demand is obtained through an analysis of job openings in North Carolina, using data from the Conference Board and the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.

There were 382,000 job openings in North Carolina in November 2021, the most recent month for which we currently have data. Labor demand is most concentrated in the North Central region of the state (125,000), followed by the Southwest (105,000) and Piedmont-Triad (94,000) regions. The Food Preparation and Serving Related occupational group currently has the most job openings (61,000), followed by Office and Administrative Support (40,000) and Transportation and Material Moving (38,000).

North Carolina is currently experiencing a very tight labor market, with only 0.9 jobseekers per job opening—the lowest on record. The number of job openings in North Carolina surged during the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing 47% between February 2020 and November 2021.

The increase in job openings since February 2020 has been most concentrated in the Southwest region of the state (+39,000), followed by the Piedmont-Triad (+36,000) and North Central (+27,000) regions. The Food Preparation and Serving Related occupational group saw the largest increase in job openings since February 2020 (+32,000), followed by Transportation and Material Moving (+18,000) and Production (+15,000).

**(B) Workforce Analysis**

While assessment of North Carolina's employment demand provides critical information regarding the state's current and future economic conditions, analyses of the state's population trends, and labor force statistics reveal additional economic and workforce insights. According to the latest decennial Census data, between 2010 and 2020, North Carolina's population grew by 9.5% (over 900,000 people), faster than the national growth rate of 7.3%. While the state has experienced population growth, this growth has not been equal regionally. Mecklenburg and Wake Counties, the state's two largest counties, accounted for 47% of the state's net population increase from 2010 to 2020, and the 16 counties making up the Charlotte, Raleigh, and Durham-Chapel Hill Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) accounted for 79% of the state's net growth. Over this period, 51 North Carolina counties lost population (total combined loss of 147,000) and 49 counties gained population (total combined gain of 1.1 million). Like most of the country, North Carolina's population has also aged over the decade. The state' child (age 0-17) population grew by 0.1% (2,654), while the adult population grew by 12.4% (901,251). While 51 North Carolina counties experienced population decline, 74 counties had fewer children in 2020 than in 2010.

### (i) Employment and Unemployment

While North Carolina has been experiencing demographic shifts in its population, the state's labor force has also been undergoing significant changes because of the impacts of the COVID19 pandemic. North Carolina's statewide unemployment rate peaked at 13.5% in March and April of 2020. Since that time, the state has experienced significant declines in its unemployment rate dropping to 3.7% in December 2021 just slightly above the pre-pandemic rate of 3.5% in January of 2020.

While the state experienced significant increases in its unemployment rate during the early part of the pandemic, the state's labor force reflected dramatic declines, dropping to 4,689,755 in April of 2020 from a high of 5,109,000 in December of 2019. During the same period, the state experienced significant declines in its statewide labor force participation rate dropping from 61.4% pre-pandemic to a low of 56.2% in April of 2020. The state's labor force participation has rebounded to 59.4% in December of 2021, but still below its pre-pandemic level. During the peak of the pandemic, the number of unemployed persons reached over 647,514 in May of 2020. Prior to the pandemic, the number of unemployed persons was 179,605 in January of 2020, the number of unemployed persons reached over 647,000 in May of 2020 and this number has experienced significate declines over the last several months reaching 188,391 in December of 2021

While all geographic areas of the state experienced significant impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sandhills region experienced the highest annual average unemployment rate at 8.6% in 2020, while the North Central Region had the lowest annual average unemployment rate at 6.7%.

In addition to geographical differences in labor force statistics, there are marked differences across the state in unemployment rates among several of the state's demographic groups. During 2020, the unemployment rates for Black and Hispanic workers were 9.6% and 8.6%, respectively, while the unemployment rate for white workers was 6.4%. The annual average unemployment rate for women was 7.5% compared to 6.7% for men.

North Carolina's labor force statistics also reveal significant variations with respect to several sub-populations, including individuals with disabilities as well as the veterans. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2019 approximately 15.4% of North Carolina's population aged 16 years and over (or nearly 1.3 million individuals) was characterized as having some sort of disability. Of these individuals, only 23.0% were employed and 74.7% were not in the labor force. Among individuals aged 20 to 64 with a disability, the unemployment rate was 9.6% (more than double that of the total population). North Carolina had approximately 642,000 veterans living in the state in 2019. Among veterans aged 18 to 64, the unemployment rate was 3.1% and the labor force participation rate was 72.4%.

During the height of the pandemic, North Carolina's Unemployment Insurance system experienced an unprecedented workload including the implementation of federal-state Pandemic related UI programs to cover additional weeks of benefits for eligible claimants as well as programs to assist contract and self-employed workers.

In 2020, North Carolina's Unemployment Insurance system processed over 1.5 million initial claims for Regular Unemployment Insurance benefits and more than 804,000 initial claims for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). In the week ending March 28, 2020, the state processed 172,145 initial claims for Regular UI Benefits, which exceeds the total number of initial claims processed in all of 2019 (165,986). During 2020, North Carolina's UI System processed more than 22 million continued claims for UI Benefits across all programs far exceeding claims volumes experienced during prior economic downturns. During the latter part of 2021, the state's UI claims volume experienced significant declines and the early January 2022 data indicate that North Carolina's UI claims volume has returned to pre-pandemic levels.

### (ii) Labor Market Trends

### Industry Trends

As previously noted above, the state experienced significant impacts on its economic conditions as result of the pandemic including the loss of 575,200 jobs between February and April of 2020. Since April of 2020, North Carolina's economy has added 527,900 jobs or 91.8% of the total job loss. This included the addition of 459,700 jobs in the service-providing industries and 68,200 jobs in the goods-producing industries. Job growth has been driven by the addition of 196,000 in Leisure and Hospitality Services industries; 99,800 jobs in the Trade, Transportation and Utilities industries, 85,200 in Professional and Business services industries, 38,400 in the Educational and Health Services industries; and 7,500 in the Financial Services industries. Within the state's goods-producing industries, the state's Manufacturing industries added 48,300 jobs and the Construction sector added 19,900 jobs.

North Carolina's current industry mix is concentrated in four industry super-sectors: Trade, Transportation and Utilities (879,700 jobs, 19.2%); Government (703,800, 15.4%); Professional and Business Services (685,000, 15.0%); and Education and Health Services (604,500, 13.2%). Combined these four sectors account for nearly 63% of all jobs in the state.

While information regarding statewide employment patterns provides an overview of the relative strength of the state's economy, more localized industry patterns can reveal regional and local strengths and opportunities. Information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Quarterly Census of Employment and Wage program provides a more refined view of local employment trends.

Based on the annual average information for 2020, North Carolina had over 298,000 business establishments that paid $243 billion in wages to the state's workers. Employment within each of the eight prosperity zones ranged from over 1.1 million in both of the North Central and Southwest zones to just over 228,000 in the Northeast prosperity zone. Three of the zones, North Central, Southwest, and Piedmont-Triad, accounted for two-thirds of the state's total employment, 61% of overall establishments, and 71% of all wages paid. Not surprisingly these three regions are home to several of the state's large metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) which include the Charlotte/Concord/Gastonia in the Southwest zone; the Burlington, Greensboro-High Point, and Winston Salem MSAs in the Piedmont Triad zone; and Raleigh, Durham-Chapel Hill, and Rocky Mount MSAs in the North Central zone.

In addition, these three regions had the highest average weekly wage of $1,231 in the Southwest, $1,208 in the North Central, and $963 in the Piedmont-Triad. The four prosperity zones with the smallest employment included the Northeast, Northwest, Western, and Sandhills and together these areas account for less than a quarter of the state's total employment and employing establishments. These regions account for less than 17% of the state's total wages and their 2020 average weekly wages were less than 80% of the state's average wage. While there are significant geographic and economic differences across the eight prosperity zones, employment in each region is dominated by six major industry groups: Health Care and Social Assistance; Educational Services; Retail Trade; Manufacturing, Accommodation and Food Services, and Administrative Support and Waste Management.

### Occupational Trends

Just as North Carolina's industry mix reflects the states diverse economic base, the state's existing workforce is spread across a diverse group of occupations. Over 12% of the state's occupational mix is centered in Office and Administrative Support Occupations, 10.6% in Sales and Related Occupations, 9.1% in Transportation and Material Moving Occupations, and 8.5% in Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations. Over the next several years, employment in Health Care Related Occupations is anticipated to continue to expand. Current employment levels reveal that 6.4% of all occupational employment is in Healthcare Practitioners and

Technical Occupations and 4.1% in Healthcare Support Occupations. An additional 7.5% of the state's occupational employment is concentrated in Production Occupations while 6.1% of the state's occupational employment is concentrated in Education, Training and Library Occupations.

**(iii) Education and Skill Levels of the Workforce**

North Carolina possesses a world class system of higher education which is comprised of two public systems of higher education, the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) with 58 colleges and the University of North Carolina (UNC) System with 16 post-secondary institutions, as well as 36 private institutions of higher education. While the combined efforts of these public and private institutions help produce a skilled workforce for the state, challenges still exist. In 2019, about 11% of the population 25 years and over had less than a high school diploma, 26% had a high school diploma, 21% had some college but no degree, 10% had an associate degree, and 20% had a bachelor's degree while 12% had a Graduate or professional degree as their highest level of educational attainment.

In addition to the educational attainment of the state's population, North Carolina faces challenges in addressing the education and training needs of those individuals with disabilities. Based on information from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 1-year estimates, there are nearly 1.2 million individuals with a disability in North Carolina who are 25 years of age or older. Of these, 19.5% have less than a high school diploma, 32.8% are high school graduates, 30.5% have some college or associate degree, and 17.2% have a bachelor's degree or higher. Among the population 25 and older without a disability, only 9.5% have less than high school diploma, 24.0% are high school graduates, 30.8% have some college or associate degree, and 35.7% have a bachelor's degree or higher.

In 2019, approximately 8.9% of the state's population aged 25 years and over were veterans of military service. Veterans have a much lower rate of having less than a high school diploma than non-veterans (5% vs. 12%), a similar rate of high school degrees (27% vs. 26), a higher rate of some college or Associate degrees (39% vs. 30%), and a slightly lower rate of bachelor's degrees or higher than non-veterans (29% vs. 33%).

**(iv) Skill Gaps**

While North Carolina's projected employment growth will be spread across a diverse group of industries and occupations, the state will be faced with ensuring that its workforce has the necessary education, training, and jobs skills to meet both industry and occupational demands.

In 2018, occupations requiring no formal education or only a high school diploma accounted for 63.7% of total employment; however, this is projected to decline to 62.6% by 2028. At the same time, the share of occupations requiring education beyond high school will increase. Jobs requiring some post-secondary training below a bachelor's degree will increase by 8.1% while those requiring a bachelor's degree for entry will grow by 10.0% and jobs requiring an advanced degree for entry are projected to grow the fastest at 11.4%. These growth rates are all higher than the increase in jobs requiring a high school diploma or less for entry (4.4%).

Based on the projected need for additional workers with postsecondary education and previous research by Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce, the myFutureNC Commission was established in late 2017 as a statewide initiative to focus on educational attainment. The Commission brought together North Carolina's thought leaders in education, business, philanthropy, the faith-based and nonprofit communities, and ex officio representatives from the North Carolina House of Representatives, Senate, and Governor's office. The Commission's primary goal was to create a statewide education plan for early childhood through postsecondary education to recommend a clear attainment goal, identify key benchmarks for measuring progress toward that goal, and propose priority areas to guide the future of education in North Carolina.

On Feb. 20, 2019, myFutureNC unveiled its goal and bold vision for the future of education in North Carolina: to ensure that by 2030, 2 million North Carolinians, age 25-44, have a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential. In the summer of 2019, myFutureNC became a statewide nonprofit organization to carry on the work of the Commission. According to myFutureNC, as of 2016 about 1.3 million adults aged 25 to 44 in the state had a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential. Without any changes, North Carolina is projected to have about 1.6 million adults who meet the attainment definition in 2030, which means the state will need to produce an estimated 400,000 additional residents to attain a high-quality postsecondary credential or degree for our state to meet the demands of employers. The myFutureNC nonprofit will work to engage local, regional, and statewide stakeholders to communicate the need for both greater educational attainment and deeper economic alignment; to better align and coordinate systems to support students at all levels, from pre-K education through high-quality certificate, associate, and higher-degree programs; to be a catalyst for innovative, effective ideas and identifies best practices that can be applied to cities, towns, and rural areas across North Carolina and to monitor progress to improve its efforts each and every year.

2. WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES ANALYSIS

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

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

Governor Cooper's mission is to ensure North Carolinians are better educated, healthier, and have more money in their pockets so that they can live more abundant, purposeful lives. The cornerstone to achieving this goal is to help people get good-paying jobs to support themselves and their families. Through NC Job Ready, Governor Cooper's workforce development initiative, North Carolina is working to build a stronger and better workforce. NC Job Ready is built on three core principles: education and skills attainment are the foundation to a strong and resilient workforce; an employer-led workforce development system is key to the growth of a highly skilled and job ready workforce; and local innovation is critical to a dynamic and effective workforce system.

### Skills and Education Attainment

Education is the foundation of a strong workforce. But despite North Carolina's decades-long reputation for education excellence through its world-class community colleges, universities, and public schools, employers in North Carolina too often encounter challenges in finding workers with the right skills. As the skill requirements of jobs are increasing and rapidly changing, businesses need to find people with the right skills for the jobs they create, and North Carolinians need access to education and training to prepare for those jobs.

Recognizing that an educated North Carolina is a job-ready North Carolina, Governor Cooper established a goal to make North Carolina a Top Ten Educated State by 2025 by increasing the number of four-year-olds enrolled in high quality pre-K, raising the high school graduation rate, and increasing the number of North Carolinians with a post-secondary degree or credential. Governor Cooper has also been instrumental in the formation of the myFutureNC goal, and the statewide nonprofit organization focused on educational attainment. As North Carolina's economy grows, most new jobs require education beyond a high school diploma—but fewer than half of North Carolinians ages 25-44 have a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential. The mission for myFutureNC is to close the educational attainment gap in North Carolina by helping 2 million North Carolinians ages 25-44 achieve high-quality postsecondary attainment by 2030. This goal will help address the needs of employers, equip local

communities to take action, and open up new opportunities for North Carolinians. In June 2019, Governor Cooper signed House Bill 664 codifying the myFutureNC goal into state law.

To close the attainment gap, the state must make significant investments in ensuring North Carolinians have access to, and support in completing, postsecondary training. After hearing countless stories of college students working hard to better their lives but getting thrown off course by a financial emergency, Governor Cooper launched the Finish Line Grants program. Finish Line Grants help community college students who face unforeseen financial emergencies complete their training. Workforce Development Boards and community colleges partner together to distribute WIOA state set-aside funds to help students pay for course materials, housing, medical needs, car repairs, dependent care, or other financial emergencies that students may face through no fault of their own. To date, over 7,300 Finish Line Grants have been awarded to more than 4,800 students in North Carolina to help them stay on course to complete their training. Where Workforce Development Boards and community colleges have already tracked retention rates for Finish Line Grant recipients, the results are impressive. For example, at Southwestern Community College, 97 percent of Finish Line Grant recipients are still enrolled or have completed their training —well above the college's overall 64 percent retention rate.

Governor Cooper also issued Executive Order No. 92, establishing North Carolina as an Employment First state to increase opportunities for fair wages, employment, and careers for individuals with disabilities. This will also help meet the state's workforce needs by improving recruitment and retention of talented employees with disabilities, establishing state government as a leader in this area and encouraging private businesses to follow suit.

North Carolina also has a strong history of developing career pathways to help North Carolinians get the education and training they need. To date, communities in North Carolina have developed 40 Certified Career Pathways to help North Carolinians work in high-demand, high-wage careers, with additional pathways being developed. Finally, Governor Cooper has also proposed NC GROW (Getting Ready for Opportunities in the Workforce), a new scholarship and financial aid program to help people get community college degrees and training necessary to enter high-demand, high-wage jobs, in his budget proposal. NC GROW would help make North Carolina a Top 10 Educated state by 2025 and achieve the myFutureNC goal of 2 million North Carolinians with a postsecondary degree or credential by 2030.

**Employer Leadership**

Employers know best what skills their workers need, and business leadership is key for workforce development and job readiness. Businesses that invest in developing North Carolina's workforce will benefit from well-trained employees and a more innovative workplace that better reflects its community.

Recognizing that employers must be in the driver's seat of workforce development, Governor Cooper recently launched a Next Generation Sector Partnership initiative to promote a coordinated strategy among workforce, economic development, and education organizations to meet businesses' needs. Next Generation Sector partnerships are collaborations of businesses from the same industry and labor market that work with workforce partners to address workforce and other competitive needs of their industry. The model puts businesses at the center of this collaboration and allows government and organizations to listen and learn how to support businesses more successfully. Currently, three North Carolina regions are receiving technical assistance, coaching and support to launch Next Gen Sector Partnerships in the advanced manufacturing and biopharma industries.

Governor Cooper has also made significant investments in increasing work-based learning opportunities at employers across the state, recognizing its power to give students and jobseekers a taste of the technical skills associated with a given career, help them develop

critical soft skills needed to be successful, and equip them with the tools to decide if they are on the right career path. That starts with employers getting involved in their local schools to increase students' career awareness and understanding of the jobs available now and in the future. Work-based learning also includes internships, pre-apprenticeships, youth apprenticeships and registered apprenticeships where students experience real-world professional environments and learn new skills specific to the job they hope to pursue.

In late 2018, Governor Cooper announced a free, first-of-its kind online tool to lead the way in connecting education to career. The new work-based learning tool, called the "Navigator," brings together members of business, education, and workforce development communities in a space where they can post, search for and measure work-based learning opportunities. To date, more than half of North Carolina's educators have logged in to the Navigator to find work-based learning opportunities for their students.

North Carolina was also recently named one of nine grant winners selected from more than 220 applicants to expand youth apprenticeships. Through the Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeships, the North Carolina Community College System Office, Governor's Office, North Carolina Business Committee for Education, Workforce Development Boards, and other workforce development advocacy groups will scale and expand youth apprenticeships into new industries such as financial services, agribusiness, and hospitality and tourism.

North Carolina was also one of six states selected by the National Governors Association to expand work-based learning opportunities. Through a partnership between the Governor's Office, Department of Commerce, North Carolina Business Committee for Education, Department of Public Instruction, and Workforce Development Boards, North Carolina hosted two state-wide summits focusing on expanding work-based learning in the state. Recently, North Carolina was selected for an ongoing cohort of states to continue this work and develop regional work-based learning cohorts. Governor Cooper has also proposed a Work-Based Learning Fund in his budget to help companies start or scale internships, apprenticeships, and other work-based learning activities.

**Local Innovation**

Communities across North Carolina are developing great local models of workforce development. North Carolina should build on those successes and replicate them in more places to continue building and expanding innovative solutions.

In 2018, Governor Cooper launched the "NCWorks Local Innovation Fund," a grant administered by the Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions and the NCWorks Commission. The grant provides funding for local communities to pilot innovative programs or replicate successful program models that address a local or regional workforce issue; specifically targeting an underserved or under resourced community or population. Communities assembled collaborative teams to design and implement a set of solutions to a workforce issue. Teams include representatives from the local, regional, and state level of workforce, education, community, labor and business leaders. The six innovative projects received support from the NCWorks Local Innovation Fund. Projects included training construction and repair workers to fix damage to the state from Hurricane Florence, providing postsecondary training to formerly incarcerated individuals, and expanding an early childhood educator training program. The NCWorks Commission is conducting an evaluation of the grants and the NCWorks system plans to collect and replicate these best practices across the state.

**NCWorks Supporting NC Job Ready**

NCWorks, North Carolina's public workforce development system is a statewide partnership that helps people find new or better employment, and helps businesses connect with the talented workers they need. The NCWorks system is essential to the success of the NC Job Ready initiative.

The NCWorks system is comprised of an array of workforce and educational programs that serve a diverse population across various age groups. The NCWorks system provides workforce development activities that increase occupational skill attainment, employment, retention, and participant earnings. The state's workforce development services range from online self-service activities to staff-assisted services in one of 83 NCWorks Career Centers, to multi-year training programs at high schools, community colleges and universities and vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities. Individuals may participate in a single program or activity or may be eligible to receive services through multiple programs and service providers. The system consists of programs and networks designed to help individuals succeed in the workplace by providing career services, skill development, training, and employment services to workers and by helping businesses locate, hire, and retain a skilled workforce.

The NCWorks system 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 candidate referral; work-based learning and customized training opportunities; assistive technology and other support for businesses that hire people with disabilities; and the provision of labor market information that helps connect employers to a steady pipeline of talented citizens who have the skills to help their businesses thrive.

Under North Carolina's general statutes, the NCWorks Commission is charged with reviewing and evaluating the state's publicly supported workforce development programs for effectiveness, duplication, fiscal accountability, and coordination. The NCWorks Commission completes an annual review of 19 workforce development program plans, policies, and services across five agencies in North Carolina. This annual review includes an analysis of the WIOA core programs, as well as other one-stop delivery system partners. The commission reviews workforce program funding levels and sources, service provision types, special populations served and business outreach initiatives. Appendix 2B includes a summary of the workforce programs offered in North Carolina. North Carolina's 23 Local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and the NCWorks Commission are working together to collect performance data in three main areas, that include Outreach & Engagement, Skills Gap, and Process measures.

### (B) The Strengths and Weaknesses of Workforce Development Activities

### Strengths

North Carolina has a strong workforce development system that provides a diverse set of workforce programs and services to individuals and businesses with the goal of helping jobseekers and students obtain and maintain employment through career, training, education, and supportive services and helping businesses find qualified workers needed to be successful. The NCWorks system is a partnership of state and local workforce development partners that provide an array of services geared to assisting individuals with defining career pathways, skills assessment, work readiness, occupational skills training in high-demand occupations and industry sectors, work-based learning opportunities, employment search and job referral. NCWorks assists employers through a diverse set of business services including job recruitment, retention, layoff aversion, labor market information and training.

NCWorks is a unified workforce development system and an instrumental partner for ensuring North Carolina's economic future. The primary partners for career search and job placement assistance are the state's 23 Local Workforce Boards and the Department of Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS). North Carolina's 23 Local Workforce Development Boards provide oversight, planning, and administration of NCWorks Career Centers. The Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) is the state administrative entity for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I and Title III programs. DWS provides Wagner-Peyser, Veterans Services, and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) staffing in career centers.

There are 83 certified NCWorks Career Centers throughout the state of North Carolina. Each career center has the following fundamental qualities:

- Locally-responsive and demand-driven;
- Governed by a Workforce Development Board comprised of private sector representatives, local elected officials, and WIOA core partners;
- Provide access to a full range of core employment-related services to help businesses find the skilled workers they need and help job seekers find satisfying careers.
- Services are delivered through integrated service delivery strategy.
- Career Center staff have quickly pivoted to providing a variety of virtual services to both job seekers and employers in order to meet the increased demand for services during the pandemic.

North Carolina has a strong State Workforce Development Board, the NCWorks Commission. The Commission is led by a private sector chair, with 37 members including representatives from the business community, state workforce agency administrators, state education leaders, and community leaders. Members of the Commission are appointed by the Governor. The Commission oversees North Carolina's Workforce Development system and ensures that the system is coordinated and aligned to meet the needs of the state's citizens and businesses. The NCWorks Commission is charged under both state and federal law with the authority and responsibility for ensuring that the state's workforce programs are working efficiently, effectively, and collaboratively in preparing the state's workforce and meeting the needs of businesses. In February of 2021, the NCWorks Commission approved the biennial strategic plan with a shared mission and vision for the workforce development system:

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; and to ensure North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow by increasing access to education and skills training, fostering employer leadership to prepare workers, and supporting and scaling local innovation. To build a job-ready workforce to strengthen North Carolina companies, attract new businesses, and ensure our state can adapt to a changing economy during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The four strategic goals of the 2021 NCWorks Commission's strategic plan align with Governor Cooper's vision for workforce development in North Carolina and a new statewide educational attainment goal. These strategic goals assimilate North Carolina's workforce system's current strengths and incorporate strategies for aligning services in a way that results in high quality workers trained for in-demand occupations.

The North Carolina Department of Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) is a strong resource for the NCWorks system and its partners. LEAD is responsible for collection of data, research and analysis, publication of information and reports regarding the state's economy and labor market, career information, development, and implementation of information delivery systems as well as the assessment and reporting on the effectiveness of North Carolina's education and workforce programs. Information produced by LEAD helps the NCWorks system and other stakeholders make informed decisions regarding business recruitment, education and workforce policies and career development, as well as provides insight and understanding of the state and local economies.

The State of North Carolina operates eight administrative regions known as Prosperity Zones that organize the state's 100 counties to provide a consistent regional structure for economic and workforce development activities. Each zone features one-stop, physical locations,

providing citizens and businesses the ability to interact with representatives from multiple state agencies, as well as to encourage better collaboration between the agencies themselves. The state deploys subject matter experts in each zone, from transportation and environmental topics to workforce development, community planning and liaisons to existing businesses in the zones.

In 2013, North Carolina implemented an integrated service delivery model for its NCWorks Career Centers. This service delivery model focuses on enhancing customer service and is organized around the provision of services to customers, not discrete funding streams and programs offered in silos. In North Carolina, the WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and the WIOA Title III Wagner-Peyser Employment Services program are the operational backbone of the NCWorks Career Centers. Career centers implementing the integrated service delivery model deploy integrated staffing and technology to generate an integrated customer pool and customer flow. Career Center staff is organized by function, not by program or agency affiliation (funding source), with the purpose of serving customers efficiently and effectively. Staff is organized by function and cross-trained so that all staff members have the capacity to serve all customers and is knowledgeable about all services the center offers. Integrated staffing is a team-based approach that results in streamlined and seamless service delivery. Virtual services have enhanced the integrated service delivery model and have allowed career center staff to safely provide a plethora of services to North Carolinians affected by the pandemic.

Given the importance of increasing skills and raising the overall educational attainment in the state, the unified North Carolina Community College System is a critical asset to the NCWorks system, and all 58 community colleges have linkages with their Local Workforce Development Boards and Career Centers. All offer program(s) as Eligible Training Providers for Adults and Dislocated Workers. In addition, the NCCCS has administrative oversight for the state's registered apprenticeship programs, ApprenticeshipNC. A large proportion of the apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships related instruction is delivered through the local Community Colleges. Community colleges that operate Adult Education/Literacy programs on behalf of the state are well positioned to offer Integrated Education and Training, providing foundational skills while providing occupational skills. Most Workforce Development Boards have community college representation.

The NC Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) contributes to the NCWorks system in many ways as well. In additional to sponsoring Title IV vocational rehabilitation services through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division of Services for the Blind, NC DHHS provides the connection to its services made available through its Division of Social Services which administers North Carolina's TANF Employment and Training (NC Work First), SNAP Employment and Training (FNS E&T), Economic Opportunity/Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) funds for emergency services and other supports for the wellbeing and health of North Carolina's workforce, including services and strategic approaches to curtailing the significant stresses opioid and substance use places on families and workforce through the NC DHHS Opioid Action Plan that has demonstrated great success.

Additionally, the NC DHHS vocational rehabilitation program staff regularly contribute through the provision of regular reviews and consultations pertaining to site and program accessibility through its subject matter experts knowledgeable of career center program accessibility requirements and certification processes.

Nonprofit partners are also a critical part of the System. Goodwill Industries, nonprofit literacy councils, community action agencies, and other nonprofits also play a large role in workforce development in their communities. Community-based organizations including faith-based organizations, community action agencies, opportunities industrialization centers, and community development corporations are often well-positioned to reach and provide intensive specialized training and support services to underserved populations.

**Weaknesses**

North Carolina has a strong workforce development system which provides a breadth of workforce programs across several state and local entities, the state's workforce partners continue to work toward a workforce system that is fully integrated across all workforce agencies, programs, and services. However, the state has identified several areas that need further strengthening. These include coordination of WIOA Title I and III programs with the WIOA Title II programs; integration of case management systems across workforce programs; updating of local Memoranda of Understanding; enhanced services to the state's businesses; and improved coordination and collaboration with state and local economic development activities.

A key priority for the system is the development of strategies that enhance the collaboration between the WIOA Title I and III programs with the state's Title II, Adult Education providers and Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation Services to offer skills training and academic preparation. However, the workforce system's complexity can be overwhelming to individuals and businesses seeking services. North Carolina will develop a plan to ensure better coordination across all WIOA core partners. This includes reviewing all Local Workforce Development Board representation to ensure including of Title II and Title IV providers. The goal is to develop an integrated system that does not duplicate services and provides access to all job seekers. Further integration of all core programs and services will ensure that the system is continually improving its customer focus.

In addition to continued work on integrating programs to ensure that all people are provided high quality service regardless of barriers, several areas have been identified for improvement. These include coordination of case management systems across partners, enhanced coordination of all core workforce programs, enhancement of business services, cross referral systems, enhanced alignment with economic development.

North Carolina's workforce programs support several independent case management/data collection systems. Consistent data sharing processes to address referral tracking, common intake, and service delivery would improve the system. In October of 2019, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) announced Geographic Solutions was awarded the contract for developing the case management system for the Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation Services programs for both DVRS and DSB. This has the potential of dramatically improving data integration, as Geographic Solutions is the current developer for the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) NCWorks.gov case management system for WIOA Title I & III. The next phase is to include Title II integration so services can be tracked by all core partners. Additionally, the North Carolina SNAP Employment & Training Program (FNS E&T) has recently contracted with Geographic Solutions to build a module so their case management system (NC FAST) can actively communicate with NCWorks.gov. Both projects will certainly improve the integration of the state's case management systems and will help ensure customers have a more seamless experience in receiving services. In December of 2021, the FNS E&T program coordinator met with the Governance and System Alignment Committee of the NCWorks Commission to discuss dual enrollment with the WIOA Core programs and further integration of our case management systems.

The Memorandum of Understanding process between the 23 local Workforce Boards core partners will be revised to ensure services and access to these services are clearly defined for all core partners. In addition, a review of the MOU timeline for submission will be reviewed to align with Title II grant submissions.

More feedback from businesses and individuals about their experience with the system is needed. This information will help the system and its individual programs understand what is working, and where improvements are most urgently needed. The North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) has contracted with the Eval-Group to

create a customer feedback system to measure the quality of workforce services provided to businesses and job seekers throughout North Carolina.

Mapping cross-referral systems and the roles of different partners in different workforce areas could identify opportunities for enhancing existing partnerships across the System. Stronger policy alignment between the NCWorks Commission, and primary WIOA partner organizations is needed to ensure program continuity and aligned strategic vision across all four WIOA Titles.

A closer relationship with economic development organizations, at the local, regional, and statewide level, is needed. This will help provide improved understanding of the current and future economy and will help NCWorks system prepare the workers that are needed for existing, new, and expanding businesses in North Carolina. The Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) has invigorated its business services team with the end goal of supporting increased performance and accountability for business services delivered by the 23 Local Workforce Development Boards and supporting better alignment between the 23 Local Workforce Development Boards and economic development throughout the state. This includes the provision of additional funding to the 23 Local Workforce Development Boards to support Business Engagement Coordinators who work to establish and facilitate relationships with local economic developers. DWS has purchased Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software for the 23 Local Workforce Development Boards to utilize, which will serve to assist them to more effectively deliver business services throughout the state. Finally, the NCWorks Commission has added a business engagement staff member to foster building relationships with economic development across the entire system. DWS is committed to providing resources to the 23 Local Workforce Development Boards which will enhance their delivery of business services throughout the state and foster their relationships with economic development.

Next Generation Sector Partnerships is a key area of focus for North Carolina to improve this collaboration. Driven by a partnership of key leaders from the Governor's Office, the North Carolina Community College System Office, the NC Department of Commerce, the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, the NCWorks Commission, and Local Workforce Development Boards, Next Gen Sector Partnerships support collaborative business engagement through industry-led sector partnerships. Next Generation Sector Partnerships are collaborations of businesses from the same industry and labor market that work with education, workforce development, economic development, and other community organizations to address workforce and other competitive needs of their industry. The "Next Gen" model puts businesses at the center of this collaboration and allows government and organizations to listen and learn how to support businesses more successfully. The partnership of state leaders provides technical assistance and coaching to selected partnerships throughout North Carolina.

The NCWorks Commission is focused on developing an innovative, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system. In addition, they are developing 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 to build employer-led job training programs that produce high quality career outcomes. Stronger alignment of policies between the Commission and core partners will help achieve these goals as well. This will help ensure that North Carolina's workforce development system continues to be successful in the current and future economy.

### (C) State Workforce Development Capacity

North Carolina has a strong infrastructure and capacity to provide workforce development activities. The NCWorks Commission ensures coordination of, oversees, and assesses the performance of the state's workforce development programs including the WIOA core programs. In addition, the three state agencies responsible for the WIOA core programs are members of the WIOA State Steering Council.

The six WIOA core workforce programs are provided to job seekers and employers via NCWorks Career Centers (American Job Centers in North Carolina), online via the state's official job matching and labor exchange portal, NCWorks Online (NCWorks.gov), at local vocational rehabilitation offices, and at Title II program providers throughout the state. Below is an overview of the capacity of the three agencies.

***North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions***

The North Carolina Department of Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) has administrative responsibility for WIOA Title I and Title III programs. Services are delivered through 83 local NCWorks Career Centers located within the state's 23 Local Workforce Development Boards. The local WDBs work to ensure the provision of high-quality workforce services to individuals and businesses across the state. Each of the local boards have representation from the Division of Workforce Solutions, local community colleges, and local vocational rehabilitation programs to ensure coordination and capacity building at the local and regional level.

The Division of Workforce Solutions has developed an integrated services delivery model which the 23 Local Workforce Development Boards have implemented at local NCWorks Career Centers to ensure an integrated and customer-focused approach to providing services to individuals and business.

North Carolina's 23 Local Workforce Development Boards provide operational oversight of the NCWorks Career Centers across the state. The NCWorks Commission develops and sets policies that guide the operation of the centers. All 83 NCWorks Career Centers, located throughout the state, provide Title I and Title III services. Staff at NCWorks Career Centers, Community Colleges, and Vocational Rehabilitation offices work collaboratively across entities to provide referral services across programs. Some career centers are co-located within community colleges, social services offices, or offices where vocational rehabilitation services are available. In addition, there are 25 affiliate locations where services are provided.

NCWorks Career Centers provide workforce development services and access to core partner services as well as access to other programs and activities carried out by one-stop partners identified in the WIOA. Basic services provided (both virtually and in-person) to job seekers and those seeking to upgrade their skills include:

- career assessment and guidance;
- access to training and education programs;
- access to information about job fairs and workshops;
- access to information on the labor 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 (both virtually and in-person) to employers include:

- job applicant screening and qualified candidate referrals;
- valuable and up-to-date labor market information and projections, including wage data;

- information on tax credits for hiring particular groups of workers;
- space to conduct job interviews;
- assistance 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).

***North Carolina Community College System***

The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) provides a comprehensive array of educational and training programs and a diverse set of services to individuals and employers through 58 community colleges. It is the third largest community college system in the nation with programs and services provided through the college's multi campus locations and supported by the system office in Raleigh. Annually, the 58 community colleges serve about 700,000 individuals. The North Carolina Community College System staff provide state-level administrative support for the System under the direction of the State Board of Community Colleges.

Educational and training programs offered at the 58 colleges plus 160+ other campuses/and off-campus locations include a diverse group of programmatic and course offerings organized into several programmatic areas which include Curriculum programs, Continuing Education programs, Economic Development programs and College and Career Readiness adult education programs. Curriculum programs operated by the NCCCS include a variety of educational programs which range in length from one semester to two years. Within the NCCCS Curriculum program area are those post-secondary programs which receive part of their funding through the U.S. Department of Education's Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Educational Act.

Continuing Education Programs operated by the North Carolina Community Colleges include non-credit courses related to a diverse set of occupational training, workforce development training, community service training and business and industry training. Courses are designed to assist individuals in gaining short term training and skill enhancement including occupational skills, entrepreneurial skills, personal growth, and development. Organized within the North Carolina Community College Continuing Education programs are several programmatic areas including Workforce Continuing Education job training and Human Resources Development programs.

The NCCCS Economic Development area oversees several of the state's workforce training initiatives including ApprenticeshipNC, BioNetwork, Customized Training (now known as NCEdge), and the Small Business Center Network. ApprenticeshipNC is an employer-driven program that combines on-the job learning with related classroom instruction. BioNetwork provides education for the life science industry sector across the state. NCEdge Customized Training supports existing, expanding, and new companies through specialized training for both pre- and post-hire needs. Small Business Centers support entrepreneurial opportunities across the state of North Carolina through the provision of training and technical assistance.

The NCCCS Career and College Readiness Adult Education program area oversees educational programs designed to prepare adults with basic academic knowledge and job readiness skills to obtain high school equivalency, prepare for post-secondary training, and/or occupational job training for in-demand jobs. The state's 58 community colleges are legislatively mandated to provide basic skills instruction to improve reading, writing, math and English language skills to adults functioning below secondary level and/or need to earn a high school equivalency.

The Career and College Readiness program area is responsible for the administration of the state's WIOA Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) programs. AEFLA programs serve every NC county through community colleges and community-based organizations. Through a competitive request for proposal process, eligible providers apply for Title II funds to supplement their adult education programs. Competitive applicants are awarded funds to work collaboratively with core WIOA partners to provide services and activities that improve adult literacy skills and knowledge for postsecondary transition and/or employment. The Curriculum and Workforce Continuing Education departments, Registered NC Apprenticeships /work units of NC community colleges are the main training partners for adult education providers. This allows for an increased capacity for Title II Adult Education providers to implement accelerated models of credential attainment such as Integrated Education and Training and Pre-Apprenticeships linked to Registered Apprenticeships, and models that specifically support English language learners.

North Carolina's Community College System and its 58 colleges are a valuable component of the NCWorks system. The colleges provide a diverse group of program offerings with many of the programs included on the state's Eligible Training Provider list. A large proportion of the state's WIOA training services are provided through the North Carolina Community Colleges. In addition, many of the colleges serve as contractors for WIOA services and 14 sponsor NCWorks Career Centers on their campuses.

***North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services***

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is overseen by a Secretary who is appointed by the Governor and is comprised of several divisions and programs which directly provide, or facilitate the provision of a wide range of essential services to the citizens of North Carolina with the aim "to improve the health, safety, and well-being of all North Carolinians." The efforts of DHHS are aimed at "advancing innovative solutions that foster independence, improve health and well-being."

To meet this mission of improving the health, safety and well-being of all North Carolinians while being good stewards of resources, DHHS is addressing the conditions in which people live that directly impact health, known as "social determinants of health," or SDOH. DHHS is focusing on housing stability, food security, transportation access, and interpersonal safety. Further, DHHS is prioritizing three primary areas including early childhood through the Early Childhood Action Plan, the Opioid crisis, and Healthy Opportunities. Employment is a key social determinant of health which positively influences the other SDOH's and each of the primary areas being prioritized by DHHS.

The agency has administrative responsibility for several divisions that provide workforce development related services and activities. These include the Division of Social Services (DSS), the Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS); the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services (MH/DD/SAS), the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) and the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB).

The Division of Social Services provides administrative oversight for the state's WorkFirst Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) employment program, the Food and Nutrition Employment and Training Program (SNAP E&T), and the Community Services Block Grant programs. DSS provides oversight and support to the 100 county social services agencies that deliver benefits and services to individuals and families. The Division of Aging and Adult Services has administrative responsibilities for the Senior Community Service Employment Services, while the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services oversees the Long-Term Vocational Support Services.

In North Carolina there are two entities with administrative responsibility for the services provided under the WIOA Title IV Rehabilitation Act program: The Division of Vocational

Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) and the Division of Services for the Bind (DSB). Both DVRS and DSB are administratively housed within the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. DSB is responsible for administration of Vocational Rehabilitation Title IV services to individuals who are blind, deafblind, and visually impaired and the DVRS is responsible for administration of VR Title IV services to individuals with all other disabilities.

Combined, North Carolina has 80 local vocational rehabilitation office locations that provide counseling staff, vocational evaluators, human resource placement specialists, and other staff as appropriate to meet the needs of those individuals who require the specialized services offered by the vocational rehabilitation programs. Specific arrangements and staffing patterns by the vocational rehabilitation program staff vary from site to site depending on local needs and agreements.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and its divisions and programs are a critical component of the NCWorks system. DHHS works to ensure that persons with disabilities as well as TANF Employment and Training ("WorkFirst") and SNAP Employment and Training ("FNS E&T") participants and other workforce program participants are able to access core workforce services matching their unique needs. Vocational Rehabilitation staff participate on Local Workforce Development Boards, and the DHHS secretary is a member of the NCWorks Commission. DHHS remains an active partner with the NCWorks Commission, the NC workforce development system and supports the NCWorks system 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.

North Carolina's workforce agencies have enhanced their partnerships, locally, regionally, and at the statewide level over the last several years to ensure coordination of programs and capacity to serve its citizens and businesses. The NCWorks Commission will continue to review and evaluate the capacity of programs to provide high quality customer-focused services across the state and to monitor core partner collaboration and effectiveness in serving the state's citizens and businesses.

## B. STATE STRATEGIC VISION AND GOALS

State Strategic Vision and Goals

1. **Vision**

Governor Roy Cooper has outlined a vision for North Carolina's workforce development system that is predicated by three guiding principles: education and skills attainment is the foundation to a strong and resilient workforce; an employer led workforce development system is key to the growth of a highly skilled and job ready workforce; and local innovation is critical to a dynamic and effective workforce system. Governor Cooper's vision is being implemented through his NC Job Ready initiative and the NCWorks Commission (as the State Workforce Development Board) has incorporated the Governor's vision into its strategic plan. The NCWorks Commission's vision is defined as follows in the 2021-23 Strategic Plan: "To build a job-ready workforce to strengthen North Carolina companies, attract new businesses, and ensure our state can adapt to a changing economy during and after the COVID-19 pandemic."

The mission of the state's workforce development system, established by the NCWorks 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; and to ensure North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow by increasing access to education and skills training, fostering employer leadership to prepare workers, and supporting and scaling local innovation."

The state's workforce development system is comprised of partners at the state and local level and is collectively referred to as NCWorks. North Carolina has a strong workforce development system, and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) helps empower the state to prepare its workforce, provide support for the state's businesses and guides how the system connects skilled job seekers to employers.

In early 2019, Governor Cooper, along with state leaders from the North Carolina General Assembly, education and business came together to establish and to commit to work toward a postsecondary educational attainment goal of 2 million North Carolinians (ages 25-44) with a recognized credential beyond high school by the year 2030. This goal is referred to as the myFutureNC goal and was developed through a multi-year combined effort of state education, business, workforce, faith-based and nonprofit community representatives, along with representatives from the North Carolina General Assembly and Governor Cooper's staff. The cross-sector collaborative initiative led to the development of the myFutureNC goal and the establishment of a statewide nonprofit organization, myFutureNC, that is focused on the educational attainment of the state's citizens.

The NCWorks Commission developed and adopted its latest strategic plan in February 2021. The plan was developed with interagency input from partners at the state and local level and sets forth a vision and strategic goals for North Carolina's workforce development system. It provides a strategic framework for all workforce programs in North Carolina, including, but not limited to the WIOA core programs. The myFutureNC goal was interwoven into the NCWorks Commission strategy and plan development. The plan focuses on the coordination and alignment for all workforce programs in the state and provided the foundation for the development of North Carolina's Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Unified State Plan.

The purpose of the Strategic Plan is to create an integrated workforce system that effectively responds to the needs of employers and prepares workers for North Carolina's economy. The strategic plan, titled Preparing North Carolina's Workforce for Today and Tomorrow, sets forth a vision to build a job-ready workforce to strengthen North Carolina companies, attract new businesses, and ensure our state can adapt to a changing economy during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Goals

The NCWorks Commission developed four goals to achieve the state's vision for the workforce system as part of its strategic plan, each of which will employ several strategies, which are discussed in detail in the State Strategy section of the Unified Plan. These four goals are defined at the workforce system level and address both (a) preparation and education needed to develop skills to benefit workers and (b) the workforce needs of employers.

**Goal 1: Prepare workers to succeed in the North Carolina economy by increasing skills and education attainment.** The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted numerous individuals across the state, causing unprecedented increases in unemployment and rapid changes in the way people learn and access information. In a post-pandemic recovery era, North Carolina will need more focus on equity, education, and training, which is crucial to creating more skilled workers, deeper talent pools, and a more resilient workforce. As the skill requirements of jobs increase and change rapidly, businesses need a diverse, highly skilled pipeline of workers ready for the jobs they create, and North Carolinians need access to training so they can be equipped for those jobs.

**Goal 2:Create a workforce system that is responsive to the needs of the economy by fostering employer leadership.** Employer-led job training programs have the best career outcomes. Employers know best what skills their workers need, and employer involvement is key for workforce development and job readiness. Businesses that invest in developing North

Carolina's workforce will benefit from well-trained employees and a more innovative and diverse workplace that better reflects its community.

**Goal 3:Promote replication of creative solutions to challenging workforce problems by supporting local innovation**. Communities across North Carolina are developing great local models of workforce development. North Carolina is positioned to build on those successes and replicate them to continue to drive the building and expanding of innovative solutions.

**Goal 4:Promote System Access, Alignment, Integration, and Modernization.** North Carolina's workforce system includes multiple agencies, programs, and funders. Collaboration, policy alignment, systemic communication, integration, and modernization of the workforce system will ensure a strong and healthy workforce system that can adapt to an ever-changing economy.

The goals listed in the 2021-2023 Strategic Plan serve as the basis for the 2022-2024 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Unified State Plan and are consistent with those of the strategic plans for the agencies that administer the core programs under WIOA. In addition, they align with Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready initiative, which is built on three core principles: (1) skills and education attainment so North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow, (2) employer leadership to remain relevant to evolving industry needs, and (3) local innovation to take great ideas and apply them statewide. Furthermore, the NCWorks Commission goals integrate and align with the myFutureNC statewide attainment goal.

**Performance Goals**

The tables in each WIOA core program section provide the anticipated levels of performance for Title I, Title II, Title III and Title IV programs. These performance levels are based on year-end performance figures from PY 2020. At this time, program year goals for PY 2022 and PY 2023 have not yet been negotiated.

**Assessment**

The NCWorks Commission is responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of the state's workforce development system. These evaluation and assessment activities are overseen by the NCWorks Commission's Governance and System Alignment Committee. In support of this responsibility the commission carries out several tasks including : (a) conducting annual reviews of all workforce program plans to identify gaps in service, duplication and opportunities for better alignment; (b) developing and reporting on performance measures for all workforce programs annually; (c) implementing a system-wide customer satisfaction survey for both businesses and job seekers; (d) requiring a joint WIOA core programs report to be submitted annually regarding implementation of WIOA to ensure adherence to the state plan; and (e) engaging outside consultation for third-party review, analysis, evaluation and recommendations for continuous improvement of services and resulting outcomes.

North Carolina has a longitudinal workforce data system, the North Carolina Common Follow-up System (CFS), that was originally established in the early 1990's. The CFS is mandated under state law and is jointly operated by the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division and the North Carolina Department of Information Technology. The CFS is utilized to help in the assessment of the state's workforce programs including the assessment of employment and wage outcomes. North Carolina received a Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grant in 2013 and a second WDQI grant in 2019 to help support enhancement and expansion of the CFS. Information from the CFS is utilized to support the NCWorks Commissions' program evaluation and assessment responsibilities. In addition, LEAD is working closely with the myFutureNC nonprofit to provide information and technical assistance in developing measures to help assess the state's progress on the myFutureNC goal.

The NCWorks Commission will continue to utilize the information, data, and evaluations listed above to advise the Governor, General Assembly, and other state leaders on how to continue to improve the state's workforce development system to ensure it is well-coordinated, customer-focused, high-quality, inclusive, and meeting the needs of both individuals and businesses.

## C. STATE STRATEGY

(C) State Strategy

The NCWorks Commission's strategic plan defines the strategies necessary for achieving each of the four goals. These strategies identified by the commission and through stakeholder input and engagement are centered in four areas: skills and education attainment, employer leadership, local innovation, and governance and system alignment. These strategies form the foundation for the NCWorks Commission's plan of action and guide the development of its committee structure.

**Increasing Skills and Education Attainment**

Education is the foundation to a strong workforce. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted numerous individuals across the state, causing unprecedented increases in unemployment and rapid changes in the way people learn and access information. In a post-pandemic recovery era, North Carolina will need more focus on equity, education, and training, which is crucial to creating more skilled workers, deeper talent pools, and a more resilient workforce. As the skill requirements of jobs increase and change rapidly, businesses need a diverse, highly skilled pipeline of workers ready for the jobs they create, and North Carolinians need access to training so they can be equipped for those jobs. Below are specific strategies identified in the 2021-23 strategic plan to help increase skills and education attainment and to ensure North Carolina has the best workforce development system in the country.

- **Increase career awareness.** Every North Carolinian needs access to quality career information that will help them identify occupations and jobs that are growing in their area and available training programs that can help to prepare them for those jobs. Career information includes individual experiences with employers and access to data and career exploration tools, such as NCcareers.org. TheNCCareers.org web portal is continually being expanded with the input of interagency partners to use labor market information with information about training opportunities. For example, the NC Workforce Credential Advisory Council (Council) launched in early 2022. The aim of the Council is to identify high value non-degree credentials that can put learners on a pathway to a sustaining wage. The information about these credentials of value to employers is shared on the web portal. NCCareers.org helps students identify promising careers while assisting business leaders to find skilled workers and empowering educators to guide students towards the best career paths for the future.

- **Advocate for increased educational attainment.** Enhance programs to raise the high school graduation rate and improve the technical curriculums offered – including remote online learning environments. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the evolution of education in the digital age. The importance of digital literacy is highlighted in the effort to increase the number of postsecondary degrees, credentials, or certificates needed to address the education attainment gap and make progress toward the goal of *myFutureNC* that by 2030, 2 million North Carolinians between the ages of 25 and 44 years old have a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential. In 2019, all of the major public education systems, the NC Independent Colleges and Universities, and the NCWorks Commission passed resolutions in support of the 2030 educational attainment goal, and the effort has broad bipartisan support, with Governor Cooper and the NC General Assembly united in support of the goal.

- **Promote access to job training for high-demand fields.** Many employers have job openings that remain unfilled because of a lack of workers with the right skill sets. To meet those demands, specifically in a post-pandemic era, recruitment and re-training are vital. The key is to promote the use of NCWorks Career Centers and engage with workforce development boards for incumbent worker training programs, internships, and apprenticeships to collectively reconnect the disconnected workforce and job seekers to high-demand fields. Employers in all sectors are called upon to collaborate with partner agencies to identify and adopt effective strategies to increase alignment and make better use of resources. It is also important that all partners recognize that the need for high-demand fields are not the same from region to region.

- **Increase access to education for those that have barriers.** Support persons with disabilities, adult learners, former offenders, and others with equitable access to employment, education, and resources. Additionally, support initiatives that promote opportunities for disconnected youth between the ages of 16-24, to build a career path and obtain the skills and education needed to prepare them for successful employment and continued educational achievement. Increased Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act funding for at-risk youth programs permits the implementation of more high-quality, work-based learning opportunities, like apprenticeships. Financial assistance for books and materials, childcare, transportation, internet access, and electronic devices are wrap-around support critical to successful participation in training and educations. The Finish Line Grants program has assisted over 4,800 community college students complete training when they face unforeseen challenges.

**Fostering Employer Leadership**

North Carolina will proactively address the changing needs of the economy for a job-driven system by strengthening and expanding business engagement strategies. Employer-led job training programs have the best career outcomes. Employers know best what skills their workers need, and employer involvement is key for workforce development and job readiness. Businesses that invest in developing North Carolina's workforce will benefit from well-trained employees and a more innovative and diverse workplace that better reflects its community. Below are specific strategies identified to ensure a stronger connection to the business community and to ensure that the workforce system is meeting the needs of the economy.

- **Create a workforce development system that is value-driven for employers, aligns education with industry demands, prepares North Carolinians for the future, and drives economic development.** To meet this goal, we will streamline customer access, measure, and invest in what works and coordinate across agencies to actively engage employers to drive North Carolina's workforce system. NCcareers.org is North Carolina's central online resource for students, parents, educators, job seekers and career counselors looking for high-quality job and career information.

- **Increase the number of employers participating in work-based learning experiences and apprenticeships** while also establishing employer champions; and engage employers in education efforts from early childhood through kindergarten to grade 12, post-secondary, and beyond.

- **Enhance programs to enable employers to provide training for new and existing employees.** Successfully upskilling workers will enable employers to promote from within and bring in new employees to fill the vacancies. This will help to develop a job-ready North Carolina.

- **Prioritize, acknowledge, and certify industry-led partnerships.** As market dynamics shift quickly, North Carolina needs to adapt and respond to the evolving needs of businesses. The 23 North Carolina local workforce development boards are in a

unique position to lead business engagement strategies in their communities. Diversity among partner agencies is important, and all agencies, business entities and associations engaged in economic and workforce development will collaborate to fully understand business needs and efficiently deliver the right services to address those needs through sector-strategy models.

- **Leverage employer data on workforce projections and training needs using tools and measures for business engagement.** Technology such as Salesforce, a cloud-based customer relationship management (CRM) tool, can be utilized to assist North Carolina businesses to connect with and get more information about their customer base.

**Supporting Local Workforce Innovation**

North Carolina's workforce development system is supporting communities across North Carolina that are developing great local models of workforce development. North Carolina is building on these successes by highlighting them for replication to continue to build and expand innovative workforce solutions. Below are specific strategies identified to ensure North Carolina's workforce development system is innovative.

- **Advance leadership development opportunities to workforce professionals.** Education and workforce partnerships drive successful career-readiness initiatives. Empowering local workforce leaders with development opportunities that encourage knowledge transfer will promote capacity building, strengthen the effectiveness of localized efforts, and improve outcomes across the communities they serve.

- **Support initiatives to innovate and replicate good ideas.** Local leaders know the unique needs, challenges, and opportunities of the communities they serve. Supporting the piloting of new ideas designed for their communities is critical. When local innovation efforts are successful, communities across the state can learn from them and incorporate them into their local efforts as well. In this way, replication of good ideas can become best practices across the state.

- **Promote local COVID-19 pandemic workforce recovery initiatives leveraging technology to reimagine the talent pipeline.** Employers want educated, skilled, and competent workers to help them solve tomorrow's business challenges today. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened this workforce need. Utilizing technology to retool the employer/job seeker connection and upskilling and reskilling our workforce for emerging and high-demand roles is an effective and efficient way to address talent expectations.

**Promoting Governance and System Alignment**

North Carolina's workforce system includes multiple agencies, programs, and funders. Collaboration, policy alignment, systemic communication, integration, and modernization of the workforce system will ensure a strong and healthy workforce system that can adapt to an ever-changing economy. Below are specific strategies identified to ensure North Carolina's workforce development system has strong system integration while fostering collaboration.

- **Strengthen and support system integration and inclusive practices** through continuous coordination, communication, and data sharing among the key components of North Carolina's workforce system: the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, North Carolina Community College System, University of North Carolina System, North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, the 23 Local Workforce Development Boards, the North Carolina Departments of Commerce and Health and Human Services and the many community-based organizations in our state. The NCWorks Commission, in conjunction with our partners above, develops the WIOA

Unified State Plan and all new WIOA Title 1 and Title 3 Policy Statements to align workforce development programs which support a comprehensive and streamlined workforce development system in North Carolina.

- **Support increased awareness, communication, accessibility, and understanding of the "NCWorks" brand** through building a broad brand awareness aimed at attracting a large and diverse customer base, promoting a unity of effort to increase accessibility and user-friendly navigability. Continue to evolve the scope of technology in the career center system to provide enhanced remote accessibility to all North Carolinians.
- **Research advanced technology for marketing to adapt to new generations entering the workforce** by staying abreast of the rapidly changing demands and needs of businesses and job seekers to ensure that our workforce system remains nimble, adaptive, and fully utilized. As technology advances, there is a continuous need to adapt to consumer expectations and environmental changes such as the recent pandemic.
- **Measure and report on the effectiveness of the workforce development system including the usage and quality of services** by collecting, understanding, tracking, and sharing data effectively to maintain a responsive and successful workforce development system, while evaluating the current system to identify any changes to maximize outcomes for local communities and the state of North Carolina. The NCWorks Commission utilizes this data to ensure alignment of workforce development programs in North Carolina by working with partners to develop the Annual Program Review and the Annual Workforce System Performance Report.

**Implementation and Performance Measurement**

The three agencies responsible for the core WIOA programs work together in local, regional, and state-level teams to meet the needs of individuals and employers in North Carolina. As a system, NCWorks will implement strategies identified in this plan to ensure job seekers and businesses have access to all services across programs. The strategies in North Carolina's WIOA Unified State Plan will result in a workforce system that is more fully integrated and allows all customers to access timely and relevant services from a multitude of touch points wrapped around a customer service core.

North Carolina has continued to strengthen its integrated service delivery system for the WIOA core programs. The NCWorks system fosters better coordination between the entire workforce development system. In addition, North Carolina has a strong career pathways strategy which has developed 40 comprehensive career pathways that all individuals can use to plan their career and obtain economically sustaining employment. North Carolina will continue to implement the key strategies in the unified plan to help students and job seekers achieve economic prosperity.

Across North Carolina, workforce development, education and economic development organizations are hard at work meeting the needs of businesses and connecting people to jobs. However, without a coordinated strategy to ensure that resulting initiatives are targeted and aligned, there is a risk of duplicating efforts and developing programs without an integrated understanding of business needs. Ultimately, this could lead to a disconnect between workforce supply and demand, with long-term consequences for North Carolina's businesses and communities.

The North Carolina State Sector Strategy Council was formed to address these challenges. Key leaders from the North Carolina Community College System Office, the NC Department of Commerce, EDPNC, the NCWorks Commission, and the Governor's Office (all comprising the North Carolina State Sector Strategy Council), have come together to clarify a state mission and

strategy for supporting collaborative business engagement through industry-led sector partnerships. The ultimate goal of the Council is to support the development of local and regional sector partnerships that:

- Provide a source of high-quality, real-time information on what businesses need to inform education, workforce development and economic development efforts;
- Foster sustained partnerships with business, encouraging private sector leaders to co-invest in solutions;
- Act as a coordinating body for education, workforce development and economic development partners to develop efficient and effective responses to industry needs, including development of certified career pathways.

In North Carolina, Career Pathways are established and administered at the local level, the state has pushed to make sector strategies a focus to move the workforce development system forward. Work-based learning has been made a priority by awarding grants to local workforce boards that provide business service staffing for increased employer engagement. All local workforce boards have access to these grants, which put an emphasis on in-demand industry sectors, and occupations through work experience and OJT programs.

North Carolina has developed an NCWorks Local Innovation Fund, a grant program launched by Governor Cooper and administered by the Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions and the NCWorks Commission. The grant provides funding for local communities to pilot innovative programs or replicate successful program models that address a local or regional workforce issue; specifically targeting an underserved or under resourced community or population. Communities assembled collaborative teams to design and implement a set of solutions to a workforce issue. Teams include representatives from the local, regional, and state level of workforce, education, community, labor, and business leaders.

Strategies for strengthening business engagement are also well under way in North Carolina. An inter-agency NCWorks team coordinated the development of comprehensive employer services literature and brochures for dissemination across all programs and established regional business services teams to ensure coordination among Local Workforce Development Boards. A series of program flyers, manuals, and videos were developed in the spring and summer of 2020 for all boards to utilize. Workforce Boards were shipped printed versions, and the electronic files are housed on the North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Board's (NCAWDB) website. Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, North Carolina emphasizes local success which is built upon 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. Additionally, a new NCWorks logo was introduced in October 2019 for an increased brand awareness. In spring of 2020, all the signage at the NCWorks Career Centers was updated to reflect the new logo.

The NCWorks Commission continues to track the progress of these strategies, successful completion, and evaluating the overall effectiveness of the state's workforce development system. To accomplish this task, the commission has several key responsibilities including:

- conducting annual reviews of all workforce program plans to identify gaps in service, duplication, and opportunities for better alignment;
- developing local annual performance measures for all workforce programs;
- developing and reviewing WIOA Title I and Title III policies;
- developing and reviewing the local area plans to ensure adherence to the state plan; and

- engaging outside consultation for third-party review, analysis, evaluation, and recommendations for continuous improvement of services and resulting outcomes.

The NCWorks Commission will use the information, data and evaluations listed above to advise the Governor, General Assembly, and other state leaders on how to continue to improve the state's workforce development system to ensure it is well-coordinated, customer-focused, high-quality, and meeting the needs of both individuals and businesses.

**Strategies to Align Core Programs**

Continued agency coordination is critical to continued alignment of core programs. North Carolina's workforce partners realize that the success of the workforce system partners, both jobseekers and employers cannot be made without the support of all of the state's partners working together.

One major step taken in 2021 to better align core programs was the addition of representatives of Title II (Adult Education) and Title IV (Vocational Rehabilitation) to the NCWorks Commission (state Workforce Development Board). Their roles as voting members will strengthen the alignment going forward. This action was taken through state legislation.

One strategic goal for the Division of Workforce Solutions is the development and delivery of training for chief elected officials and workforce board chairs on the responsibilities of the elected officials, Local Workforce Development Boards, economic developers and DWS (as the state administrative entity tasked with oversight). This training occurred in the fall of 2021 and incorporated data-driven research, analysis and strategic insights that align with the Governor's vision for workforce development as outlined in the NC Job Ready initiative. All WIOA stakeholders will have the opportunity for input to the WIOA Steering Council.

Stronger policy alignment between the NCWorks Commission and core partners will ensure that the workforce development system meets the goals of being well-coordinated, customer-focused, high-quality, and inclusive.

As discussed earlier, strides have been made to improve shared data sharing processes, both to enhance the customer experience, and to ensure that economic data and benchmark metric information provided to all core partners.

The North Carolina Department of Commerce released a new strategic plan, First in Talent, in July 2021. The plan has a greater focus on talent and workforce development than traditional aspects of economic development such as industry specific strategies. The plan recognizes that North Carolina is well positioned to remain competitive for economic development opportunities in our targeted industry sectors and calls for a renewed focus on recruiting and retaining the talent necessary to meet current and future workforce needs. The Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) is the administrator for WIOA Title I & WIOA Title III, and their strategic plan will align with the NCWorks Commission's strategic plan and USDOL's strategic plan.

Improving the flow of data between economic development and workforce development, at the statewide, regional, and local levels, and enhancing the strategic partnership between workforce development and economic development partners, is critical to meeting the needs of both employers and jobseekers. Moreover, strengthening this alliance will help workforce officials add value to the economic development process and aid the NCWorks system in being more response to the needs of the state's existing, expanding, and new businesses and industries.

*Strategies the State will use to align the core programs and Combined State Plan partner programs:*

Goal 1: Prepare workers to succeed in the North Carolina economy by increasing skills and education attainment.

Strategies to achieve Goal 1:

- Increase career awareness. Every North Carolinian needs access to career information that will lead them to high growth jobs and training programs that will prepare them for those jobs. Career information includes individual experiences with employers and access to digital networks, data, and career exploration tools, such as NCcareers.org.

- Advocate for increased educational attainment. Enhance programs to raise the high school graduation rate and improve the technical curriculums offered – including remote online learning environments. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the evolution of education in the digital age. The importance of digital literacy is highlighted in the effort to increase the number of postsecondary degrees, credentials, or certificates needed to address the education attainment gap and make progress toward the goal of myFutureNC that by 2030, 2 million North Carolinians between the ages of 25 and 44 years old have a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential.

- Promote access to job training for high-demand and high-growth fields that pay a living wage. Many employers have job openings that remain unfilled because of a lack of workers with the right skill sets. To meet those demands, specifically in a post-pandemic era, recruitment and re-training are vital. The key is to promote the use of NCWorks Career Centers and engage with workforce development boards for incumbent worker training programs, internships, and apprenticeships to collectively reconnect the disconnected workforce and job seekers to high-demand fields. Employers in all sectors are called upon to collaborate with partner agencies to identify and adopt effective strategies to increase alignment and make better use of resources. It is also important that all partners recognize that the need for high-demand fields are not the same from region to region.

- Increase access to education for those that have barriers. Support persons with disabilities, adult learners, former offenders, and others with equitable access to employment, education, and resources. Additionally, support initiatives that promote opportunities for disconnected youth between the ages of 16-24, to build a career path and obtain the skills and education needed to prepare them for successful employment and continued educational achievement. Increased Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act funding for at-risk youth programs permits the implementation of more high-quality, work-based learning opportunities, like apprenticeships. Financial assistance for books and materials, childcare, transportation, internet access, and electronic devices are wrap-around support critical to successful participation in training and educations.

Goal 2: Create a workforce system that is responsive to the needs of the economy by fostering employer leadership.

Strategies to achieve Goal 2:

- Create a workforce development system that is value-driven for employers, aligns education with industry demands, prepares North Carolinians for the future, and drives

economic development. To meet this goal, we will streamline customer access, measure, and invest in what works and coordinate across agencies to actively engage employers to drive North Carolina's workforce system. NCcareers.org is North Carolina's central online resource for students, parents, educators, job seekers and career counselors looking for high-quality job and career information.

- Increase the number of employers participating in work-based learning experiences and apprenticeships while also establishing employer champions; and engage employers in education efforts from early childhood through kindergarten to grade 12, post-secondary, and beyond.

- Enhance programs to enable employers to provide training for new and existing employees. Successfully upskilling workers will enable employers to promote from within and bring in new employees to fill the vacancies. This will help to develop a job-ready North Carolina.

- Prioritize, acknowledge, and certify industry-led partnerships. As market dynamics shift quickly, North Carolina needs to adapt and respond to the evolving needs of businesses. The 23 North Carolina local workforce development boards are in a unique position to lead business engagement strategies in their communities. Diversity among partner agencies is important, and all agencies, business entities and associations engaged in economic and workforce development will collaborate to fully understand business needs and efficiently deliver the right services to address those needs through sector-strategy models.

- Leverage employer data on workforce projections and training needs using tools and measures for business engagement. Technology such as Salesforce, a cloud-based customer relationship management (CRM) tool, can be utilized to assist North Carolina businesses to connect with and get more information about their customer base.

Goal 3: Promote replication of creative solutions to challenging workforce problems by supporting local innovation.

Strategies to achieve Goal 3:

- Advance leadership development opportunities to workforce professionals. Education and workforce partnerships drive successful career-readiness initiatives. Empowering local workforce leaders with development opportunities that encourage knowledge transfer will promote capacity building, strengthen the effectiveness of localized efforts, and improve outcomes across the communities they serve.

- Support initiatives to innovate and replicate good ideas. Local leaders know the unique needs, challenges, and opportunities of the communities they serve. Supporting the piloting of new ideas designed for their communities is critical. When local innovation efforts are successful, communities across the state can learn from them and incorporate them into their local efforts as well. In this way, replication of good ideas can become best practices across the state.

- Promote local COVID-19 workforce recovery initiatives leveraging technology to reimagine the talent pipeline. Employers want educated, skilled, and competent workers to help them solve tomorrow's business challenges today. The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened this workforce need. Utilizing technology to retool the employer/job seeker connection and upskilling and reskilling our workforce for emerging and high-demand roles is an effective and efficient way to address talent expectations.

Goal 4: Promote System Access, Alignment, Integration, and Modernization.

Strategies to achieve Goal 4:

- Strengthen and support system integration and inclusive practices through continuous coordination, communication, and data sharing among the key components of North Carolina's workforce system: the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, North Carolina Community College System, University of North Carolina System, North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, the 23 Local Workforce Development Boards, the North Carolina Departments of Commerce and Health and Human Services and the many community-based organizations in our state. The NCWorks Commission, in conjunction with our partners above, develops the WIOA Unified State Plan and all new WIOA Title 1 and Title 3 Policy Statements to align workforce development programs which support a comprehensive and streamlined workforce development system in North Carolina.

- Support increased awareness, communication, accessibility, and understanding of the "NCWorks" brand through building a broad brand awareness aimed at attracting a large and diverse customer base, promoting a unity of effort to increase accessibility and user-friendly navigability. Continue to evolve the scope of technology in the career center system to provide enhanced remote accessibility to all North Carolinians.

- Research advanced technology for marketing to adapt to new generations entering the workforce by staying abreast of the rapidly changing demands and needs of businesses and job seekers to ensure that our workforce system remains nimble, adaptive, and fully utilized. As technology advances, there is a continuous need to adapt to consumer expectations and environmental changes such as the recent pandemic.

- Measure and report on the effectiveness of the workforce development system including the usage and quality of services by collecting, understanding, tracking, and sharing data effectively to maintain a responsive and successful workforce development system, while evaluating the current system to identify any changes to maximize outcomes for local communities and the state of North Carolina. The NCWorks Commission utilizes this data to ensure alignment of workforce development programs in North Carolina by working with partners to develop the Annual Program Review and the Annual Workforce System Performance Report.

As the table below shows, the goals of key agencies and oversight boards in the areas of education, economic development, and health/human services align with the NCWorks strategic plan.

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| NCWorks Commission Strategic Plan (2021-2023) | Goal 1: Prepare workers to succeed in the NC economy by increasing **skills and education attainment**. | Goal 2: Create a workforce system that is **responsive to the needs of the economy** by fostering employer leadership. | Goal 3: Promote replication of **creative solutions** to challenging workforce problems by **supporting local innovation**. | Goal 4: Promote System **Access, Alignment, Integration, and Modernization**. |
| myFutureNC Commission Attainment Goal for North Carolina (2019-2030) | By 2030, 2 million North Carolinians (25-44) with a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential | | | |
| State Board of Education 2025 Strategic Plan (2019-2025) | Goal III: Increase educator preparedness to meet the needs of every student by 2025 | | Goal II: Improve school and district performance by 2025 | Goal I: Eliminate opportunity gaps by 2025<br><br>*(Also, aspects of Goal II re: financial/ technological performance)* |
| State Board of Community Colleges Strategic Plan (2018-2022) | Goal 2: Clear and Supported Pathways for Student Progress and Success.<br><br>Goal 3: Economic and Workforce Impact | Goal 3: Economic and Workforce Impact *(employer engagement, work-based learning objectives)* | | Goal 1: Student Interest and Access.<br><br>Goal 4: System Effectiveness. |
| State Board of Community Colleges (Draft Pillars for 2022-2026 Plan) | Pillar 1: First Choice for an Accessible and Affordable Education | Pillar 2: Leading North Carolina's Economic Recovery and Sustained Growth | Pillar 4: System Effectiveness *(aspects re: regional collaboration and college capacity)* | Pillar 3: National Leader in Diversity and Inclusion<br><br>Pillar 4: System Effectiveness |
| University of NC Board of Governors (2017-2022) | Goal 2: Student Success | Goal 4: Economic Impact and Community Engagement | Goal 5: Excellent and Diverse Institutions | Goal 1: Access<br><br>Goal 3: Affordability and Efficiency |
| Department of Health and Human Services Strategic Plan | Goal 1. Advance health equity by reducing | Goal 2. Help North Carolinians end the pandemic, | Goal 3. Build an innovative, coordinated, and whole person — | Goal 4. Turn the tide on North Carolina's opioid and substance use crisis. |

| NCWorks Commission Strategic Plan (2021-2023) | Goal 1: Prepare workers to succeed in the NC economy by increasing **skills and education attainment**. | Goal 2: Create a workforce system that is **responsive to the needs of the economy** by fostering employer leadership. | Goal 3: Promote replication of **creative solutions** to challenging workforce problems by **supporting local innovation**. | Goal 4: Promote System **Access, Alignment, Integration, and Modernization**. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| (2021-23) | disparities in opportunity and outcomes for<br><br>historically marginalized populations within<br><br>DHHS and across the state | control the spread of COVID-19, recover stronger, and be prepared for future public health crises with an emphasis on initiatives serving those communities most impacted. | physical, mental and social health — centered system that addresses both medical and non-medical drivers of health. | Goal 5. Improve child and family well-being so all<br><br>children have the opportunity to develop to<br><br>their full potential and thrive.<br><br>Goal 6. Support individuals with disabilities and older adults in leading safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives.<br><br>Goal 7. Achieve operational (Goal 7 continued) excellence by living our values— belonging, joy, people-focused, proactive communication, stewardship, teamwork, and transparency |

# III. OPERATIONAL PLANNING ELEMENTS

## A. STATE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

### 1. STATE BOARD FUNCTIONS

**State Board Operational Structures and Processes**

The NCWorks Commission is the designated State Workforce Development Board for the state of North Carolina. The commission operates in accordance with the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, North Carolina General Statute, and commission bylaws. Commission members are appointed by the Governor and 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 has several responsibilities including the development of policies for the alignment of workforce programs, assessment of the effectiveness of North Carolina's core and partner programs, and oversight of the NCWorks Career Center system.

**Membership**

Representation on the 37 member NCWorks Commission is mandated by federal and state law. Commission membership includes workforce agency leaders, elected officials, private sector members, representatives from labor, training, and community-based organizations as well as the WIOA core partner program managers. As defined under the WIOA, 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 North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, North Carolina Department of Administration, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, North Carolina Community College System, University of North Carolina System, and North Carolina Department of Commerce all serve as ex-officio members.

**Committees**

The work of the NCWorks Commission is accomplished through the work of its committees. These committees, established by the chair, are created purposefully to accomplish the goals of the commission's biennial strategic plan and to carry out the functions under section 101(d) of WIOA. Each committee is led by a chair and is supported by staff. The NCWorks Commission has an Executive Committee which is comprised of the Commission chair and chairs of each of the four committees.

**Staff**

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, deputy 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 business meetings at the call of the chair. 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.

Each of the NCWorks Commission's committees meet several times a year and are scheduled at the discretion of the committee chair. These meetings are attended by the assigned committee members, its chair, and appropriate staff.

## 2. IMPLEMENTATION OF STATE STRATEGY

### A. CORE PROGRAM ACTIVITIES TO IMPLEMENT THE STATE'S STRATEGY

**Core Program Activities to Implement the State's Strategy**

NC Job Ready is Governor Cooper's workforce development initiative to ensure North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow. NC Job Ready focuses on three priorities: skills and education attainment, employer leadership, and local innovation. The core programs in WIOA will align and achieve the strategies identified in North Carolina's Unified State Plan by emphasizing these priorities. The NCWorks Commission's 2021-2023 strategic plan will provide the foundation for this work and will continue to track the success of the plan. Below are the four major goals that form the basis of the strategic plan. These goals are to:

1) Prepare workers to succeed in the North Carolina economy by increasing skills and education attainment;

- The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted numerous individuals across the state, causing unprecedented increases in unemployment and rapid changes in the way people learn and access information. In a post-pandemic recovery era, North Carolina will need more focus on equity, education, and training, which is crucial to creating more skilled workers, deeper talent pools, and a more resilient workforce. As the skill requirements of jobs increase and change rapidly, businesses need a diverse, highly skilled pipeline of workers ready for the jobs they create, and North Carolinians need access to training so they can be equipped for those jobs. Related to the education attainment component of this goal, the plan calls for making progress toward the goal set by the myFutureNC Commission: that by 2030, 2 million North Carolinians between the ages of 25 and 44 years old have a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential. WIOA Title II will collaborate with NC Community College System to support Integrated Education and Training (IET) implementation to accelerate skills while beginning the path to earning an industry recognized certification. Title II will provide professional development for training providers and Adult Education programs on creating concurrent enrollment opportunities in programs of study assessed to be in high demand in the local areas. In addition, Title II will work with local NC Works Career Centers to support career services and provide training vouchers for the Title II IET.

2) Create a workforce system that is responsive to the needs of the economy by fostering employer leadership;

- Employer leadership includes an emphasis on increasing the number of employers participating in work-based learning experiences and apprenticeships while also establishing employer champions; and engage employers in education efforts from early childhood through kindergarten to grade 12, post-secondary, and beyond.

3) Promote replication of creative solutions to challenging workforce problems by supporting local innovation;

- "Local innovation" calls for promoting leadership development opportunities for the state's workforce professionals, and for funding community-based initiatives that pilot new ideas or replicate proven programs. This goal prioritizes local COVID-19 workforce recovery initiatives leveraging technology to reimagine the talent pipeline.

4) Promote workforce system access, alignment, integration, and modernization.

- This goal relates to the coordination of the workforce development system itself, which involves numerous partner agencies. Among other items, the plan calls for enhancing public awareness of the services provided through NCWorks for individuals and businesses, while researching new technological means to serve the system's customers.

**Coordinate Across Programs at State and Local Levels**

North Carolina continues to integrate programs under WIOA. Currently programs in Titles I and III, operated by the N.C. Department of Commerce, are already developing referral process guidelines to programs in Title IV. The N.C. Department of Commerce will begin work on integrating Title II into the referral process guidelines. N.C. Department of Commerce will provide guidance and technical assistance to local NC Works centers to develop an integrated referral system for services that meet local needs and ensure nonduplication of services and that provide equal access to all eligible clients. As the referral processes are established, based on the guidelines, the state agency leads will meet to quarterly to review and assess referral process efficacy. The WIOA State Steering Council reviews current referral policy and strategies biannually to identify ways to strengthen these processes to avoid duplication of services. The N.C. Department of Commerce works continuously to improve the integration of services to ensure a customer-centered approach to service delivery. This integration is supported by the NCWorks Commission's 2021-2023 strategic plan that cites strengthening system integration as one of their goals to promote the system statewide.

The NCWorks Commission's 2021-2023 strategic plan provides a framework for all workforce programs in North Carolina, including, but not limited to the programs covered under WIOA. The State Steering Council also identified key actions needed to ensure coordination and alignment.

In collaboration with the NCWorks Commission, the WIOA State Steering Council, initially established in 2015 continues as a permanent cross-agency body to coordinate and align policy and ensure continued implementation of WIOA at state and local levels. The council reviews progress on WIOA implementation and develops strategies for improvement. In addition, the council continues to review state policies that may inhibit programs from fully aligning required activities. The council provides feedback to the NCWorks Commission regarding challenges and barriers to completing the work and offers suggestions for new policy.

Other activities of the WIOA State Steering Council:

1. Review the inter-agency teams at the local and regional levels to enhance alignment of workforce services, as local and regional activities should be aligned to improve the system.
2. Develop a statewide plan and offer resources to provide access to all statewide education and workforce development entities to get all workforce system participants enrolled in NCWorks Online.
    a. NCWorks Online is the state's official job-search 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 use the system to post jobs and find the talent they need. In addition, the system includes labor market information by industry, occupation, and region.
    b. Title II and Title IV core partners will collaborate with their local NCWorks Career Center to enroll program participants into NCWorks. NCWorks will provide access and regular training to students.
    c. This system is a valuable tool for individuals, businesses, economic developers, and workforce development partners. As more individuals register and use NCWorks Online, businesses will have a larger pool of talent to select from for their workforce needs. In addition, NCWorks Online can be a valuable tool for showing businesses interested in locating or growing in North Carolina that the state has the workforce they need to be successful.

3. Continue to incorporate and promote the NCWorks brand to help customers recognize the value of the state's workforce development system.

    a. Since 2014, the state of North Carolina has used the name NCWorks to allow the workforce development system to work under one brand name, in order to help customers, individuals, and businesses more easily identify where to access workforce development services. Further work to unify under one brand name has been done since, including unveiling a refreshed NCWorks brand logo at the 2019 NCWorks Partnership Conference, as part of an overall outreach effort.

    b. A single brand for the entire workforce development system reduces, to the extent possible, the focus on individual programs or services and replaces it with a statewide approach. A common brand also reduces confusion for those unfamiliar with the system by simplifying the message and increasing the efficiency of statewide outreach.

4. Develop and implement a system-wide and consistent outreach strategy.

    a. Customers of the state's workforce development system may access more than one service. For example, a business looking to grow may need to increase the size of its workforce immediately but also ensure there is a pipeline of workers to continue to fill those positions. The company may be interested in customized training as well as work-based learning programs to ensure it can meet its current and future workforce needs. The workforce development system seeks to develop outreach strategies that provide information on the full range of services available.

    b. The NCWorks branding and outreach campaign, launched by the state in late 2019 and continuing through 2020, sought to consistently and effectively promote workforce development services. Informed by research, the campaign focused primarily on North Carolina employers. The main goals of the campaign were to raise awareness of the services specifically for businesses, help to increase usage of the NCWorks system by business leaders, and to amplify NCWorks' voice and visibility across the state. While the campaign concluded, its benefits continue in the form of certain materials and employer-focused social media activity.

5. Operationalize employer-driven strategies that engage business leaders in opportunities that develop best practices for sector strategies and career pathways that benefit both employers and jobseekers.

    a. There are many ways for employers to engage with the workforce development system who can identify and provide resources for services they need for growth and sustainability 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 relevant 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.

    b. Workforce development entities need to work together to identify all the ways that businesses can interact with the workforce development system from facility tours to work-based learning activities such as internships and externships, to apprenticeships, incumbent worker training, customized training, continuing education, job shadowing, 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.

6. Create a framework for ensuring cross-trained, qualified staff from all workforce partners including WIOA core partners have the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to support an integrated local delivery system to ensure that North Carolina has the nation's most talented, collaborative professionals and leaders for workforce development.

    a. Workforce development staff historically have been deployed to meet the specific mission of the program for which they are employed. Local, regional, and state stakeholders agree that a high level of customer service should be one of the cornerstones of the brand architecture for North Carolina's workforce delivery system. Achieving a high level of customer service is dependent on knowledgeable staff with the confidence and understanding of the system that is required to perform all aspects of their jobs. The NCWorks Training Center, in collaboration with core WIOA partners will develop a Core Partner cross training for all core partner staff.

    b. The Division of Workforce Solutions manages the NCWorks Training Center, which 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, along with other customized event services as requested.

    c. The NCWorks Training Center is readily available with logistical planning of events, registration, data collection, supportive services, and training delivery. The current catalog of 77 interactive online courses successfully enhances accessibility of training on a variety of on demand topics.

    d. Several of these courses are bundled into a product entitled *Welcome to Workforce*, which provides a structure for comprehensive system orientation and skill development over a 2-year period. This basic foundation is critical for new staff to acquire a solid understanding of the work they perform and is also a useful refresher for more seasoned staff.

    e. The NCWorks Training Center continues to provide workforce development professionals a globally recognized credentialing opportunity through the Facilitating Career Development (FCD) course. This 120-hour course uses the curriculum of the National Career Development Association (NCDA) 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. This course is offered 4-6 times per year depending on the need.

f. Another credentialing course available and offered as needed is the Business and Employer Services Professional (BESP) course, which is comprised of 40 hours of online work, 2 classroom days, and completion of an independent project. This course is designed for any staff in the NCWorks Career Center who interfaces with the business community and the content encourages for development of strong relationships with business, effective communication skills, and using needs assessment to determine solutions for businesses in recruiting and retaining a viable workforce. The curriculum was developed and is delivered by Lengel Vocational Services and is based on the business services competencies of the FCD course and the National Association of Workforce Development Professionals (NAWDP). Two virtual BESP courses were held in 2021 with 43 graduates.

g. The newest initiative led by the Training Center is a comprehensive leadership development course entitled *STAR: Successful Teams Achieve Results.* The course values and structure were developed using a team of workforce professionals that included Workforce Board Directors, senior leadership at the Division, and NCWorks Career Center Managers. The first course was offered in the spring and summer of 2019, with 18 graduates who attended six 2-day sessions over a six-month period. The second class began shortly after and graduated 19 in November of 2019. Three virtual STAR cohorts were held in 2021 with 51 graduates. Plans are underway to offer 2 courses each calendar year, with varying locations to accommodate the entire state. Currently the course is open only to existing staff of the core workforce system (Division, Workforce Boards, service contractors) who are actively supervising others. The course will begin to include aspiring managers once most of the current managers have participated.

h. Another new initiative designed to enhance accessibility to training and increase awareness of professional development opportunities is the *NCWorks Training Champions*. Each Workforce Board was given the opportunity, in collaboration with Division leadership, to identify staff of the NCWorks Career Centers to participate in the training. The training consisted of three sessions over 4 months. Participants were exposed to tools and techniques for designing, training, and team activities, how to access and effectively utilize existing online course options and develop their own skills as a training advocate. The 28 staff who graduated are actively encouraging staff development in their local areas, supporting their peers in professional growth, and providing the Training Center with accurate and tangible information on local training needs and preferences. NCWorks Training Champions meet quarterly to share professional development ideas and training needs.

**Business Engagement and Sector Partnerships**

North Carolina is proactively addressing the changing needs of the economy for an employer-driven system by strengthening and expanding sector partnerships and business engagement strategies. A core business engagement strategy is bringing employers together from a defined region in a single industry sector to help identify their shared challenges and opportunities. The employers work with an aligned public partner team all focused on promoting the economic growth and vitality of their region. Below are specific strategies identified to ensure a stronger connection to the business community and to ensure that the workforce system is meeting the needs of the economy.

- Support local and regional sector partnership initiatives identified by Governor's interagency State Council for Sector Strategies, where employer leadership drives

strategies and partner activities. Agencies involved: Governor's Office, NC Department of Commerce, NC Community College System, Department of Public Instruction, NCWorks Commission, Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC).

- Ensure alignment of sector partnerships to local and regional priority and in-demand industries for outcomes toward growth and economic impact.

Training on the employer-led business engagement model and showcasing best practice examples of a sector strategy is a priority. This initiative is designed to be employer-driven and to promote aligned partnerships among local businesses, community partners and workforce development entities, with employers helping drive the agenda.

- Key leaders from the North Carolina Community College System Office, the NC Department of Commerce, The Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC), the Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS), the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the NC Chamber, the NCWorks Commission, and the Governor's Office (all comprising the North Carolina State Sector Strategy Council), have come together to clarify a state mission and strategy for supporting collaborative business engagement through industry-led sector partnerships.

- The 23 North Carolina Local Workforce Development Boards are also in a unique position as a neutral convener to lead business engagement strategies in their local communities. Diversity among partner agencies is important, and all agencies, business entities and associations engaged in economic and workforce development are working to collaborate to fully understand business needs and efficiently deliver the right solutions to address those needs through sector strategy models.

- Multiple regions have launched sector partnerships, have emerging sector partnerships, or are exploring the potential of sector partnerships across the state. There are three operating advanced manufacturing partnerships in the Western, Foothills and Southeast Regions, and one emerging in the Sandhills region of the state. A healthcare sector partnership just launched in the Northeast Region and is being re-launched in the Sandhills region. Aviation, Offshore Wind and Biopharma are three industry sectors also being explored across the state.

- Additional partnerships of employers are operating across the state that demonstrate significant employer engagement and are positively impacting the economic development outlook in their region.

**Career Pathways**

North Carolina implemented a strong career pathway strategy that expanded on the work done over the last decade by the K-12 and community college systems. Local area workforce boards continue to promote activities that support Career Pathways for critical industry clusters and those that create new career pathways are recognized by the NCWorks Commission. Pathways include multiple entry and exit points, so all people can use the pathway to plan their career. North Carolina's career pathways strategy is undergoing an analysis to revise the training on how to use career pathways to advise and support all individuals.

- Increase, strengthen, and promote work-based learning activities, including investigating how they could be incorporated into agreements with companies receiving state economic development incentives; as well as how teachers and instructors can integrate work-based learning into their curriculum programs.

- Increase support for registered apprenticeships with pre-apprenticeships to develop a full-service program that reaches all industry sector and all communities.

North Carolina continues to focus on providing career pathways to our citizens. These pathways align with the skill needs of industries in the economy of North Carolina and prepares our citizens to be successful in a full range of educational options by providing education, training, and other services to meet the needs of the individual. The certified pathways previously implemented resulted in 40 certified pathways across the state from 2016-2021.

Work-based learning is a key element in career pathways and other work. North Carolina is continuing to go through analysis measures to identify opportunities to foster the alignment of economic and workforce development, including cross-training workforce partners to increase and promote work-based learning across the state. Two examples of successful measures are the continued allocations of resources (by DWS) to support a work-based learning focused position in all local areas which is tied to goals and performance metrics, and the incorporation of all work-based learning and training activities to economic development projects where companies are seeking state or local economic 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. A main goal is to expand the number of NCWorks Certified Work-Ready Communities to demonstrate to businesses that communities have the workforce needed.

The NC Work Ready Communities initiative is a partnership between the NC Work Ready Certified Communities State team and the ACT Work Ready Communities team to support economic development throughout the state by providing counties with a framework to validate that they have a skilled workforce ready to fill current and future jobs. An on-going goal of this initiative is to expand the number of NC Work-Ready Communities to demonstrate to businesses that communities have the workforce needed. 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. As of January 2022, sixty-eight counties participate in this initiative.

Other initiatives related to these career pathway efforts include:

- Workforce development partners use sector partnerships and career pathways to prepare workers to succeed by gaining the skills and experience needed for in-demand occupations.
- NCWorks Career Pathways are developed to focus on local and regional in-demand occupations in collaboration with local educational institutions and partners. Education and workforce development partners will continue to target their resources on career awareness and increasing enrollment in career pathways.
- As resources and budgets tighten, targeting resources toward helping people enroll in career pathways for high-demand occupations will help the workforce system be more efficient with its resources; individuals will gain access to high-demand occupations and improve their quality of life; and businesses have the workforce they need to be successful and grow.
- Connect Title II Adult Education, College and Career Readiness programs by creating multiple entry points to ensure access for underserved populations.
- NC College and Career Readiness will collaborate with core partners and NC community colleges to support the development of pre-apprenticeships linked to registered apprenticeships to target adults who have barriers to employment. State Leadership

funds will be used to coordinate with core providers to establish a student referral system, cross-training, and integrated service delivery system.

- The Community College System will coordinate workforce development strategies to support on-ramp programming to include Integrated Employment and Training, workforce preparation, career advising, and apprentices and transition services.
- Title II will work with Career and Technical Education to provide training on developing key elements for career pathways to include contextualized instruction for targeted industries, and programming that targets the needs of serving individuals with disabilities and English language learners.
- Continue to support the implementation of nccareers.org, a career information portal that ensures students and jobs seekers have reliable information on career opportunities and educational programs to prepare for those opportunities.
- An interagency working group of partners continues to review and update nccareers.org and make recommendations for the portal. This web portal is a hub where students and job seekers can turn to find relevant and accurate career information. This hub has been revamped and continues to be built out with new features.
- 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, including utilization of career pathways, pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and community-based work experiences (internships, job shadowing, and on the job training) whenever available and whenever these venues are well-matched with the skills, interests, and abilities of its program consumers.
- The vocational rehabilitation programs will continue to incorporate, to the maximum extent possible, career pathways and jobs with the potential to lead to career advancement within their services to individuals with disabilities through approaches to include increased emphasis and on reference to career pathways during comprehensive assessment of individuals' skills, interests, and aptitudes and during counseling and guidance sessions with individuals.
- Program leadership will promote to staff and service recipients the use of established resources highlighting information about career pathways and in-demand occupations; increase emphasis on established career pathways and career growth when developing employment goals and individualized plans for employment with services and training that directly support the employment objectives; remain actively engaged with workforce partners in the collaborative development of career pathways and identify particular issues or challenges individuals with disabilities may encounter when adopting a career within an established career pathway or enhancements that may be particularly favorable for the populations served by the state's vocational rehabilitation programs.
- Individually and collaboratively address the unique needs of current and prospective customers, including community college students, youth, individuals with barriers to employment, veterans, and other populations to help them succeed in education and careers.

Career pathways provide a consistent plan for individuals to use. Pathways are designed to allow individuals multiple entry and exit points as well as crediting students for earned credentials, prior learning, and established job skills.

**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 in the following ways:

- Continue the process of interfacing NCWorks Online with North Carolina's array of workforce development case management systems.
- There are several case management systems in North Carolina that are used by workforce development programs to track services provided to participants that could include tuition reimbursement amounts, referrals to other agencies, counseling notes, etc. These case management systems are required for data collection and federal reporting. Currently, there is no integration or interface between these systems, requiring extra work on the part of customers and staff. For example, as customers access the workforce system through different agencies, they are required to resubmit eligibility and/or demographic information, which is time consuming and redundant. During the past plan, initial exploration of methods addressing this limitation did occur, but the progress had been impeded because some of the partners were in the process of replacing their current case management systems. This is a lengthy process. Progress has been made and funding commitments toward this alignment in that the North Carolina SNAP Employment & Training Program (FNS E&T) has recently contracted with Geographic Solutions to build a module so their case management system (NC FAST) can actively communicate with NCWorks.gov. Additionally, in October 2019, Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation Services Programs (DVRS and DSB) has committed to funding through a contract with Geographic Solutions for developing their case management system. This has the potential of dramatically improving alignment of data systems, as Geographic Solutions is the current developer for the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) NCWorks.gov case management system for WIOA Title I & III.
- The Division of Information Technology (IT) department is currently in the process of partnering with other agencies to work on improved system integration.
- Develop an annual workforce development system report card with universal success metrics.
    - While each workforce development program typically has multiple performance measures, many of them mandated by the U.S. Departments of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor, universal success metrics give North Carolina customers a consistent look at the results of the workforce system. These results will be displayed via a report card and provide a common framework to measure our workforce system's progress across a wide variety of programs. This dashboard will be easy to access and understand, and will highlight the employment, wage, and training results for each workforce development program.
    - The NCWorks Commission has established a set of core performance measures for all workforce programs in the state and reports on these measures annually. Measures look at employment and educational enrollment status of former participants across programs.
- Create metrics based on consistently collected feedback from customers to strengthen the workforce development system.

- Historically, each workforce development agency has been responsible for measuring the overall satisfaction of its clients. Measuring this level of satisfaction is program specific and lacks consistency. An integrated workforce development system requires universal customer satisfaction metrics based on a consistent feedback loop. The analysis of the feedback will be used to strengthen North Carolina's workforce development system.
- NCWorks contracted with a research evaluation group to develop, distribute, and analyze customer feedback across the state. In addition, the biennial Employer Needs Survey conducted by the Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) collects workforce development system feedback from over 2,000 business establishments about their hiring practices, hiring difficulties and workforce needs.
- The workforce development system must be continuously responsive to its customers. The NCWorks Commission will continue 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.

- Pilot consumer reporting and partnerships that identify/promote industry-recognized credentials to better assess the employer demand and the outcomes of those with the credentials in the workforce.
  - The Community Colleges System and myFutureNC have worked with employers to identify credentials of value, in close partnership with the Department of Public Instruction, Department of Commerce, NCWorks Commission, the Governor's Office, and myFutureNC. Known in the state as "North Carolina Workforce Credentials," these are credentials that require more than a high school diploma and less than a postsecondary degree; are in demand in North Carolina; and lead to family sustaining wages. First, the team used Department of Commerce data on "Star Jobs" to identify high-demand, well-paying occupations. Then the interagency team identified industry credentials for these occupations. Finally, the interagency team held meetings with employers in key industry sectors to review possible credentials to validate those valued by the employers.
  - As industry-recognized credentials become more prevalent in the labor market, it is important for educational institutions to establish data-sharing relationships with certifying bodies and for state agencies that manage wage and occupation data to ensure their training programs are well aligned with industry and professional standards. There are challenges impacting the effectiveness of direct collaboration between these groups including legal issues and security of data. Educational institutions often do not have access to certification exam data, which limits their ability to know if students are leaving their programs well prepared to meet industry-specified competencies. The NC Community College System and other partners will continue to pursue data-sharing relationships.

- Finalize state performance measures for local workforce boards.

- As per the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) section 116 and NC General Statute 143B-438.10, the NCWorks Commission is responsible for developing performance accountability measures for Local Workforce Development Boards. The commission reviewed baseline information in the spring of 2016 and developed performance measures beginning in program year 2016. These measures will ensure

that local boards are fully implementing programs to meet the goals of the commission and WIOA.

- The NCWorks Commission developed these measures in consultation with the Local Workforce Development Boards Directors and chairs to complement the WIOA federal primary indicators of performance for adult and youth training and employment. Local Workforce Development Boards and the NCWorks Commission work together to collect performance data in three main areas: Outreach & Engagement, Skills Gap, and Process measures.
- These nine measures for local board performance reveal trends in outreach and engagement with individuals and businesses, training for adults and youth, and career center and career pathway certifications.

**NCWorks Commission Local Workforce Development Board Performance Measures**

**Outreach & Engagement**

1.Provide staff-assisted services to a percentage of the labor force that is equal to or larger than the annual unemployment rate for the Local Workforce Development Boards (WDB) Area.**

2.Provide a staff-assisted service to at least 5% of all private businesses in the counties served by the local WDB.

3.At least 10% of all private businesses receiving staff-assisted services will be new customers.

4.At least 25% of all private businesses receiving staff-assisted services will be small businesses (<100 employees).

**Skills Gap**

5.Provide training (classroom, on-the-job, and/or standardized training) services to at least 5% of adult participants.**

6.Enroll at least 25% of youth served in the WIOA Youth program in a work-based learning activity.

**Process**

7.Each WDB will engage in the creation of at least two NCWorks Certified Career Pathways. Evaluations will be tracked.

8.100% of the local WDBs' career centers will be NCWorks Commission certified career centers. Certifications will be tracked.

**Includes Adults, Dislocated Workers, and Title III participants

B. ALIGNMENT WITH ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE THE PLAN

The activities listed in the previous section, developed by the NCWorks Commission, were planned for the entire workforce development system under the Commission's strategic plan. The NCWorks Commission's strategic plan provides the framework for all workforce programs in North Carolina, including but not limited to the programs covered under WIOA. These programs, in addition to the core programs of the Unified State Plan, include Registered Apprenticeship (ApprenticeshipNC), career and technical education offered at both the K-12 and community college levels, programs offered by the NC Department of Health and Human Services, including Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)/Work First and SNAP/Food and Nutrition Services, and other programs offered by the NC Community College System, and the NC Department of Commerce.

The NCWorks Commission includes representatives from the business community, heads of state workforce agencies, educators, and community leaders who work together to align our core workforce programs and activities at the state-level. Efforts include extensive stakeholder work and annual programmatic reviews of program plans, policies, and services across agencies.

The programs under review include the American Indian Workforce Development Program administered by the NC Department of Administration; the Title I adult and youth programs, Wagner-Peyser, Trade Adjustment Assistance, and Veterans' Program, administered by the NC Department of Commerce; the Registered Apprenticeship Program, Bionetwork, NCEdge Customized Training, Small Business Center Network, Adult Education and Basic Skills, Occupational Continuing Education, and Postsecondary Career Technical and Vocational Education programs administered by the NC Community College System; the Career and Technical Education program administered by the NC Department of Public Instruction; and the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)/Work First, Snap/Food and Nutrition Services, Community Services Block Grant; Senior Community Service Employment, and the Vocational Rehabilitation and VR Services for the Blind programs administered by the NC Department of Health and Human Services.

These programs are evaluated regarding funding and service capacity, number of counties served, types of services provided, and target populations. In the most recent review, the Commission found that most programs offered some type of skill development and employment services for adults, but few programs served youth. Several programs provide similar services like resume development, career counseling, and skill development; however, while these activities seem duplicative with regard to the type of service provided, the programs serve very different target populations, and programs have specialized services for meeting the needs of their customers such as specialists trained to serve individuals with disabilities. The need to strengthen services to employers, quality customer service, the skills gap, business outreach, and services to youth identified in the evaluation are addressed throughout the WIOA Unified Plan. Additionally, in its most recent review, the commission found that most programs were employing a variety of virtual career services to ensure a continuity of services to North Carolinians during the pandemic.

The North Carolina Community College System and the local 58 community colleges work collaboratively with Local Workforce Development Boards on specific industry initiatives to raise the awareness of career opportunities, education, and training opportunities, as well as work-based learning opportunities in all communities across North Carolina. Activities such as manufacturing career awareness week, construction careers awareness day and the monthly career pathway webinars sponsored by CTE Perkins at the community colleges raise the awareness of emerging careers as well as in-demand job opportunities across the state. Career fairs and job fairs bring employers and students face to face to share opportunities, and in many cases current students are offered opportunities for work-based learning and are hired for jobs in their community. These activities are planned, coordinated, and carried out in cooperation with community college and high school career and technical education programs, with local chambers of commerce and workforce boards.

In addition to the career awareness, career planning, and education and training programs offered by high schools and colleges, Career and Technical Education Programs at community colleges work together with WIOA to offer opportunities for paid on-the-job training, supportive services such as Finish Line Grants, and shared career counseling. Emphasis on postsecondary credentials such as the accountability measure in Perkins V and the goal of Postsecondary credentials in myFutureNC provide the framework for future collaboration. In addition, there is a flow of information back and forth between CTE and Workforce Development Board/Commerce staff. The Comprehensive Local Needs Assessments conducted for Perkins have been used by some workforce development partners to understand needs in their areas. In

2021, NCCCS held meetings inviting all workforce development boards in the state to share challenges and opportunities in their areas, to be used by Perkins staff to better understand the workforce system and how to connect.

Strategic planning efforts related to workforce development, including those of the Education Cabinet, Community College System, the University of North Carolina Board of Governors, State Board of Education and myFutureNC are consistent with those of the Commission. Efforts to coordinate and align strategic plans, goals, and performance measures with the North Carolina Unified Plan are made through interagency workgroups and stakeholder participation.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs maintain working partnerships with non-profit organizations as providers of rehabilitation services. The community rehabilitation programs provide services through contracts and memoranda of agreement and have representation on a state-level steering committee. The VR programs also have cooperative agreements, policies, and procedures for coordination, referrals, information sharing, and the provision of support services with other programs such as through the NC Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services. The VR programs also partner with local education agencies to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services.

Another alignment strategy of the state is through data sharing agreements across workforce agencies and the expansion of the North Carolina Common Follow-up System (CFS), a longitudinal tracking system. Data agreements across agencies are being developed to enable electronic referrals, including programs outside the plan, such as between the TANF program and Vocational Rehabilitation. The CFS provides information on the educational and employment outcomes of participants in publicly supported educational, employment and training programs, including programs outside of the WIOA unified state plan, such as the University of North Carolina, adult correctional programs, and social services programs. The Labor and Economics Analysis Division of the NC Department of Commerce is currently working with the Government Data Analytics Center within the NC Department of Information Technology to improve access to the State's longitudinal data and provide flexibility and scalability, and advance data analysis capabilities associated with workforce and educational program operation and performance. Information from the CFS, including cross-program participation, is used in planning, policymaking, program evaluation, resource allocation and career planning.

## C. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS

As a system, NCWorks will pursue strategies to ensure job seekers have access to all services across programs. The NCWorks Commission continues the coordination and alignment of programs to create an integrated workforce system that allows all customers to access timely and relevant services.

The NCWorks Commission has established several key mechanisms to strengthen how programs are coordinated. Currently Titles I and III are integrated and there is a formalized referral process with programs offered through Title IV. To complete the coordination, Title II will be included in the formal mechanisms and or a standardized formal referral process will be developed to integrate Title II. The formal mechanisms listed below continue to be used to improve coordination between all WIOA programs, including Title II.

First, the WIOA State Steering Council was established in 2015 to bring together the senior leadership of each program covered under WIOA to review current activities, discuss solutions, and track implementation. This council will review progress on WIOA implementation and develop strategies for improvement and review state policies that may inhibit programs from fully aligning activities. The council will implement strategies for better alignment such as

creating a common intake form, exploring the possibility of an integrated case management system, and strengthening the referral process between programs. The council will provide feedback to the NCWorks Commission regarding challenges and barriers to completing the work, and suggestions for new policy.

Second, local, and regional teams will facilitate coordination, collaboration, and alignment at the local level. State-level coordination and alignment provides 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. These councils report to the WIOA State Steering Committee on best practices as well as barriers to success.

Third, in October 2019, North Carolina rolled-out the new NCWorks logo and brand to assist in creating a seamless workforce development system that is easily identifiable to all customers, with a priority of service to those jobseekers who are Veterans, recipients of public assistance, low-income individuals, and jobseekers who are basic skills deficient. Job seekers find value in North Carolina's workforce development system when the overwhelming complexity is minimized, and services streamlined. The common brand reduces confusion for those unfamiliar with the system by simplifying the message and increasing the efficiency of statewide outreach.

Fourth, NCWorks partners will continue to implement and expand its system-wide outreach strategy. A consistent outreach strategy allows for customization at the local level. A key activity to achieve this consistent outreach strategy is cross-training of staff. The NCWorks Training Center provides cross-training, so that staff have basic knowledge of all the workforce programs in the state.

Finally, the NCWorks Commission will review the implementation and effectiveness of WIOA, NCWorks Career Centers, and overall performance of the system. The Governance and System Alignment committee reports to the full commission on successes and challenges of the system and recommends key policy changes to the Governor, NC General Assembly, and other state and local leaders.

In addition to the strategies put in place by the NCWorks Commission, the three agencies responsible for implementation of WIOA have key activities in place to ensure a well-coordinated, customer-focused, and high-quality system is in place. For example, per federal requirements, during recent Title II grant application planning processes involving local Adult Education providers, NCCCS collaborated with the local workforce boards via the Workforce Development Directors Council, and the local workforce boards included the goals of Adult Education in their WIOA Annual Plans. Another example would be the Finish Line Grants, a collaboration between Department of Commerce, Local Workforce Development Boards, and the NC Community College System, initiated by the Governor's Office. These grants provide emergency supportive services to students in financial need, so they can complete their credentials or degree.

**NCWorks Career Center System**

NCWorks Career Center (one-stop) system has fully integrated services provided through Titles I and III. North Carolina's focus for this 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. The WIOA State Steering Council continues to work on developing key strategies for integrating services across all WIOA Titles, in addition to other workforce programs.

Below is a description of how integrated career centers operate, and plans for integrating the remaining WIOA programs:

To ensure a customer-focused career center system, the NC Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions implemented a state-wide, integrated services delivery approach to better serve the state's citizens and businesses by responding to customer needs. 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 Opportunity Act Title I (Adult and Dislocated Worker) programs and Title III (Wagner-Peyser Employment Services) are the operational backbone of NCWorks Career Centers.

Career centers deploy integrated staffing and use integrated technology to generate an integrated customer pool and customer flow. Staff are organized by function and are cross trained so that all center staff have the capacity to serve all customers and is knowledgeable about all services the center offers. In addition, staff use 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. When customers are interested in training and more individualized services, they are enrolled in both WIOA Title I Adult program and Wagner-Peyser program; and the goal is to enroll at least 75% of Trade Adjustment Act customers in WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker program. This model emphasizes cross-training of staff and strong partnership to serve customers better.

The NCWorks Commission is charged certifying one-stop Career Centers. They are responsible with setting new criteria and standards for quality customer service for the state-wide career center system. These criteria include elements to ensure high-quality customer service, integrated services delivery, accessibility, and consistent program offerings to ensure a consistent level of quality customer service throughout the state's workforce delivery system. During 2021, the NCWorks Commission started the 3-year recertification process of North Carolina's one-stop career centers. Given the important changes happening at career centers to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission requested a 1-year extension from the Department of Labor. This extension was granted in October 2021 allowing the NCWorks Commission to adjust the certification criteria to reflect the numerous virtual services offered by one-stop career centers. In December, NCWorks Commission staff surveyed 160 workforce professionals in the state as part of the career center recertification process. Through the survey the Commission learned about how career centers and workforce boards have successfully implemented virtual services since the onset of the pandemic and their feedback on ways to improve career center certification. The updated criteria will be available for review by the end of the first quarter of 2022.

In addition, many centers are co-located with community colleges or county social services and have vocational rehabilitation staff who work on-site. In addition, a strong partnership and referral process is in place for all workforce development programs offered by the state and local communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic and continuing until numbers subside, NCWorks Career Centers have incorporated practices in the workplace to help staff and customers feel more secure. These practices include offering virtual appointments, training sessions, and group meetings, requiring staff and encouraging customers to wear masks, and posting signage throughout Centers to encourage social distancing and sanitizing hands. Centers abide by strict cleaning protocols between customer visits. Many NCWorks Career Centers have installed plexiglass barriers at reception and utilize portable barriers for in-person meetings. Each Center maintains an inventory of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). In addition to the traditional in-person job fair, NCWorks Career Centers connected employers to job seekers by hosting drive-through and virtual job fairs. The pandemic required NCWorks Career Centers to consider innovative ways to serve customers.

**Plans for Integration of All WIOA Programs**

In addition to the integration of programs offered through Titles I and III through NCWorks Career Centers, there is also a strong relationship between career centers and the programs offered through Title II, Title IV, and other programs.

**Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act**

Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, providers must align their program plans to those of the Local Workforce Development Boards. To ensure services are aligned, Title II operates a competitive Request for Proposal process that includes local Boards to review and comment on the extent of a proposal's alignment to the local plan. In addition, Title II providers share in infrastructure costs based on propionate use by Title II students. Through MOUs Title II providers negotiate roles and responsibilities for integrated services.

The focus of Title II is providing academic preparation and workforce preparation skills and knowledge for credential attainment. Title II providers will collaborate with their local NCWorks Career Centers to ensure adults receive comprehensive services to support credential attainment and employment through the following strategies:

- Establish a Core Partner One-Stop committee to meet annually and report to NCWorks Commission on priority of services and clearly defined processes for seamless delivery of services.
- Establish a standard MOU process and timeline to include all core partners.
- Revise the MOU to include a clear process for outlining core partner delivery of Career Services, access to core partner services and referral.
- Title II providers will participate as a member of the Local Workforce Development Board and committees to plan integrated services, coordinate core partner responsibilities, and negotiate services and delivery systems provided at NCWorks Career Centers. Each Title II provider must enter into a Memorandum of Understanding outlining access to services and training vouchers for Title II students.
- Assist in the development and participate in cross-functional training about staff roles, responsibilities, and available resources.
- Establish processes to include Title II students in recruitment and job placement with employers.
- Develop and implement models such as Integrated Education and Training and Pre-apprenticeships linked to Registered Apprenticeships.
- Create common referral system to provide universal access to placement and training services and to integrate programs by offering a common core of information and services which will ensure seamless and more efficient service delivery and cross-agency collaboration.

**Vocational Rehabilitation Programs**

The Divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Services for the Blind have strong ties with other components of the statewide workforce development system. The partnerships and linkages that were established prior to the enactment of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 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 is assessed through the methodology outlined in the respective sections of the VR portions of the NC 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 Career Center staff to better determine which consumers with disabilities utilizing the centers should be referred to DVRS or DSB rather than being served through NCWorks. 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 Vocational Rehabilitation programs 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 VR programs remain 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 Title IV divisions have gained more access to comprehensive data, which enables faster service delivery and cross-agency collaboration. Nearly all Vocational Rehabilitation program offices have obtained access to these databases to date.

In every community where there are NCWorks Career Centers, local DVRS and DSB offices provide vocational rehabilitation counseling staff, vocational evaluators, community employment program 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 the VR programs. Specific arrangements and staffing patterns by vocational rehabilitation program staff at NCWorks Career Centers vary across the state, depending on local needs and agreements. One of the ongoing goals for the vocational rehabilitation and NCWorks system is to continue to refine the processes and procedures for NCWorks Career Center staff to better determine which consumers with disabilities utilizing the centers should be referred to DVRS or DSB rather than being served through NCWorks. It is necessary to determine which consumers served by the NCWorks system have a disability and to be able to make referrals electronically. Strategies to develop an electronic referral system will be further developed through mutual collaboration between DVRS, DSB and NCWorks. DVRS and DSB will also provide disability-related trainings for NCWorks Career Center staff and any employer who can benefit.

The number of individuals served or identified through components of the workforce development system is increasing. Local VR office 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.

Enhanced working relationships and communication with other key partners of the workforce development system such as the NC Division of Social Services, NC Community College System, regional economic development partners, and other local partnerships allow all the agencies to better meet the needs of the individual. Other efforts to provide comprehensive, high-quality, customer-centered services, including supportive services to individuals, will also be conducted through (a) cooperative agreements with agencies not carrying out activities under the statewide workforce development system for the purpose of information and resource sharing and referrals; (b) coordination with education agencies, such as the Department of Public Instruction, NC Community College System, University of North Carolina System, and local education agencies for the provision of training and transition services to youth with disabilities, including pre- employment transition services; (c) cooperative agreements and contracts with private nonprofit vocational rehabilitation service providers for the provision of rehabilitation training with short- and long-term supports; (d) arrangements and cooperative agreements for the provision of supported employment services with the NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services to ensure that individuals with the most significant disabilities have equal access to VR and best practice employment services; and (e) coordination with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities to facilitate VR services and the provision of transition services, including pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities.

The Unified Plan process provides for an opportunity to bring together Adult Education/Literacy and Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act Youth programming in new ways.

## D. COORDINATION, ALIGNMENT AND PROVISION OF SERVICES TO EMPLOYERS

North Carolina's workforce development system is committed to the provision of comprehensive, high-quality services to employers that help to meet the current and projected workforce needs and achieve the goals of industry and sector partners throughout the state. The three agencies with administrative responsibility for the WIOA core programs work together via local, regional, and state-level teams and initiatives focused on meeting the needs of businesses and industry in North Carolina. An interagency NCWorks team facilitates the integration of employer services through several coordinated efforts including: the development of comprehensive employer service informational brochures and literature that are dissemination for use across all WIOA programs; working with a vendor to implement a new integrated customer relationship management tool, and establishing area business services teams to ensure coordination among Local Workforce Development Boards and other partners including community colleges, public schools and vocational rehabilitation. 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.

North Carolina's employer service efforts are focused around the three key Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act concepts of (1) regionalism as an approach to engage businesses, (2) creating collaborative partnerships with economic development/education to provide solutions, (3) developing sector strategies to build talent pipelines, and 4) supporting the pursuit of "recognized postsecondary credentials" and the aim of credential attainment via the training offered to WIOA participants.

Through collaborative efforts, North Carolina's Local Workforce Areas are pursuing a regional approach, and establishing a framework to enhance business engagement with the Workforce System. The framework provides a foundation to support the work of local teams which will work to ensure consistent delivery of services to businesses across the state and to create a comprehensive approach for forging collaborative partnerships with key stakeholders. Local teams will be comprised of business services staff from workforce programs in the area including WIOA core programs as well as other workforce development partner programs. These efforts will focus on business engagement and outreach, developing comprehensive solutions (across programs when applicable), and satisfying the workforce talent needs of businesses and industry sector partners.

The following overarching goals are essential to these efforts:

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

In addition to these efforts, North Carolina has several other key strategies that help to engage employers, assist with their workforce needs and contribute to broader economic development activities. Local teams will use the strategies below alone or in combination when working with businesses. Below is a summary of the state's employer services strategies and activities.

**NCWorks Career Centers**

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, North Carolina's web-based job matching system, provides the mechanism 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 to employers.

**NC Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions On-the-Job Training**

The North Carolina Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions provides the resources and guidance to the 23 Local Workforce Development Boards to implement successful work-based learning and on-the-job training (OJT), which 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 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.

OJT is a viable and compatible part of North Carolina's Integrated Services Delivery services. Local Workforce Development Boards 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.

**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 onetime 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;
- A Veteran who is a member of a family that received SNAP benefits (food stamps) for at least a 3-month period during the 15-month period ending on the hiring.
- A Veteran who has been unemployed for: At least 4 weeks in the year ending on the hiring date.
- A disabled Veteran entitled to compensation for a service-connected disability, who has been:
    - Hired within 1 year of discharge or release from active duty, OR
    - Unemployed for at least 6 months in the year ending on the hiring date.

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

**North Carolina Community Colleges Services to Employers**

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 provides a diverse set of education and training programs as well as an array of services to the state's business and industries. The system is nationally known for its educational and training programs including the nation's first and most robust NCEdge Customized Training program.

The NCCCS is known for its comprehensive and diverse program offerings. These include the administration and provision of High School Equivalency exams and adult education. The NCCCS also has administrative responsibility for the WIOA Title II Adult Education and Literacy programs and many of the local community colleges are the main training partners of WIOA Title II programs. Additionally, NCCCS Basic Skills Plus, a tuition waiver program supports adult education students enrolled in career pathways leading to a high demand industry credential.

North Carolina's Community Colleges also play a major role as a network of Eligible Training Providers, with all colleges sponsoring job training or curriculum programs which are approved for WIOA customers. In addition, there are 14 certified comprehensive NCWorks Career Centers that are located on a community college campus, and additional community college locations are used as outposts to comprehensive centers located off-site. These efforts as well as additional linkages between community colleges and NCWorks Career Centers make program collaboration and cross-referral easier.

The North Carolina Community College System has a long-standing history of serving employers through a variety of efforts. These include North Carolina's registered Apprenticeship program-ApprenticeshipNC, Business Advisory Committees, Sector Strategies, Customized Training (now known as NCEdge) and Small Business Centers. The Community College System has also for many years offered work-based learning opportunities for academic credit, including clinicals for nursing students and Work-based Learning coursework in a variety of occupations and industries that pair students with employers to learn to apply what they are learning in the classroom at a workplace. More recently, the Community Colleges System and myFutureNC have worked with employers to identify credentials of value, in close partnership with the Department of Public Instruction, Department of Commerce, NCWorks Commission, and the Governor's Office.

The North Carolina Community College System's 2018-2022 strategic plan, *Putting Education to Work*, has a major emphasis on employer services through its goal of "Economic and Workforce Impact," and the goal seeks to meet employer needs through a collaborative approach including other workforce partners. The Community College System has begun work to develop its next strategic plan (2022-2026). While specific goals have not yet been set, it is certain that there will be a goal focused on workforce development and economic recovery/growth. Education, training, apprenticeship/ credentialing, and other services to employers will remain a priority under the new plan. Workforce development partners are included in the development of the Community College System's strategic plan.

**Registered Apprenticeship**

North Carolina's registered apprenticeship program ApprenticeshipNC is administered by the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS). Participating employers work with ApprenticeshipNC to create a written agreement that specifies the length of a participant's training, the related technical instruction, and outline of the skills that each participant will need to learn as well as the wages that he or she will earn. Through participation in the ApprenticeshipNC 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; credentials that are recognized both in North Carolina and nationwide; and;
- valuable assets in the recruitment and retention of a highly qualified workforce.

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

North Carolina's ApprenticeshipNC program encompasses registered apprenticeship programs as well as Pre-Apprenticeships and Youth Apprenticeships in its broader portfolio for work-based learning opportunities. Pre-apprenticeships 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.

Registered Apprenticeships, youth apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships involve a great deal of coordination with employers and among workforce development partners, including North Carolina Community College apprenticeship consultants; public schools, and other education providers; and Local Workforce Development Boards as promoters of registered apprenticeship strategies as a part of their overall portfolio of business services.

Key coordination strategies between WIOA core partners and ApprenticeshipNC include upgraded training of existing employees, On-the-Job Training Services, in-school and out of school-youth apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships. Training sessions will also include sharing information on employers that are searching for new employees to develop Pre-Apprenticeships. The Pre-Apprenticeships will provide pre-employment skills for employers to interview for Youth Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeships. WIOA will also pre-screen the pre-apprentices and depending upon eligibility will co-enroll those that are hired by the employer. This will also be an opportunity for braided funding of WIOA and Registered Apprenticeships.

Additional coordinated employer efforts include coordination of WIOA core partners, economic development and ApprenticeshipNC to provide services to several of the state's high demand industries: Advanced Manufacturing, Healthcare, Logistics/Transportation, Energy, Construction, IT and Hospitality. A DOL/OA grant award for expanding registered apprenticeship could assist in this coordination.

**Business Advisory Committees**

The North Carolina Community College System requires business advisory committees per the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (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.

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 Division 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.

**Sector Strategies**

North Carolina has a long history in sector strategies using WIA/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), and many others. 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.

**NCEdge Customized Training**

One of North Carolina's key workforce tools for economic development is the NCEdge Customized Training program offered through the NC Community College System. These state-funded community college training offerings are tailored to the needs of employers that are looking to expand, relocate or make new investments in North Carolina.

The NCCCS NCEdge Customized Training offerings are interwoven into several of the Local Workforce Development Boards and NCWorks career center services. In addition, there are continuing efforts to enhance the connection between NCEdge Customized Training and other community college education and training services for employers with Local Workforce Development Board services and activities. In 2021, Customized Training was rebranded under the name, NCEdge (ncedge.org).

**Small Business Centers**

Every community college in North Carolina has a Small Business Center that provides education, training, and counseling for prospective business owners. These services include training seminars and workshops focused on a variety of topics including: Starting a Business, Writing a Business Plan, Financing, Advertising, Bookkeeping and Marketing. Small Business centers also work with local businesses to develop other workshops and trainings that help to meet their specific needs. In addition, to workshop and training offerings, SBC's provide a variety of counseling and informational resources to clients. Counseling services cover a diverse group of topics including licensing issues, business plans, business feasibility, marketing and advertising, loans and sources of financing and doing business with the government. SBC's also provide other informational, technical and referral resources. These include access to and use of computers, books and other media as well as the provision of information about businesses and industries and referrals to other governmental and business resources.

**NC Workforce Credentials (Credentials of Value)**

The Community Colleges System and myFutureNC have worked with employers to identify credentials of value, in close partnership with the Department of Public Instruction, Department of Commerce, NCWorks Commission, and the Governor's Office. Known in the state as "North Carolina Workforce Credentials," these are credentials that require more than a high school diploma and less than a postsecondary degree; are in demand in North Carolina; and lead to family sustaining wages. To determine these credentials, the interagency team started with Department of Commerce data on "Star Jobs" to identify high-demand, well-paying occupations. Then the team identified industry credentials for these occupations. Finally, the interagency team held meetings with employers in key industry sectors to review possible credentials and validate those highly regarded by the employers. An initial list of validated credentials has been established, and the North Carolina Workforce Credentials Advisory Council was created to sustain the effort and continue to work with interagency partners to identify additional sectors and respond to the evolving needs of employers over time.

**Vocational Rehabilitation Programs Services to Employers**

The Divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) and Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) currently utilize a dual customer approach by providing services to both businesses and individuals with disabilities. These divisions emphasize 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, follow-up, and job retention services.

DVRS and DSB continue to market business services by employing between the 77 community employment program specialists that serve business communities statewide. These individuals often have education and experience in a business-related field, such as human resources and marketing, so these divisions are equipped with personnel who understand the needs of employers. In addition to providing individualized job seeker services, the community employment program specialists connect with local industry through participation in networking events and working relationships with workforce system partners.

The performance of these community employment program specialists are measured, in part, by assessing relationships with business as evidenced by direct and indirect placements of eligible jobseekers with disabilities. Additionally, as of July 2019 the tracking of measurable skill gains achieved by consumers served by the community employment program specialists. DVRS and DSB VR programs believe 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 and DSB VR program services to adults intersect 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. VR program staff continue to be trained in the dual customer approach and employment outcomes to identify these intersection points between the VR services provided to jobseekers and those services provided to employers. The unique role of the community employment program specialist 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 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.

The VR programs plan to continue 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. DVRS and DSB plans to identify methods for capturing information on employment relationships within its shared 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 to students with disabilities. A number of areas of program development are focused on increased engagement with employers in order to implement pre-employment transition services. 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.

The Vocational Rehabilitation programs of DVRS and DSB plan 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. The VR programs plan 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 and DSB's VR programs will work on enhancing OJT utilization for students and youth with disabilities as well by engaging business in the development of young talent. The programs continue to streamline its 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.

The Vocational Rehabilitation programs 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' VR program 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's VR program 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 Program 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 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.

**Other Collaborative Employer Services**

In addition to the employer services administered by the WIOA partner programs, the North Carolina Business Committee for Education (NCBCE) is a business-led education non-profit that operates out of the Office of the Governor. NCBCE provides a critical link between North Carolina business leaders and the state's education and workforce decision makers helping to create connections between education and the overall work readiness of citizens across the state. NCBCE partners with statewide education and workforce partners to implement projects that help facilitate the critical link between curriculum content and workforce talent needs. Partners from North Carolina's State Workforce Board and WIOA administrative entities are collaborative partners involved with several of the NCBCE initiatives. These include enhancing career awareness and skill preparation through expanded work-based learning initiatives. NCBCE in collaboration with several partners has launched the "Navigator", which is an online tool designed to connect classroom learning to career learning. Through the Navigator platform employers post work-based learning opportunities including job shadowing, internships and apprenticeships and educators can search for, request, and track these work-based learning resources through an open market environment.

Through its existing collaborations, program offerings, tools, and continued innovation, North Carolina's Workforce System is committed to the provision of effective employer services, best practices and guidance that encourages and enhances the adoption and implementation 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 116 local public-school districts. Fourteen certified career centers are located on community college campuses. 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 initial NCWorks 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.

Partnership Engagement with education and training providers is written throughout the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act. Postsecondary Perkins provides infrastructure funding for career centers. Some NCWorks Career Centers place career counselors and case managers at community colleges (including for Governor Cooper's Finish Line Grants program). In addition to the career awareness, career planning, and education and training programs offered by high schools and colleges, Career and Technical Education programs at community colleges work together with WIOA to offer opportunities for paid on-the-job training, supportive services such as finish line grants, and shared career counseling. Emphasis on postsecondary credentials, such as one of the accountability measures in Perkins V and the goal of postsecondary credentials in myFutureNC provide the framework for future collaboration

There is community college and Adult Education (Title II) representation on all 23 Local 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. One key example of this partnership is the state's career pathways initiative (see earlier section on career pathways).

The NCWorks Career Center community college partnerships and the community college representation on the Local Workforce Development Boards facilitate alignment of career and technical education and local workforce needs as the comprehensive responsibility of the North Carolina Community College System includes postsecondary occupational (career and technical education) training. The North Carolina Community College System Office partners with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in managing funding provided under the Carl D. Perkins Career Technical Education Act, with the North Carolina Community Colleges implementing the postsecondary career and technical education programming and activities.

**Career Pathways**

As referenced earlier, the NCWorks Certified Career Pathways are a key element of Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready workforce development initiative to ensure North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow. The state now has 40 NCWorks Certified Career Pathways across the state and published an "impact report" that focused on the thirteen that had reached one year of implementation by June 30, 2018.

Career Pathways are designed not only for younger students, but also for adults who are looking to advance their careers. Individuals can access a Career Pathway through NCWorks Career Centers, public schools, community colleges, and public and private universities.

They outline and define the following:

- Necessary courses at the high school and college level;
- Required credentials;
- Experience required and the employers in a given area who provide work-based learning activities related to that field; and
- Various certificates and degrees in the related field.

According to the impact report, NCWorks Certified Career Pathways have had a positive impact on the state since their inception, by easing the financial burden of education and training for career seekers; upskilling career seekers, making them attractive candidates for gainful employment; facilitating regional support, capacity building and collaboration for workforce partners; and causing a "domino effect" and inspiring other successes outside of their initial scope. The NCWorks Commission continues to support the Career Pathways work across the state.

**Vocational Rehabilitation Programs**

The Department of Health and Human Services Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) programs work with NC Community College System in that DVRS has a strong vendor relationship to sponsor training and enable individuals with disabilities to participate in continuing education, diploma, and degree programs. To achieve this, the VR programs maintain relationships with disability support services coordinators at local colleges to assist persons with disabilities in accessing their education and obtaining academic supports. The VR programs also partner with local colleges in the planning, recruitment, and provision of career readiness programs that target individuals who require basic skills training. In some programs,

VR contributes financially to a student with a disability's participation in the work-based learning elements of their program.

Additionally, DVRS and colleges within the NCCCS are two of the partner organizations that comprise Project SEARCH™ teams in NC. Project SEARCH™ is a collaborative model serving individuals with the most significant intellectual or developmental disabilities, in which students participate in a series of three internships at the host business as well as job-focused academic skills training to prepare them for integrated, competitive employment in their community. Currently, there are two Project SEARCH™ sites with community college partnerships with the expectation that more will be developed.

The DHHS VR Programs will continue to develop their partnerships with the NCCCS and its colleges through exploring opportunities to combine resources in support of work-based learning opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The VR programs will continue to collaborate on job-driven training programs that will meet the needs of partnering business and industry and assist individuals with disabilities with obtaining credentials, including through the development of training programs at North Carolina's state operated VR facilities WorkSourceEast and WorkSourceWest.

F. PARTNER ENGAGEMENT WITH OTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PROVIDERS

**Partner Engagement with Other Education and Training Providers**

Governor Cooper is working to make North Carolina a Top Ten Educated State by 2025. A key priority of Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready initiative is skills and education attainment. As the skill requirements of jobs are increasing and rapidly changing, businesses need to find people with the right skills for the jobs they create, and North Carolinians need access to training so they can be ready for those jobs. This involves the fostering of partnerships between businesses, educators, and state and local workforce development agencies. NC community colleges offer much of the postsecondary education and training in the state and considered by some as the provider of choice for WIOA. Other education and training partners are also available and (along with community colleges) are identified through the state's Eligible Training Provider List.

The NCWorks Online system allows the individual providers the ability to login and apply to be on the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) to receive referrals of Title I eligible customers. Once they have completed their application, the DWS ETP Coordinator or ETP staff 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 the DWS ETP Coordinator or ETP staff. 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 based on their approval process. With the two-year review process, they will have to be approved again based on current standards by the ETP Coordinator and ETP staff.

The following types of training providers are subject to the ETPL requirements in order to receive WIOA Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker funds to provide training services to eligible adult and dislocated worker individuals:

· Institutions of higher education that provide a program of training that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential;

· Registered Apprenticeship programs registered by the ApprenticeshipNC, which is the state approving agency for North Carolina and is recognized by USDOL Office of Registered Apprenticeship as the approving agency;

· Public or private training providers, including joint labor-management organizations, pre-apprenticeship programs, and occupational/technical training; and

· Providers of adult education and literacy activities provided in combination with occupational skills training.

The local workforce boards may establish additional criteria for program eligibility and performance within a local area through local policy. This may include setting minimum required levels of performance as criteria for training providers to become or remain eligible to provide services in that local area. Training providers should be aware that their programs may be approved by some local areas and not by others based on local criteria and the difference in training and employment needs in the various geographical areas across the State.

In addition to collaboration with NCCCS, and sponsorship of postsecondary training at various educational institutions, the VR 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. These are described in the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services portion of the Unified Plan under section (d) Coordination with Education Officials.

With regard to the WIOA Title IV program, the NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services modified its state level memorandum of agreement with the Department of Public Instruction in 2018 to outline a collaborative partnership between the two agencies and provide state-level approval and support to expand transition services for students with disabilities, including Pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities that are potentially eligible for VR services. At the local-level VR offices and local education agencies will also continue third-party cooperative agreements that outline how the agencies will partner in the provision of services to students with disabilities, with regard to funding contributions, procedures for information sharing, and referral processes. Currently, the local third-party cooperative agreements are statewide with 96% of all LEAs in North Carolina contributing funding towards 202 positions for VR professional and support staff.

DVRS' and DSB's Vocational Rehabilitation programs will maintain and strengthen their programmatic relationships with school transition services through its continued active participation on the State Capacity Building Team for Transition. This workgroup led by the Department of Public Instruction, also includes the University Center for Development and Learning, Parent/Child Advocacy Agency, Career and Technical Education, and NC Community Colleges System. The Team was established to develop statewide goals and better coordinate transition activities for students with disabilities, enabling this population to achieve post-school outcomes, including employment and 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 consistent with a student's post-school goals.

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.

The VR program administered by the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) also operates under a formal cooperative agreement with DPI, specific to students of transition age who are blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired being served by local education agencies and the schools and require VR services in order to become employed. DSB shares information about the transition program and provides technical assistance and consultation to DPI, LEAs, and schools regarding accommodations and assistive technology that will help facilitate the education and VR of students who are blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired. DSB also has third-party cooperative agreements with twelve LEAs and one regional school that stipulate cost sharing and agency roles and responsibilities.

Additionally, both VR programs, DVRS and DSB, sponsor training from various providers under an individualized plan for employment. This may include postsecondary academic training from a public or private college or university; vocational training from business schools, trade schools, and vocational training programs at the community college level or technical institute level. Sponsorship of such services and supportive services is subject to financial need and provided as appropriate for the client's individualized plan for employment within policy guidelines that include rate schedules. Established standards for training providers, including colleges and universities, proprietary schools, barber and cosmetology schools, commercial driver training schools and other training programs, are stipulated in VR program policy.

## G. LEVERAGING RESOURCES TO INCREASE EDUCATIONAL ACCESS

**Leveraging Resources to Increase Educational Access**

North Carolina is making access to education a priority. A key priority of Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready initiative is skills and education attainment, and Governor Cooper has laid out the goal to make North Carolina a Top Ten Educated State by 2025 by increasing the number of four-year-olds enrolled in high quality pre-K, raising the high school graduation rate, and increasing the number of North Carolinians with a post-secondary degree or credential. An educated North Carolina is a job-ready North Carolina. In addition, NCWorks Certified Career Pathways continue to be key tools for increased educational access for citizens and collaboration among workforce partners.

In response to the need for developing a workforce with increased skills and educational attainment, Governor Cooper implemented the Finish Line Grants program, which helps community college students who face unforeseen financial emergencies complete their training. The program will use up to $7 million in WIOA federal funds to help students pay for course materials, housing, medical needs, car repairs, dependent care, or other financial emergencies that students may face through no fault of their own. To date, over 7,300 Finish Line Grants have been awarded to more than 4,800 individuals in North Carolina.

Governor Cooper has been instrumental in the formation of the myFutureNC goal, and the statewide nonprofit organization focused on educational attainment. As North Carolina's economy grows, most new jobs require education beyond a high school diploma—but fewer than half of North Carolinians ages 25-44 have a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential. The mission for myFutureNC is to completely close the educational attainment gap in North Carolina by helping 2 million North Carolinians ages 25-44 achieve high-quality postsecondary attainment by 2030. This goal will help address the needs of employers, equip local communities to take action, and open up new opportunities for North Carolinians.

Other Leveraged Resources to Increase Educational Access

Adding to WIOA funding, 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.
- Pandemic recovery-funded scholarships (time-limited)
    - GEER Scholarships – award up to $750 or the total cost for certain Workforce Continuing Education programs that lead to an industry-recognized credential

    - Longleaf Commitment – scholarships for recent North Carolina high school graduates to attend a NC community college with no tuition costs

- 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 NC Community Colleges Foundation, State Board of Community Colleges, or 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 related to a variety of postsecondary education initiative and career pathways in North Carolina.
- At the local level, county commissions approve and provide much of the funding for community college buildings, including specialized workforce development centers.

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 Work-Based Learning, which is supporting educational goal-setting and collaborative workforce development. North Carolina has recently been selected by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) for grant funding from the Workforce Innovation Fund and to join the Workforce Innovation Network. This grant will help North Carolina advance digital skill development for equitable economic participation in alignment with state workforce and economic development goals. In addition, North Carolina is also part of the Credentials of Value Institute. The Education Strategy Group (ESG), with generous support from the Lumina Foundation, launched the Credentials of Value Institute in the fall of 2019. North Carolina has continued this work through the creation of the NC Workforce Credential Advisory Council, which is a partnership between the Department of Public Instruction, NC Community Colleges, and the North Carolina Department of Commerce to identify and prioritize non-degree credentials that put learners on a pathway to sustaining wage jobs and support the state's postsecondary attainment goal, ensuring that by 2030, two million North Carolinians (between the ages of 25 and 44) have a high-quality credential or postsecondary degree. The NC Workforce Credential Advisory Council comprises 21 members representing employers, state agencies, and educators from across the state. Beginning in 2022, this Council will:

- endorse priority non-degree credentials—such as certifications, licenses, and apprenticeships— identified through labor market analysis and employer engagement;
- support outreach and engagement strategies to promote these credentials; and
- help develop policy recommendations that will incentivize alignment toward priority credentials in our state.

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 childcare 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, childcare assistance and/or occasionally direct educational assistance.

North Carolina is investigating ways to increase the number of SNAP Employment and Training programs across the state and finding linkages to the community college system to help get more food stamp recipients into education and training programs.

NC Community College System Office has researched barriers to access, including but not limited to education costs, wrap-around costs (transportation, credentialing, childcare, etc.) and nonfinancial 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 WIOA programs is connected with community college financial aid resources.

Vocational Rehabilitation Programs

The DVRS and DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Programs plan to maintain and strengthen their 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, DVRS, 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 focusing 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, DVRS and DSB VR programs plan 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 pre-employment transition 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 vocational rehabilitation services to students with disabilities to highlight pre-employment transition services 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 pre-employment transition services 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, DVRS 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 pre-employment transition 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 cooperative agreement . 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.

## H. IMPROVING ACCESS TO POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIALS

Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready initiative emphasizes the importance of postsecondary credentials. As referenced earlier regarding myFutureNC, Governor Cooper, other government leaders, business and education leaders have all agreed upon a postsecondary education goal, with resolutions of support by all major workforce and education governance and other policy

boards in the state (including the NCWorks Commission). North Carolina will focus efforts by all education and workforce programs to help working adults gain post-secondary credentials either through the state's higher education system or through other strategies such as Registered Apprenticeship and third-party industry credentials.

**Registered Apprenticeship**

North Carolina is also working to grow its Registered Apprenticeship program and make stronger connections with local workforce boards, career centers, and other workforce programs across the state.

NCWorks Career Center staff and ApprenticeshipNC staff are actively working to educate and inform businesses about Registered Apprenticeship as a great way to develop and sustain a talent pipeline to meet their workforce needs. In addition to staff reaching out to businesses, the program also uses businesses with a registered apprenticeship program to talk to other businesses. This peer-to-peer communication has seen success across the state.

NCWorks Career Center staff and ApprenticeshipNC staff are also working to expand the number of public-private partnerships in North Carolina. This model brings together several companies that require similar skills in their workforce and sets up a pre-apprenticeship that leads to a registered apprenticeship program and youth apprenticeships for the group of companies. The state has seen great success with this model and is actively working to expand it.

**NC Community College System Areas of Focus**

The North Carolina Community College System's 2018-22 strategic plan sets the following goals:

1. Student Interest and Access
2. Clear and Supported Pathways for Student Progress and Success
3. Economic and Workforce Impact
4. System Effectiveness

Under the "Student Interest and Access" goal are the following objectives:

5. Collaborate with stakeholders to promote a workforce system that fosters innovation and establishes seamless connections among community colleges, K-12 education, universities, workforce and economic development partners, and business and industry.
6. Offer relevant, high-quality instructional programs that meet the needs of business and industry for existing and future jobs.
7. Increase student access to work experience [broadly defined, including apprenticeships].

Other sections of the plan address training to fill skill gaps; reducing access barriers for underserved populations; increasing completion of credentials; and career pathways. Examples of specific strategies that tie in with NCCCS roles in the workforce system:

- Simplify and streamline processes from entry through completion/transfer, effectively incorporating multiple on and off ramps. (This includes alignment with workforce development/Career Centers, which help provide important on-ramps into education/training.)
- Refine foundational and developmental education strategies to accelerate student readiness for college-level instruction. (This includes Adult Education/Literacy strategies.)

- Partner with high schools, universities, and workforce development entities and engage with employers and industry associations at the regional/local levels to identify workforce needs and establish education and training programs collaboratively and comprehensively.

In February 2021, the State Board of Community Colleges made some changes in objectives and strategies, in large part to address the pandemic and (following George Floyd's death) put a greater focus on equity. Examples included enhanced language or new objectives regarding…

- Improving online learning
- Reduce opportunity gaps and addressing the needs of students of color
- Addressing via training the worker pipeline of emergency workers (including de-escalation training for law enforcement officers)

As of the submission of this WIOA Unified State Plan, the NC Community College System is midway through the development of its next strategic plan. Possible pillars for the next plan include:

- First choice for an accessible and affordable education in North Carolina
- National leader in diversity and inclusion
- Leading North Carolina's economic recovery and sustained growth
- Ensuring System effectiveness

A number of workforce development stakeholders will be engaged in the planning process, and it is anticipated that the State Board of Community Colleges will adopt its new strategic plan in June 2022.

**Vocational Rehabilitation Areas of Focus**

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.

## I. COORDINATING WITH ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

**Coordinating with Economic Development Strategies.**

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 WorkReady Communities to efforts in western NC to close the "interest gap" and change perceptions of manufacturing jobs.

North Carolina's key workforce development strategies are well aligned with economic development activities in North Carolina. When the NCWorks Commission was developing its strategic plan, it pulled key strategies from the state 10-year economic development plan, the

Jobs Plan, to include in the commission plan to ensure alignment between economic and workforce development. The state economic development plan is a rolling four-year plan. A new plan was released July 2021 and has a large emphasis on workforce and workplace (employers). This work has resulted in a workforce development plan that is in alignment with the state's economic development plan. The information below details more specific ways the state's strategies connect with economic development.

Key strategies identified by the NCWorks Commission in its strategic plan are aligned with NC's economic development strategies will help North Carolina current and future businesses be successful. These key statewide strategies are described below:

- Increase career awareness.
- Advocate for increased educational attainment.
- Promote access to job training for high-demand and high-growth fields that pay a living wage.
- Increase access to education for those that have barriers.
- Create a workforce development system that is value driven for employers, aligns education with industry demands, prepares North Carolinians for the future, and drives economic development.
- Increase the number of employers participating in work-based learning experiences and apprenticeships while also establishing employer champions; and engage employers in education efforts from early childhood through kindergarten to grade 12, postsecondary, and beyond.
- Enhance programs to enable employers to provide training for new and existing employees.
- Prioritize and acknowledge industry-led partnerships.
- Leverage employer data on workforce projections and training needs using tools and measures for business engagement.
- Advance leadership development opportunities to workforce professionals
- Support initiatives to innovate and replicate good ideas.
- Promote local COVID-19 workforce recovery initiatives leveraging technology to reimagine the talent pipeline.
- Strengthen and support system integration and inclusive practices through continuous coordination, communication, and data sharing among the key components of North Carolina's workforce system: the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, North Carolina Community College System, University of North Carolina System, North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, the 23 Local Workforce Development Boards, the North Carolina Departments of Commerce and Health and Human Services and the many community-based organizations in our state.
- Support increased awareness, communication, accessibility, and understanding of the "NCWorks" brand through building a broad brand awareness aimed at attracting a large and diverse customer base, promoting a unity of effort to increase accessibility and user-friendly navigability.
- Research advanced technology for marketing to adapt to new generations entering the workforce by staying abreast of the rapidly changing demands and needs of businesses

and job seekers to ensure that our workforce system remains nimble, adaptive, and fully utilized.

- Measure and report on the effectiveness of the workforce development system including the usage and quality of services by collecting, understanding, tracking, and sharing data effectively to maintain a responsive and successful workforce development system, while evaluating the current system to identify any changes to maximize outcomes for local communities and the state of North Carolina.

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 pre-apprenticeships, youth apprenticeships and registered 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.

In addition, North Carolina has eight regions across the state that are used to coordinate activities, especially in economic and workforce development. These regions, called Prosperity Zones, aligns key economic, workforce, and education activities. Each major workforce and economic development program including WIOA programs, economic development, community colleges, and public schools has a regional representative in each zone. These regional staff meet together on a regular basis to discuss current economic and workforce development issues.

## B. STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS AND POLICIES

North Carolina has several policies in place to support the implementation of the State's strategies including integrated service delivery, career center and career pathways certification through the NCWorks Commission, a statewide goal for educational attainment, and performance measures for Local Workforce Development Boards. In addition, North Carolina will continue to review and evaluate statewide policies to support implementation of the state's strategies.

The Division of Workforce Solutions implemented an integrated service delivery model for the programs in Titles I and III. The division maintains memoranda of understanding (MOU) with each Local Workforce Development Board on this delivery model. This MOU includes key policies around integrated teams, use of one case management system, and co-enrollment in Title I and III programs. This delivery model ensures an aligned, customer focused system in all 83 NCWorks Career Centers (NC's one-stop system).

North Carolina One-Stop Partner Programs Contributions:

A key component of the Cost Sharing Line Of Effort (LOE), was the convening of a negotiating team representing all of North Carolina's 23 Workforce Development Boards and the required One-Stop partners. This process streamlined negotiations and made it convenient for all parties involved. As a result of the consensus reached by all the required partners, infrastructure costs in North Carolina are funded through the Local Funding Mechanism (LFM). Negotiations focused on seeking contributions from each agency/program equal to the program caps outlined in the State Funding Mechanism (SFM). The caps for each program were 1.5% of the

defined eligible budget except for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) which was 0.75% per the graduated cap outlined in TEGL 17-16. VR's contribution should increase in subsequent years by 0.25% until reaching 1.5%. Should the partner agencies fail to agree on the terms of implementing the IFA, the matter will be referred to the Governor. As part of the Cost Sharing LOE, the partners drafted a memorandum of understanding (MOU) template to be used by each Local Workforce Development Board. The completed signed partner agreements were submitted to the State. Cost sharing summaries were issued and PY2017 partner contributions (six months) were collected in November of 2017. Starting with PY2018 contributions, a new memorandum of understanding with infrastructure cost agreement addendums was submitted by the 23 Workforce Development Boards on or before July 1, 2018, and each subsequent Program Year since.

The North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions issued an operational guidance notice that outlines the infrastructure cost sharing information and includes a required template for the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the Infrastructure Cost Agreement addendum. Policy was initially issued in May 2018 and was most recently updated by Operational Guidance 23-2021 Date: August 20, 2021.

The NCWorks Commission, as mandated by the US Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, has approval authority over major statewide WIOA policy. The Commission transmits Commission Policy Statements on items that are subject to monitoring and audits by the Division of Workforce Solutions. The policy statements are issued by the Commission Chair and are posted by the DWS Planning and Policy Development Unit. The Division of Workforce Solutions issues operational and programmatic guidance to support workforce systems administration and implementation. Operational Guidance Notices communicate directives and provides instruction for the 23 local Workforce Development Boards and other agencies administering workforce programs. The Operational Guidance Notices carry the full authority of the Commission Policies and are issued through the DWS Assistant Secretary. The notices are also posted by the DWS Planning and Policy Development Unit.

All North Carolina workforce policies and guidance notices are well vetted by subject matter experts, including DWS leadership, and support the State's workforce program implementation and coordination with core one-stop center partners including WIOA Title I - Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth; Adult Education and Literacy Act – Community College programs; Wagner-Peyser employment services; and Rehabilitation Act Title I - Vocational Rehabilitation programs, as well as other required one-stop partners. Commission Policy Statements and Operational Guidance Notices are posted on the NC Commerce website at: https://www.nccommerce.com/jobs-training/workforce-professionals-tools-resources/workforce-policies. Issuing policy and guidance is paramount in communicating specific workforce strategies and deadlines that lead to successful workforce program initialization and execution that ultimately lead to success for both job seekers and employers.

The NCWorks Commission also has several policies that support the implementation of the state's strategies. The commission established criteria for NCWorks Career Centers to ensure they are high quality, customer-focused centers that meet the needs of job seekers and employers. Local Workforce Development Boards must apply to the commission for certification and all centers in their area must be certified. Centers are certified for three years and develop continuous improvement plans that are reviewed by staff every year. Criteria for certification are in the following categories:

- Customer-centered design and accessibility
- Partnerships and integrated services
- Professional staff

- Performance and customer satisfaction

The commission has also created a certification process for NCWorks Certified Career Pathways for recognizing comprehensive career pathways that at helping to develop a talent pipeline for in-demand occupations. Career pathways are a key areas of focus for North Carolina which has been an innovator in developing strategies that support transitions from education to employment. North Carolina's career pathways work brings together three key programs, local workforce boards, community colleges, and the public schools to work with engaged employers. This collaboration identifies and creates clear pathways for in-demand occupations to ensure that the state has the workforce needed for our businesses to succeed.

North Carolina's Federal Performance Outcomes are tracked for all WIOA Core Programs. The Division of Workforce Solutions provides Future Works BI to keep the 23 Local Workforce Development Boards abreast of their current performance numbers in real-time. In late 2019, the North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Boards (NCAWDB), in coordination with NCAWDB Director's Council, North Carolina Department of Commerce Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD), North Carolina Common Follow-up System (CFS) and the NCWorks Commission developed the NC Workforce Development Dashboard that went live on the NCAWDB website in February 2020. The NC Workforce Development Dashboard provides a user-friendly tool for tracking real-time performance data.

The NCWorks Commission is also responsible for development of state performance measures for Local Workforce Development Boards. The commission has been working with the Local Workforce Development Boards to track performance since 2016. New measures were approved and data began to be tracked for performance in 2018. The measures focus on key activities required by local boards for a comprehensive workforce development system including outreach, employer engagement, training services, development of career pathways, and certified career centers.

## 1. THE STATE OPERATING SYSTEMS THAT WILL SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE'S STRATEGIES. THIS MUST INCLUDE A DESCRIPTION OF–

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. To accomplish this task better the NCWorks Commission continues to support cooperation and collaboration among North Carolina's workforce delivery system partners regarding the use of NCWorks Online. This depends on each partner agency's willingness to encourage all program participants of North Carolina's workforce programs to enroll in NCWorks Online.

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.

The agencies administering the Title IV programs are in the process of developing a replacement case management system, ENCORE, which is expected to be implemented prior to the next Unified State Plan update. The target "go-live" date for the ENCORE system is January 9, 2023. The new system is expected to improve data quality through additional system edit checks and other internal controls and provide on-demand real-time reports and dashboards for performance management. Additionally, the replacement system uses the same Geographic Solutions base system as NCWorks. In a subsequent development phase, ENCORE will interface with NCWorks to facilitate referrals and improve accuracy in identifying cross-program

participation regarding WIOA Title I and Title III and facilitate state-level reporting of effectiveness in serving businesses.

The core WIOA programs have partnered in the development and implementation of the NCCareers career information system. NCCareers launched in 2020 and includes various tools for career exploration, labor market information, and links to other agencies and programs, including the College Foundation of North Carolina, NCWorks, and services for individuals with disabilities. The NCCareers system is supported through a governance committee with representation from all the core WIOA Title programs as well as private sector organizations and other education and workforce agencies.

The core WIOA programs are also contributors to the NC Common Follow-up System, a longitudinal tracking system for North Carolina's workforce and education programs. The Common Follow-up System contains data on participants in North Carolina public employment, training, and education programs as well as employment and wage information on all individuals working in UI-covered employment in North Carolina. The Common Follow-up System is utilized for workforce and educational system evaluation. It's funded partly through a Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grant and is maintained through a collaborative effort between the NC Department of Information Technology's Government Data Analytics Center and the Labor and Economic Analysis Division of the NC Department of Commerce.

The NCWorks Commission will continue to work with state agency leaders to review current policies, suggest needed changes to those policies, and identify new policies needed to continue to strengthen the state's workforce development system. Coordination and alignment of this system is a key goal for the commission. The Governance and System Alignment committee has met with both WIOA core and partner program leadership to discuss the benefits of a shared database and potential procedures and protocols that could be improved upon to further support alignment and collaboration. The natural evolution of all the programs is driving our databases closer together, as leadership acknowledges the need. In the past 2 years, North Carolina has made great strides in aligning our systems. The next step may involve a committee study of the current databases, followed by the commission making recommendations to the Governor on how to further align the core programs with a common database. We may be able to easily interface the NCDHHS Vocational Rehabilitation Title IV database, since they will have the same vendor, but any interface with NCCCS Title II would have a cost and will not be a simple solution. Any common intake system/shared database should have a main priority of facilitating the intake and service delivery process for all North Carolinians, particularly those with barriers to employment and those enrolled in multiple core programs.

North Carolina's Federal Performance Outcomes are tracked for all WIOA Core Programs. Data collection and reporting for Title I and Title III programs is achieved through the NCWorks system, which is in use at all the career centers throughout NC. The Division of Workforce Solutions also provides Future Works BI to keep the 23 Local Workforce Development Boards abreast of their current performance numbers in real-time. In late 2019, the North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Boards (NCAWDB), in coordination with NCAWDB Director's Council, North Carolina Department of Commerce Labor & Economic Analysis Division (LEAD), North Carolina Common Follow-up System (CFS) and the NCWorks Commission developed the NC Workforce Development Dashboard that went live on the NCAWDB website in February 2020. The NC Workforce Development Dashboard provides a user-friendly tool for tracking real-time performance data.

The NCWorks Commission is also responsible for development state performance measures for Local Workforce Development Boards. The commission has been working with the Local Workforce Development Boards to track performance since 2016. New measures have been approved and data began to be tracked for performance starting in 2018. These measures are focused on key activities required by local boards for a comprehensive workforce development

system including outreach, employer engagement, training services, development of career pathways, and certified career centers.

For Title II, monthly flat files are received from the NCCCS colleges via Colleague extracts and NC Community Based Organizations (CBOs) via LACES extracts. The flat files are merged, cleaned, and matched with external data sources including Diploma Sender (HSE data), the NCCCS Data Warehouse (NCCCS enrollment and NC Department of Commerce Wage data), and the National Student Clearinghouse (post-secondary enrollment) to calculate and evaluate student outcomes including but not limited to program retention, participation, and measurable skills gains. MSG rates are published monthly on the NCCCS dashboards for providers to access for program monitoring and evaluation.

North Carolina's Vocational Rehabilitation Title IV programs share a Libera System-7 electronic case management system that generates pre-defined queries and data extracts used for federal reporting and agency performance management. Information entered by VR staff is supplemented by direct and staff-assisted interfaces with other state and federal systems, such as to verify client identifying information, Social Security beneficiary status, and quarterly earnings. Information is also extracted from the system and provided to other agencies, including WIOA partners, such as for infrastructure and cost sharing, verification for Work Opportunity Tax Credits, Ticket-to-Work claims, and for the North Carolina Common Follow-up System.

For federal reporting, including WIOA performance, data extracts are audited regularly using an edit check tool to verify accuracy and resolve errors and omissions prior to electronic submission. Performance reports at multiple levels of analysis, from the state-level down to the individual counselor caseload, are prepared by agency staff, reviewed, and distributed or submitted at varying intervals, depending on the report, and intended audience. Several internal-agency reports also include information from sources other than the electronic case management system, such as client satisfaction data obtained quarterly through telephone interview surveys.

The agencies administering the Title IV programs are in the process of developing a replacement case management system, ENCORE, which is expected to go live in its first phase on January 9, 2023. The new system is expected to improve data quality through additional system edit checks and other internal controls and provide on-demand real-time reports and dashboards for performance management. Additionally, the replacement system uses the same base system as North Carolina's Title I and Title III programs and will, in a subsequent development phase, interface with these programs to facilitate referrals and improve accuracy in identifying cross-program participation among clients and state-level reporting of effectiveness in serving businesses.

## 2. THE STATE POLICIES THAT WILL SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STATE'S STRATEGIES (E.G., CO-ENROLLMENT POLICIES AND UNIVERSAL INTAKE PROCESSES WHERE APPROPRIATE). IN ADDITION, PROVIDE THE STATE'S GUIDELINES FOR STATE-ADMINISTERED ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS' CONTRIBUTIONS TO A ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM

In 2016, the North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions developed, as part of the NCWorks Career Center Operations Strategic Priorities, a number of Lines of Effort (LOE) to address key initiatives within the North Carolina One-Stop system. These LOE's were created to provide a framework to focus effort and resources, with maximum flexibility at the Local Workforce

Development Board level to enhance and improve career center operations. The Cost Sharing Line of Effort (LOE) was developed to enable the implementation of WIOA one-stop partner cost sharing requirements by the January 1, 2018, deadline. Under this initiative, Division staff, Workforce Board Directors, and subject matter experts were charged with assembling a team to address infrastructure cost processes including terms and method for collecting contributions.

A key component of the Cost Sharing LOE, was the convening of a negotiating team representing all of North Carolina's 23 Workforce Development Boards and the required One-Stop partners. This process streamlined negotiations and made it convenient for all parties involved. As a result of the consensus reached by all the required partners, infrastructure costs in North Carolina are funded through the Local Funding Mechanism (LFM). Negotiations focused on seeking contributions from each agency/program equal to the program caps outlined in the State Funding Mechanism (SFM). The caps for each program were 1.5% of the defined eligible budget except for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) which was 0.75% per the graduated cap outlined in TEGL 17-16. VR's contribution should increase in subsequent years by 0.25% until reaching 1.5%. Should the partner agencies fail to agree on the terms of implementing the IFA, the matter will be referred to the Governor. As part of the Cost Sharing LOE, the partners drafted a memorandum of understanding (MOU) template to be used by each Local Workforce Development Board. The completed signed partner agreements were submitted to the State. Cost sharing summaries were issued and PY2017 partner contributions (six months) were collected in November of 2017. Starting with PY2018 contributions, a new memorandum of understanding with infrastructure cost agreement addendums was submitted by the 23 Workforce Development Boards on or before July 1, 2018, and each subsequent Program Year since.

The North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions issued a formal policy that outlines the infrastructure cost sharing information and includes a required template for the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and the Infrastructure Cost Agreement addendum. Policy was initially issued in May 2018 and most recently updated by Operational Guidance 23-2021 Date: August 20, 2021.

North Carolina's Workforce Policies:

The NCWorks Commission, as mandated by the US Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, has approval authority over major statewide WIOA policy. The Commission transmits Commission Policy Statements on items that are subject to monitoring and audits by the Division of Workforce Solutions. The policy statements are issued by the Commission Chair and are posted by the DWS Planning and Policy Development Unit. The Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) issues operational and program guidance to support workforce systems administration and implementation. Operational Guidance Notices communicate directives and provides instruction for the 23 local Workforce Development Boards and other agencies administering workforce programs. The Operational Guidance Notices carry the full authority of the Commission Policies and are issued through the DWS Assistant Secretary. These notices are also posted by the DWS Planning and Policy Development Unit.

All North Carolina workforce policies and guidance notices are well-vetted by subject matter experts, including DWS leadership, and support the State's workforce program implementation and coordination with core one-stop center partners including WIOA Title I - Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth; Adult Education and Literacy Act – Community College programs; Wagner-Peyser employment services; and Rehabilitation Act Title I - Vocational Rehabilitation programs, as well as other required one-stop partners. Commission Policy Statements are posted on the NC Commerce website at: https://www.nccommerce.com/jobs-training/workforce-professionals-tools-resources/workforce-policies. Issuing policy and guidance is paramount in communicating specific workforce strategies and deadlines that lead

to successful workforce program initialization and execution that ultimately lead to success for both job seekers and employers.

Integrated Service Strategies:

In January of 2019, the Division of Workforce Solutions and the 23 local Workforce Boards developed an updated Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), (attached) to further refine and clarify the roles and responsibilities between the State and local boards. One component of this was to task local boards with brokering and leveraging support for workforce activities by convening stakeholders that include, but are not limited to: DWS, community colleges, economic development, public school systems, business entities, private/public for profit entities, private/public non-profit entities, etc.

This MOU also reaffirmed the role of the Integrated Service Delivery model (ISD) in the workforce system. Under this model, WDB staff, Title I contracted staff, partner representatives and DWS personnel will integrate their staff to shift from program specific organizations to an integrated services approach. Foundational to this approach is co-enrollment, universal intake, and the use of a "product box" where partner agencies contribute services to meet the needs of our customers.

The Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) model was initiated in 2013, and North Carolina's commitment to this has never been stronger. It remains a priority to continue to refine the ISD process. In the fall of 2018, mandatory "ISD 2.0" training (attached) was provided to all Career Center staff (DWS, Local Board, Contract, and Partner staff) to ensure programs are effectively meeting the needs of our customers.

Review of the Internal Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) Process:

Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) Operational Guidance 23-2021 operational-guidance-og-23-2021-ncworks-career-center-memorandum-understanding-mou-and goes into depth on the methodology for infrastructure cost management. In addition, the operational guidance provides specific IFA and MOU completion information and guidance. DWS staff provide presentations on completion and work with WDBs and partners to ensure all signatures are included.

MOU and IFA documents are effective July 1 of each year, and DWS staff work with local Workforce Boards throughout the year to insure coordination of funding and accurate accounting of all relevant costs. Per TEGL 17-16, all North Carolina local WDBs IFAs and MOUs were due by January 2018. Every program year local WDBs update IFAs, and if needed, MOUs. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, local WDBs were granted an extension of the annual due date. For PY2021, the updated IFAs and MOUs were due no later than October 31, 2021.

In February of each year, the DWS Fiscal Management Unit sends an IFA worksheet to all local Workforce Boards to record expenditures in infrastructure cost categories, along with additional costs and shared services incurred with local agency partners. This worksheet also tracks headcounts and salary data from Career Center staff, third-party in-kind contributions (consistent with the uniform guidance 2 CFR 200.236), computer costs, and other infrastructure costs. Local boards were required to return these completed IFA worksheets to DWS Fiscal Management by March 31 for review and analysis.

Concurrently, our DWS Performance team works with DWS Fiscal Management to reviews expenditures that DWS has incurred for each local Workforce Board. Fiscal reviews infrastructure expenses from that data and enter on the spreadsheet for each local Workforce Board. This information is added together for each Workforce Board and a percentage of expenditures is calculated based on headcount.

DWS Fiscal Management also manages and tracks contributions from NC Department of Health and Human Resources, North Carolina Community College System, Commerce-Division of Employment Security, which is passed along to the local Workforce Boards in the final calculation of the IFA. Once Fiscal Management calculation are complete, DWS Fiscal Management works with the DWS Planning and Policy Development team to inform local Workforce Boards if they owe IFA funds to DWS, or vice-versa. From there, local MOU's are developed to finalize the process.

## 3. STATE PROGRAM AND STATE BOARD OVERVIEW

### A. STATE AGENCY ORGANIZATION

The NCWorks Commission guides the workforce development system in North Carolina. The state's Workforce Development System is comprised of an expansive group of state and local agencies; public and private educational systems and institutions; private training providers and nonprofit organizations. At the statewide level, there are seven entities with administrative, oversight and/or operational responsibilities for the state's workforce development activities. These entities include the North Carolina Department of Commerce, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, the North Carolina Department of Administration, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the North Carolina Community College System, the University of North Carolina System and the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities. 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.

The North Carolina Department of Commerce is comprised of several divisions and affiliated commissions which provide economic, community and workforce development services to the state's businesses and citizens. The agency is overseen by the Secretary who is appointed by the Governor. The Secretary of Commerce serves on Governor Cooper's Education Cabinet as well as on the NCWorks Commission.

Commerce's finance and rural economic development divisions provide administrative oversight and operational support for state and local economic and community development activities. The agency's workforce development activities are provided to the state's citizens and businesses through three divisions: the Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS), the Division of Employment Security (DES) and the Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD). In addition, the Department of Commerce provides administrative staff support for the NCWorks Commission (North Carolina's State Workforce Development Board).

The Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) has administrative responsibility for several of the state's workforce development programs and services. These include Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth), WIOA Title III the Wagner Peyser Act program, Trade Act program, Veteran's Employment and Training Services and the Agriculture Employment program. DWS has a state level staff that provide administrative oversight for programs as well as local staff who provide direct services for Wagner Peyser and Trade Act programs at area NCWorks Career Centers. In addition, DWS has eight Regional Operations Directors (RODs) that support the 23 Local Workforce Development Board Directors and the North Carolina Department of Commerce to facilitate the coordination of workforce, economic development, and educational services across the state's eight prosperity zones. The division supports the Local Workforce Development Boards' oversight for North Carolina's 83 local NCWorks Career Centers.

The Department of Commerce's Division of Employment Security (DES) operates the state's unemployment insurance (UI) system. This includes management and operation of the state's UI Tax system, UI claims and UI benefit payment activities. DWS works in collaboration with DES to provide reemployment assistance to eligible UI claimants.

The Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) provides a variety of research and technical support to the state's workforce development, economic development and educational systems, programs, and activities. This includes the provision of labor market information, training on the use of labor market and workforce information, research and analysis of the state's workforce and economy, evaluation of education and workforce programs and research support for state and local economic development activities.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is comprised of several divisions and programs which provide services to the state's residents. The agency is overseen by a Secretary, who is appointed by the Governor. The agency has administrative responsibility for several divisions that provide workforce development related services and activities. These include the Division of Social Services (DSS), the Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS); the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services (MH/DD/SAS), the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) and the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). The DHHS Secretary serves on Governor Cooper's Education Cabinet as well as on the NCWorks Commission.

The Division of Social Services provides administrative oversight for the state's Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) employment program (NC WorkFirst), the Food and Nutrition Employment and Training Program (NC FNS E&T), and the Community Services Block Grant programs. DSS provides oversight and support to the 100 county social services agencies that deliver the services and benefits to individuals and families. The Division of Aging and Adult Services has administrative responsibilities for the Senior Community Service Employment Services, while the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services oversees the Long-Term Vocational Support Services.

In North Carolina there are two entities with administrative responsibility for the services provided under the WIOA Title IV Rehabilitation Act program: the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) and the Division of Services for the Bind (DSB). Both DVRS and DSB are administratively housed within the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. DSB is responsible for administration of Vocational Rehabilitation Title IV services to individuals who are blind, deafblind, and visually impaired and the DVRS is responsible for administration of VR Title IV services to individuals with all other disabilities. Title IV services are provided via 80 locations throughout the state.

The North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs is housed within the North Carolina Department of Administration. The Department of Administration is overseen by a Secretary, who is appointed by the Governor. The Commission of Indian Affairs operates a WIOA Section 166 workforce development program that targets the needs of unemployed, underemployed, and low-income American Indians in North Carolina. The Commission's WIOA program director serves on the NCWorks Commission.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction has administrative oversight for implementing the state's public-school laws for pre-K through 12th grade. Responsibilities are carried out under the direction of the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The State Superintendent is elected by the people and the State Board of Education includes the Lieutenant Governor, the State Treasurer, and 11 members who are appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the North Carolina General Assembly. The State Superintendent serves on Governor Cooper's Education Cabinet as well as on the NCWorks Commission.

DPI provides leadership and service to 116 local public school districts and to more than 2,500 district public schools, over 180 charter schools, and three residential schools for students with hearing and visual impairments. DPI provides support and administrative oversight for educational programming including secondary programs under the Carl Perkins Act, while the North Carolina Community College System provides administrative oversight for post-secondary Perkins Act programs.

The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) provides a comprehensive array of educational and training programs and a diverse set of services to individuals and employers through 58 colleges. It is the third largest community college system in the nation with programs and services provided through 223 locations (58 main campuses and 165 remote locations) throughout the state. The North Carolina Community College System Office staff provides state-level administrative support for the System under the direction of the State Board of Community Colleges. The state board is comprised of 21 members including the Lieutenant Governor (or designee), the State Treasurer (or designee) and members who are appointed by the Governor and North Carolina General Assembly. The Board is responsible for electing a system president and for the adoption and administration of policies, regulations, and standards for the System. Each of the 58 local colleges is governed by a local board of trustees with responsibility for electing a president that serves as the college's chief executive officer. The NCCCS President serves on Governor Cooper's Education Cabinet, as well as on the NCWorks Commission and serves as a co-chair of myFutureNC.

Educational and training programs offered through the 58 colleges include a diverse group of programmatic and course offerings organized into several administrative programmatic areas which include Curriculum programs, Continuing Education programs, Economic Development programs and Basic Skills programs. Curriculum programs operated by the NCCCS include a variety of educational programs which range in length from one semester to two years. Within the NCCCS Curriculum program area are those programs which receive part of their funding through the U.S. Department of Education's Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Educational Act. The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is the recipient of the federal Perkins Act funds and works in collaboration with the NCCCS to implement and deliver the programs and activities required under the Act.

Continuing Education Programs operated by the North Carolina Community Colleges include non-credit courses related to a diverse set of occupational training, workforce development training, community service training and business and industry training. Courses are designed to assist individuals in gaining short term training and skill enhancement including occupational skills, entrepreneurial skills, personal growth, and development. Organized within the North Carolina Community College Continuing Education programs are several programmatic areas including Workforce Continuing Education Training and Human Resources Development programs.

The NCCCS Economic Development area oversees several of the state's workforce training initiatives including the ApprenticeshipNC, BioNetwork, NCEdge Customized Training, and the Small Business Center Network. The ApprenticeshipNC programs are employer driven programs that combine on-the job learning with related classroom instruction. programs help workers learn specialized skills needed in today's economy.

ApprenticeshipNC is recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor as the State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA) for the state of North Carolina. As the SAA, the ApprenticeshipNC director has the responsibility of reviewing and approving all registered apprenticeship programs.

ApprenticeshipNC also provides additional work-based learning programs to meet industry needs, such as Pre-Apprenticeship and Youth Apprenticeship. ApprenticeshipNC has an advisory council of 13 members that consist of a combination of employers and agency

representatives. The Apprenticeship Council provides guidance and assistance in the promotion of Registered Apprenticeship in North Carolina.

The Career and College Readiness program area is responsible for the administration of the state's WIOA Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) programs. AEFLA programs serve every NC county through community colleges and community-based organizations.

Through a competitive request for proposal process, eligible providers apply for Title II funds to supplement their adult education programs. Competitive applicants are awarded funds to work collaboratively with core WIOA partners to provide services and activities that improve adult literacy skills and knowledge for postsecondary transition and or employment. The Curriculum and Workforce Continuing Education departments, Registered NC Apprenticeships /work units of NC community colleges are the main training partners for adult education providers. This allows for an increased capacity for Title II Adult Education providers to implement accelerated models of credential attainment such as Integrated Education and Training and Pre-Apprenticeships linked to Registered Apprenticeships, and models that specifically support English language learners.

North Carolina's Community College System and its 58 colleges are a valuable component of the NCWorks system. The colleges provide a diverse group of program offerings with many of the programs included on the state's Eligible Training Provider list. A large proportion of the state's WIOA training services are provided through the North Carolina Community Colleges. In addition, many of the colleges serve as contractors for WIOA services and there are 11 NCWorks Career Centers and several affiliated sites located on Community College campuses.

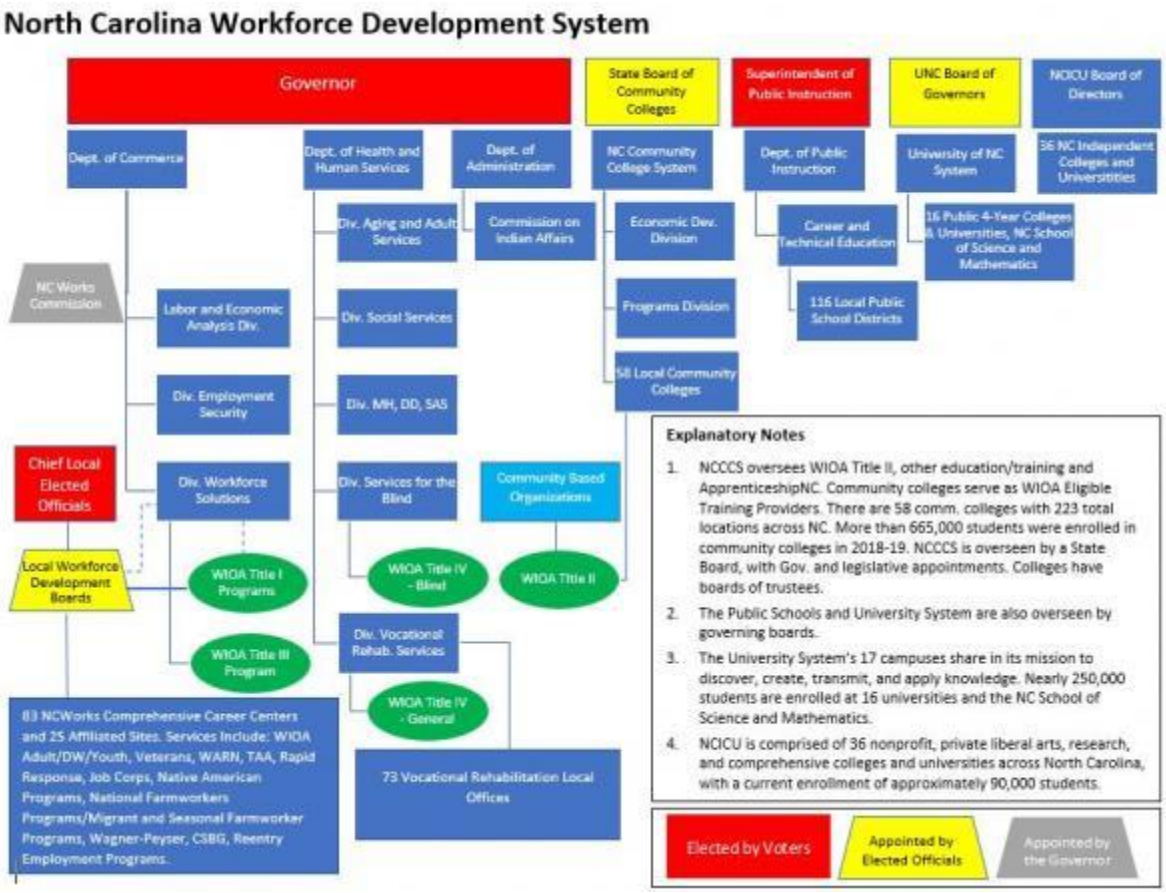
The University of North Carolina (UNC) System is a public, multi-campus university dedicated to the service of North Carolina and its people. The System is comprised of all 16 of North Carolina's public institutions that grant baccalaureate degrees as well as the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics and numerous research centers and institutions throughout the state as well the UNC System administrative offices.

The UNC System is overseen by a 28-member Board of Governors, whose members are elected by the North Carolina General Assembly. The Board is responsible for planning and developing a coordinated system of higher education in North Carolina and for coordinating its work with the North Carolina Community College System and private colleges and universities in the state. The Board is responsible for electing a president of the University of North Carolina System who is the chief administrative officer of the University. Each of the 16 public institutions of higher education has their own Boards of Trustees and Chancellors who are elected by the Board of Governors. The UNC System President serves on Governor Cooper's Education Cabinet as well as on the NCWorks Commission.

The University of North Carolina enrolls a diverse group of students in over 120 academic programs of study. The 16 higher educational institutions provide a diverse set of academic areas which lead to Baccalaureate, Post Baccalaureate, Masters', Post Master's Certificates, Specialist, First Professional, Doctoral Degrees. Programmatic offerings and degree levels vary by institution. While the North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics is a public high school that provides academic offerings concentrated in Science, Technology and Mathematics (STEM) areas through residential, online and summer programs.

North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU) is the private, nonprofit, statewide office of private higher education in North Carolina, addressing matters of state and federal policy and representing private colleges and universities across the state in collaboration with North Carolina's other education and workforce partners. The NCICU represents all 36 private nonprofit liberal arts, research, and comprehensive colleges and universities in North Carolina accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern

Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). NCICU's board of directors includes the presidents of each of the 36 institutions. Its member institutions provide a diverse set of programmatic offerings across various post-secondary degrees as well as non-degree offerings. The NCICU president serves on Governor Cooper's Education Cabinet as well as on the NCWorks Commission.




Organizational Chart of the North Carolina Workforce Development System

B. STATE BOARD

The NCWorks Commission is the designated State Workforce Development Board for North Carolina. The commission operates in accordance with the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, North Carolina General 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 NCWorks Career Center system. The commission also recommends strategies that enable the state's workforce and businesses to compete in the global economy.

Mission of the NCWorks Commission: 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; and to ensure North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow by increasing access to education and skills training, fostering employer leadership to prepare workers, and supporting and scaling local innovation.

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

adult education representative and representatives from the state's labor, training, and community-based organizations. As defined by WIOA, the majority of the NCWorks Commission members are private business representatives. All members are appointed to four-year terms by the Governor. Agency Administrators from the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Administration, Department of Public Instruction, North Carolina Community College System, University of North Carolina System, and Department of Commerce all serve as ex-officio members.

## I. MEMBERSHIP ROSTER

Representation on the NCWorks Commission is mandated by federal and state law. Led by a private sector chair, the 37-member Commission membership includes workforce agency leaders, elected officials, private sector members, and representatives from the state's labor, training, and community-based organizations. As defined by WIOA, the majority of the NCWorks Commission members are private business representatives. All members are appointed to four-year terms by the Governor. Agency Administrators from the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Administration, Department of Public Instruction, North Carolina Community College System, University of North Carolina System, and Department of Commerce all serve as ex-officio members. All board members have voting privileges.

| Member Name | Affiliation | Organization |
|---|---|---|
| Roy Cooper | Government Representative-Governor<br><br>(Ex-officio) | Governor, State of North Carolina |
| Catherine Truitt | Government Representative<br><br>(Ex-officio) | State Superintendent, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction |
| Pamela Brewington Cashwell | Government Representative<br><br>(Ex-officio) | Secretary, North Carolina Department of Administration |
| Thomas Stith | Government Representative<br><br>(Ex-officio) | President, North Carolina Community College System |
| Machelle Baker Sanders | Government Representative<br><br>(Ex-officio)<br><br>Representing WIOA Title I and Wagner-Peyser | Secretary, North Carolina Department of Commerce |
| Kody Kinsley | Government Representative<br><br>(Ex-officio) | Secretary, North Carolina Department of Health & Human Services |
| Peter Hans | Government Representative<br><br>(Ex-officio) | President, University of North Carolina System |
| Gilda Rubio-Festa | State Official with primary responsibility for | Associate Vice President, |

| Member Name | Affiliation | Organization |
|---|---|---|
| | Adult Education and Family Literacy-WIOA Title II | College and Career Readiness, North Carolina Community College System |
| Cynthia Speight | State Official with primary responsibility for Vocational Rehabilitation or Services for the Blind-WIOA Title IV | Director, Division of Services for the Blind, North Carolina Division of Health and Human Services |
| Shawn Brown | Local Elected City Official | Mayor, City of Claremont |
| Ronnie Smith | Local Elected County Official | Commissioner of Martin County |
| Tom Rabon, Chair | Private Business Representative | New Kind |
| Hugh Allen | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Other) | Mid-South Metro of TD Bank |
| John Wesley Davis IV | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Business/Military) | Alex Brown, a division of Raymond James |
| Suzanne Johnson | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Pharmaceuticals) | Grifols |
| Olalah Njenga | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Small Business-Business Services) | YellowWood Group |
| Leslie Walden | Private Business Representative<br><br>(IT Software) | Fidelity Investments |
| Nikki Nissen | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Healthcare) | Novant Health Medical Group |
| Stan Sherril | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Energy) | Duke Energy |
| Himanshu Karvir | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Hospitality, Tourism and Entertainment) | Virtelle Hospitality |
| Kim Toler | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Chemical) | Nutrien |
| Jim Van Camp | Private Business Representative | Van Camp & Van O' Linda Law Firm |

| Member Name | Affiliation | Organization |
|---|---|---|
| | (Knowledge Creation) | |
| Marti Matthews Martin | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Other) | PPDI |
| Daniel L. Briggs | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Other) | Davidson, Piedmont, and Briggs Funeral Services |
| Paul Lawler | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Other) | International Economic Development Council |
| Christopher Gergen | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Small Business) | Forward Impact |
| Pam Townsend | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Engineering) | WSP USA |
| Brock Ashburn | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Agriculture, Forestry and Food) | Highland Brewing Company |
| Michael Okun | Organized Labor Representative<br><br>(CBO/Training/Veterans/Individuals with disabilities) | North Carolina State AFL-CIO |
| MaryBe McMillan | Organized Labor Representative | North Carolina State AFL-CIO |
| Tammy Simmons | Registered Apprenticeship Representative | Machine Specialties, Inc. |
| Sherry Carpenter | Community Based Organization | Goodwill Industries |
| Steven Hunt | Community Based Organization | Robeson Community College |
| Hope Williams | Community Based Organization<br><br>(Labor/Training-General) | North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities |
| Jeffrey Frederick | Community Based Organization | North Carolina Association of Workforce Boards |
| Cheryl Richards | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Business and Industry) | Johnson & Wales University |
| Rodney Carson | Private Business Representative<br><br>(Business and Industry) | SAS Institute |

## II. BOARD ACTIVITIES

The work of the commission is accomplished through the work of committees. These committees, established by the chair, are created purposefully to accomplish the goals of the commission's 2021-2023 strategic plan and to carry out the functions under section 101(d) of WIOA. Each committee is led by a chair and is supported by NCWorks Commission staff. The committee chairs, along with the NCWorks Commission chairman make up the Commission's the Executive Committee. Each of the commission member serves on one of the committees.

### Meetings

The commission conducts quarterly business meetings at the call of the chair. 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. Committees meet several times a year and are scheduled at the discretion of the committee chairs. These meetings are attended by the assigned committee members, its chair, and NCWorks Commission staff.

Several key staff assist the NCWorks Commission members and staff carry out state board functions. The NCWorks Commission has assembled a group of agency leaders to help coordinate and integrate workforce programs across agencies. This State-Agency Sub-Committee *works* 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.

Additionally, the commission is developing strategies to support the use of sector strategies to provide individuals, including low-skilled adults, youth, and individuals with barriers to employment, with workforce development activities, education, and supportive services to enter or retain employment.

### Other Activities

The NCWorks Commission releases a weekly report, called The Workforce Observer, which highlights statewide workforce policy, programs, events, trends, and the many workforce and economic development activities around the state of North Carolina. The Workforce Observer also highlights individual commission members, their respective organizations, and their contributions to the betterment of workforce development within the state of North Carolina. The NCWorks Commission also releases a monthly Spotlight on Local Workforce Innovations publication which showcases local innovations in collaborative, employer-led workforce development partnerships across our state. The publication highlights promising practices that can be replicated across North Carolina.

The NCWorks Commission, in partnership with the Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD), develop a biennial Employer Needs Survey of North Carolina employers with 10 or more employees designed to gauge hiring experiences, recruitment and retention strategies and workforce challenges. Over 2,300 employers from across the state responded to this year's survey. The commission also participates in quarterly industry tours which highlight innovative workforce solutions across the state.

## 4. ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION OF PROGRAMS AND ONE-STOP PROGRAM PARTNERS

### A. ASSESSMENT OF CORE PROGRAMS

The NCWorks Commission is responsible for assessing North Carolina's workforce development system, including core WIOA programs. This work is accomplished by the Commission's Governance and System Alignment Committee which reports to the full commission at each quarterly meeting.

State law requires the commission to annually review and evaluate the plans and programs for all federally- or state-funded workforce development programs. In 2014, the NCWorks Commission established a process to annually review the 19 workforce development program plans, policies, and services across five state agencies in North Carolina. This review includes analysis of core programs as well as other one-stop delivery system partners. Since the onset of the pandemic, the review has also included information about how each program has adjusted their services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including the implementation of virtual services.

During 2021, the NCWorks Commission started the 3-year recertification process of North Carolina's one-stop career centers. Given the important changes happening at career centers to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission requested a 1-year extension from the Department of Labor. This extension was granted in October 2021 allowing the NCWorks Commission to adjust the certification criteria to reflect the numerous virtual services offered by one-stop career centers. In December, NCWorks Commission staff surveyed 160 workforce professionals in the state as part of the career center recertification process. Through the survey the Commission learned about how career centers and workforce boards have successfully implemented virtual services since the onset of the pandemic and their feedback on ways to improve career center certification. The updated criteria will be available for review by the end of the first quarter of 2022.

The Commission is required to develop and continuously improve performance measures to assess the effectiveness of workforce training and employment in the state. 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 NCWorks Commission's Governance and System Alignment committee reviews the operation, services, and performance of core programs as directed by WIOA. The NCWorks Commission is also required to develop state performance accountability measures for Local Workforce Development Boards. Increased contact and outreach with Chief Local Elected Officials is needed to provide support and training on their role in effective administration of WIOA dollars. The Division of Workforce Solutions, in partnership with the Executive Director of the NCWorks Commission, provided this training to the Chief Local Elected Officials in the fall of 2021.

### B. ASSESSMENT OF ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS

The NCWorks Commission is responsible for reviewing and evaluating the workforce development system in North Carolina which includes core WIOA programs and one-stop partner program services. See answer to question III (b)(4)(A) for more details.

### C. PREVIOUS ASSESSMENT RESULTS

North Carolina General Statute requires the NCWorks Commission to develop, continuously improve, and report on systemwide performance measures to assess the effectiveness of the entire workforce development system. The commission initially began this work by convening a task force of members along with an advisory group representing each of the state workforce development agencies. After extensive stakeholder collaboration, core measures were developed to provide a common framework to analyze the performance of the workforce development system. 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 performance measures working group defined the list of programs, information, and measures to include in assessing the performance of North Carolina's workforce development programs. Data from the North Carolina Common Follow-up System (CFS) were utilized to carry out the analysis. The 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 CFS is currently utilized to facilitate the assessment of North Carolina's workforce development and educational programs and produce outcome measures such as post-program participation employment and wage information. North Carolina has created various reports and developed online data tools utilizing the CFS infrastructure.

The NCWorks Commission works in collaboration with the Labor and Economic Analysis Division to develop a set of performance measures to assess the effectiveness of the North Carolina's Workforce Development Programs. These efforts are documented in annual reports which include post-program participation outcomes related to employment, employment retention, wage progression and post- participation in education and other workforce development programs. Below are the previous 2 years North Carolina's Workforce Development System Annual Performance Measures Reports:

- https://files.nc.gov/nccommerce/documents/files/NCWORKS_2021_-Workforce_System_Performance_Report_FINAL-DRAFT.pdf
- https://files.nc.gov/nccommerce/documents/files/NCWORKS_2022_-Performance_Report_website_final.pdf

These reports contain post-exit measures for six years after participation. The reports also include assessment of the following programs: Wagner-Peyser Act (Title III) program; WIA & WIOA (Title I) Adult programs; WIA & WIOA (Title I) Dislocated Worker program; WIA & WIOA (Title I) Youth program; Veteran's Employment program; Division of Services for the Blind (Title IV program); Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (Title IV program); Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Employment and Training program; Secondary Career and Technical Education (including Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education programs); Apprenticeship programs; Community College Basic Skills programs (including Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program), Community College NCEdge Customized Training program, Human Resources Development program, Community College Workforce Continuing Education programs (including short term occupational training) and Postsecondary Career, Technical and Vocational Education programs (including Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education programs).

While the framework provides a consistent snapshot of individual program results, there are distinct variations in services, activities, and populations served that may result in differing levels of performance between programs. For example, many workforce development programs assist job seekers in obtaining basic literacy skills that are needed to obtain further credentials

and move towards gainful employment. The success of this program may be measured by referrals to other workforce development programs and continuation in education and training programs, as well as employment.

Continuous learning is also essential for workers to stay well-informed of new technology and to gain the skills needed to find good jobs. Therefore, a positive outcome for workforce development system participants is to continue in education and training programs offered through North Carolina's publicly supported university and community college systems and/or enrollment in one of the many publicly supported workforce development programs.

This type of success is used as the basis for the individual program measures. The performance measures working group found value in measuring what North Carolina's workforce development participants did when they left, or delayed participation in, the original program of record. Participants included individuals who graduated, who successfully completed a program, earned a credential, or found employment, as well as those individuals who started a program but did not continue in the following fiscal year. It should be noted that failing to finish a program does not mean an individual did not acquire new skills to find improved employment. Therefore, the working group chose to look at the entire group of participants regardless of exit status.

The latest Workforce Development System Annual Performance Measures Report indicates a 15% increase (+132,103 individuals) in the total number of North Carolinians utilizing the workforce system, after years of steady decline. This can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the large number of individuals dislocated from their jobs. A closer look at the data provided shows all workforce development programs in North Carolina continued to decline in the number of individuals served, except for the North Carolina Department of Commerce, WIOA Title I and Title III programs, which increased significantly, approximately 37% increase (+179,845 individuals).

Using the report to compare the wage progression for each individual cohort, it becomes obvious that all cohorts experienced wage progression over time. Participants in the North Carolina Community College System, Customized Training and Apprenticeship Programs experienced the highest wage outcomes, while participants in the North Carolina Community College System, Basic Skills and Human Resource Development Programs experienced the lowest wage outcomes.

The NCWorks Commission, Skills and Education Attainment Committee is currently undertaking a study on alignment of all North Carolina's career pathways, across all workforce system partners, for a more uniform model. One of the desired results of this study is increasing wage outcomes in some of the lower performing workforce programs.

## D. EVALUATION

North Carolina will leverage its workforce longitudinal data system, the Common Follow-up System (CFS), to conduct rigorous evaluations of workforce services provided under WIOA core programs. These evaluations will demonstrate the causal impact of workforce services using research methods that yield moderate-to-high causal evidence consistent with US Department of Labor (DOL) guidelines.

The Labor and Economic Analysis Division of NC Commerce (LEAD) is responsible for maintaining the CFS and for using CFS data to evaluate the effectiveness of state and federally funded workforce programs in North Carolina. During the past three years, LEAD has utilized resources provided by US DOL's Workforce Data Quality Initiative grant to enhance its capacity to conduct workforce program evaluations, using control group and interrupted time series research designs to evaluate the impact of vocational rehabilitation, reentry employment, and

registered apprenticeship programs. Two of LEAD's evaluation studies have been submitted to US DOL's Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research.

The NCWorks Commission will coordinate evaluation projects in consultation with local workforce boards and the state agencies responsible for administering core WIOA programs. These partner organizations will convene on annual basis to update the state's workforce learning agenda, identify evidence gaps, and establish priorities for new evaluation projects. The NCWorks Commission will work with LEAD to administer these evaluation projects and to facilitate CFS data access for external researchers, as needed.

North Carolina's evaluation projects will follow US DOL guidelines and will be consistent with US DOL research objectives. The state will coordinate the research efforts with the evaluations provided for by the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Education under WIOA, where feasible.

## 5. DISTRIBUTION OF FUNDS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

### A. FOR TITLE I PROGRAMS

#### I. YOUTH ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 128(B)(2) OR (B)(3)

**WIOA Youth Activities Formula:**

1/3: State relative share of total unemployment in areas of substantial unemployment (ASU) (average 12 months ending 6/30)

1/3: State relative share of excess unemployment (average 12 months ending 6/30)

1/3: State relative share of economically disadvantaged youth (American Community Survey)

Policy Statement 04-2019 Change 1 references The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) released revised WIOA Allotments for PY 2019 (July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020) for Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Activities in Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) No. 16-18, Change 1.

Funding for PY 2019 has been adjusted to restore the PY 2019 appropriated funding set aside for program integrity and evaluation purposes. Funding change impacts October portion of WIOA funds only. The state allotments are based on funds appropriated to the USDOL by the United States Congress through the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019, Public Law 115-245. According to the Act, Youth Activities funds became available for obligation on April 1, 2019. However, the Act funds the WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker programs in two separate appropriations.

The first becomes available for obligation on July 1, 2019; this portion is commonly referred to as the "base" funds. The second becomes available for obligation on October 1, 2019; this portion is commonly referred to as "advance" funds because they are provided in the Appropriations Act passed during the fiscal year immediately before the fiscal year when the funds are available. In order to ensure that North Carolina is in compliance with USDOL requirement's for Dislocated Worker allocations for PY 2019, the formula for each local Board's Dislocated Worker allocation was modified slightly.

The reason for the modification is to include the required element: Declining Industries. As a result, the new formula is comprised of the following components: An Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer/Program Auxiliary aids and services available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

- 30% Insured Unemployment

- 30% Excess Unemployment
- 30% Long-term Unemployment
- 10% Declining Industries

Declining Industries consist of the change from the 3rd Quarter of one year to the 3rd Quarter of the next in the number of establishments in each county. For this year's calculations, that data consists of the change in the count of establishments from the 3rd Quarter of Calendar Year 2017 compared to the 3rd Quarter of Calendar Year 2018. It should be noted that Adult and Youth allocation formulas are unchanged. Also, the Hold Harmless provision remains in effect for all three program allocations calculations. The Hold Harmless provision ensures that "no local area receives an allocation percentage that is less than 90 percent of the average allocation percentage received by the local area for the previous two years" (TEGL 16-18, Change 1)

Please reference PS04-2019, Change 1 noted above.

II. ADULT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 133(B)(2) OR (B)(3)

WIOA Adult Activities Formula:

- 1/3: State relative share of total unemployment in areas of substantial unemployment (ASU) (average 12 months ending 6/30)
- 1/3: State relative share of excess unemployment (average 12 months ending 6/30)
- 1/3: State relative share of economically disadvantaged Adult (American Community Survey 2011-2015)

In order to ensure that North Carolina is in compliance with USDOL requirement's for Dislocated Worker allocations for PY 2019, the formula for each local board's Dislocated Worker allocation was modified slightly. The reason for the modification is to include the required element: Declining Industries. As a result, the new formula is comprised of the following components:

- 30% Insured Unemployment
- 30% Excess Unemployment
- 30% Long-term Unemployment
- 10% Declining Industries

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 PY 2019, the percentages deducted were as follows:

| Program | Percent of Holdback |
|---|---|
| Adult | 15% administrative holdback |

| Program | Percent of Holdback |
|---|---|
| Youth | 15% administrative holdback |
| Dislocated Worker | 15% administrative holdback<br><br>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 2019, that ratio was:

| Program | July Percentage | October Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Adult | 15.8338% | 84.1662% |
| Dislocated Worker | 17.4178% | 82.5822% |

Once the total allocation amounts for each program are known, the DOL-provided formulas are then used to calculate the Local Area allocation amounts. All three programs (Adult, Youth, Dislocated Worker) have a minimum allocation amount in effect, 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 two preceding years. Amounts necessary for increasing such allocations to local areas to comply with this requirement are to be obtained by proportionally 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 16-18.

III. DISLOCATED WORKER EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH WIOA SECTION 133(B)(2) AND BASED ON DATA AND WEIGHTS ASSIGNED

**WIOA Dislocated Worker Formula:**

In order to ensure that North Carolina is in compliance with USDOL requirement's for Dislocated Worker allocations for PY 2019, the formula for each local board's Dislocated Worker allocation was modified slightly. The reason for the modification is to include the required element: Declining Industries. As a result, the new formula is comprised of the following components:

- 30% Insured Unemployment
- 30% Excess Unemployment
- 30% Long-term Unemployment
- 10% Declining Industries

North Carolina has weighted two categories of Dislocated Worker allocation factors as zero weight factors because suitable data could not be found at the state or national level. Each factor and the specifics around its zero weighting are discussed below:

Plant Closing and Mass Layoff Data

Historically, North Carolina has depended on the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) to provide data for this factor of Dislocated Worker allocations. However, as noted in TEGL 19-20, BLS no longer produces this dataset. The state is not aware of any suitable data at the state or national level that could be substituted for the BLS data and has therefore weighted this factor as zero.

Farmer-Rancher Economic Hardship Data

When looking for data to use for this factor, we came across a number of datasets and sources related to farming. Our search included:

- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)
    - National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) – specifically the North Carolina office
    - Economic Research Service
    - Census of Agriculture
- North Carolina Department of Agriculture

Much of the data available from these sources is limited to the state level and therefore is unsuitable for the county-level nature of Dislocated Worker allocations. For the data that is available at the county level, much of it is centered on specific crop or livestock metrics and not focused on economic hardship. One economic metric that is available annually and at the county level, through the NC Department of Agriculture, is related to a totaling of cash receipts from products sold. However, this metric provides no indication of economic stability or hardship nor any relationship to the number of farms involved, and was therefore discounted. Lastly, we examined whether North Carolina could approach this factor in a similar fashion to how we approach the Declining Industries factor by examining a year-to-year change in the number of farmers by county. Unfortunately, the only access to this information at the county level is through the Census of Agriculture, which is only produced every 5 years, most recently in 2017.

North Carolina feels that the Governor's formula for dispersing Dislocated Worker allocations equitably distributes funds throughout the state by including reliable data related to the four factors below:

- insured unemployment data,
- unemployment concentrations,
- declining industries data, and
- long-term unemployment data.

The unemployment data referenced is consistent with the formula approach used by USDOL to calculate each state's Dislocated Worker allocation share and utilizing a year over year change in establishment counts for the Declining Industries component ensures an equal footing for all counties across the state.

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 PY 2019, the percentages deducted were as follows:

| Program | Percent of holdback |
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| Youth | 15% administrative holdback |
| Dislocated Worker | 15% administrative holdback<br><br>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 2019, that ratio was:

| Program | July Percentage | October Percentage |
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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 two preceding years. Amounts necessary for increasing such allocations to local areas to comply with this requirement are to be obtained by proportionally 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 16-18.

## B. FOR TITLE II

### I. DESCRIBE HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL AWARD MULTI-YEAR GRANTS OR CONTRACTS ON A COMPETITIVE BASIS TO ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS IN THE STATE, INCLUDING HOW ELIGIBLE AGENCIES WILL ESTABLISH THAT ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS ARE ORGANIZATIONS OF DEMONSTRATED EFFECTIVENESS

The NC Community College System (NCCCS), College and Career Readiness (CCR) office will allocate AEFLA funds for multiyear awards for four years with a re-application process for continued funding in year two, three, and four for grantees. The NCCCS, CCR office will compete funds separately for sections 231, 225, and 243. NCCCS office has a formal Request for Proposal (RFP) process that ensures all eligible providers have direct and equitable access to

apply for grant and contract (section 231(c)(1) of WIOA 34 CFR. All three applications will use the same review process. The RFP process includes screening for program's demonstrated effectiveness and past effectiveness. Additionally, the RFP includes a process for Local Workforce Development Boards to determine whether programs are consistent with the approved local workforce development plan (section 107(d)(11)(B)(i)(I) of WIOA and 34 CFR. An eligible provider must demonstrate past effectiveness by providing performance data on its record in improving the skills of eligible individuals who are basic skills deficient in the content domains of reading, mathematics, and English language acquisition. An eligible provider must also provide information regarding its outcomes for participants related to employment, attainment of secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and transition to postsecondary education and training, per federal regulations 34 CFR 463.24. An eligible provider must demonstrate past effectiveness in two ways:

•An eligible provider previously funded under Title ll of the Act must provide reports from the NC Title ll data management system for previous year's performance.

•An eligible provider that has not been previously funded under Title ll of the Act must submit previous year data to demonstrate its past effectiveness in serving basic skills deficient eligible individuals, including evidence of its success in achieving outcomes listed in the WIOA Title II AEFLA Federal Requirements.

Additionally, during the RFP process, eligible adult education agencies must complete and return the following documents: Federal Assurances, State Assurances, and the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA). By signing the assurances documents during the RFP process, eligible providers are indicating their intention to adhere to the rules and the regulations of the Adult Education and Family Act (AEFLA) and NCCCS, CCR office.

Title II 231 WIOA funds for Adult Education and Family Literacy are distributed by the NC Community College System according to a formula adopted by the State Board of Community Colleges on February 16, 2018. The formula was developed to: incent program improvement, to incent access and to ensure equity in allocation of funds. It has three components:

1. Base- 15% of available funding will be allocated for base funding to be distributed equally across eligible providers who were successful in the competition.

2. Access- 50% of available funding will be allocated for access. This component is calculated on NRS reported hours reported in the previous year. Access will be determined by contact hours of participants within three weighted tiers:

- Tier A -weight 5- Beginning Adult Basic Education Literacy, Beginning Adult Basic Education, Beginning English as a Second Language, and Beginning ESL
- Tier B-weight 4- Low Intermediate ESL, High Intermediate ESL, Low Advanced ESL, Low Intermediate Adult Basic Education, and High Intermediate Adult Basic Education
- Tier C-weight 3- Adult Secondary Education Low and Adult Secondary Education High

3. Performance -35% of available funding will be allocated for performance. Performance allocations will be determined by the number and percentage of basic skills participant periods of participation with a measurable skills gain. This allocation will be calculated on data reported in the previous year.

For the distribution of Title II 243 funds, the allocation percentages are:

1. Base- 70%

2. Access/participation- 10%

3. Performance-20%

For the distribution of 225 funds, the allocation percentages are:

1. Base- 30%
2. Access/participation- 30%
3. Performance- 40%

New providers, without reported NRS data receive the base.

## II. DESCRIBE HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL ENSURE DIRECT AND EQUITABLE ACCESS TO ALL ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS TO APPLY AND COMPETE FOR FUNDS AND HOW THE ELIGIBLE AGENCY WILL ENSURE THAT IT IS USING THE SAME GRANT OR CONTRACT ANNOUNCEMENT AND APPLICATION PROCEDURE FOR ALL ELIGIBLE PROVIDERS

The NCCCS will require all eligible providers' use the same application process for sections 231, 225, and 243. All three programs will use the same grant application and process. The RFP process standardizes the announcement of requests for proposal (RFP), application and review process so that the same process is used for all eligible providers. Funds will be allocated through a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) to eligible providers who may be the following but not limited to:

1. Local educational agencies

2. Community-based organizations or faith-based organizations

3. Volunteer literacy organizations

4. Institutions of higher education,

5. Public or private nonprofit agencies, Libraries

6. Public housing authorities

7. Nonprofit institutions that are not described in any of the above and have the ability to provide adult education and literacy activities to eligible individuals

8. Consortia or coalitions of the agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries, or authorities described above

9. Partnerships between an employer and an entity described above.

The RFP will be posted on the NC Government Grant portal. The application will be available on the NCCCS office website and announcements will be placed in state's largest circulating newspapers. All current providers will be notified through NCCCS system office provider's distribution list. NCCCS office will host a bidders' technical assistance meeting and invite current and potential new adult education providers. All eligible applicants are provided with the same period for inquires to ask questions about the three applications.

## C. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Each VR agency (General Agency and Blind Agency) receives a separate grant award from Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). Funds in each grant are calculated based on the

RSA statutory formula that takes into account population and per capita income in determining the amount of Federal funds made available to states for VR program purposes.

## 6. PROGRAM DATA

### A. DATA ALIGNMENT AND INTEGRATION

There are multiple state agencies in North Carolina that have administrative responsibility for the WIOA core programs. These include the North Carolina Department of Commerce, North Carolina Community College System, and 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 development system. Each agency collects and reports their individual participant record system from their case management system and submits their required reports. The effectiveness in serving employers measures is a combined report by matching employer records using name and telephone numbers to identify common employers. NC currently has an integrated system for Title I and Title III with Geographic Solutions, and the Title IV programs have recently signed a contract with Geographic Solutions for a replacement case management system with the actual go-live date set for January 9, 2023, according to Bhanu Das, Manager of Strategic Initiatives with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. Although there will be separate instances of the Geographic Solutions system for NCWorks and Vocational Rehabilitation, the WIOA core partners will leverage having the same core system structure and data model to share and transfer information in a subsequent phase of implementation expected in late 2023. The expectation is that data shared across agencies will be more complete and require fewer or no transformations during the ETL process.

The three agencies that administer the core WIOA programs participate in a state level longitudinal data collection system used in North Carolina along with other education and workforce programs. This Common Follow-Up System (CFS) allows N.C. 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 NCWorks Commission uses the information from the CFS to complete its annual performance measures report. One of the indicators that is tracked for each program is continuation in higher education and/or other workforce programs. The commission reviews this information annually and reports to the N.C. General Assembly.

The core WIOA agencies have different methods of accessing UI wage data including direct access to data to allow immediate reports. Agencies also use UI wage data as part of the reports produced from the Common Follow-up 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 29 years of historical quarterly wage records (since Q4 of 1992). North Carolina has recently executed the data sharing agreement to participate in State Wage Record Interchange System (SWIS). Access to NC UI wage records are completed undersigned Memoranda of Understanding which outline data sharing and confidentiality laws and requirements.

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

Data from the state's unemployment insurance system used for the computation of WIOA performance measures by the Division of Workforce Solutions and the NCCCS are utilized in compliance with 20. C.F.R Part 603.

North Carolina will continue to make privacy considerations a priority in all initiatives and interfaces.

North Carolina currently has an integrated system for Title I and Title III with Geographic Solutions, and the Title IV programs have recently signed a contract with Geographic Solutions for a replacement case management system—ENCORE, with an actual go-live date set for January 9, 2023, according to Bhanu Das, Manager of Strategic Initiatives with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. Although there will be separate instances of the Geographic Solutions system for NCWorks and Vocational Rehabilitation, the WIOA core partners will leverage having the same core system structure and data model to share and transfer information. The expectation is that data will be shared across agencies will be more complete and require fewer or no transformations during the ETL process.

In the past, the leadership teams from North Carolina's Workforce Development System have discussed the need to have one case management data system for a more effective system integration between core programs and to streamline the intake process for program participants (especially those enrolled in multiple core programs). Currently, NCCCS utilizes a completely separate data system from Geographic Solutions which is proprietary based and adding any interface would incur cost with very little benefit at this time. The NCCCS is open to any discussion on how we can improve integration with a shared data system.

The Governance and System Alignment committee has met with both WIOA core and partner program leadership to discuss the benefits of a shared database. The natural evolution of all the programs is driving our databases closer together, as leadership acknowledges the need. In the past 2 years, North Carolina has made great strides in aligning our systems. The next step may involve a committee study of the current databases, followed by the commission making recommendations to the Governor on how to further align the core programs with a common database. We may be able to easily interface the NCDHHS Vocational Rehabilitation Title IV database—ENCORE, since they will have the same vendor, but any interface with NCCCS Title II would have a cost and will not be a simple solution. Any common intake system/shared database should have a main priority of facilitating the intake and service delivery process for all North Carolinians, particularly those with barriers to employment and those enrolled in multiple core programs.

In 2019, North Carolina received its second Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grant from the U.S. DOL's Employment and Training Administration. While previous enhancement efforts funded by the 2013 WDQI grant resulted in the integration of new data structures and expanded data elements for the Common Follow-Up System (CFS), additional expansion is needed to fully achieve project objectives. The 2019 WDQI grant fund will be utilized to continue the enhancement and expansion of the CFS capacity as a comprehensive longitudinal workforce system. These efforts include the plan to undertake several activities: expanding information contained in the CFS; improving the quality of the CFS data matching capabilities in collaboration with the North Carolina Department of Information Technology's Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC); utilizing CFS to carry out analysis of workforce and education

programs; developing user informational dashboards/portals to assist decision-making; and producing and disseminating workforce and education performance information and outcomes.

The three agencies that administer the core WIOA programs participate in a state level longitudinal data collection system used in North Carolina along with other education and workforce programs. This Common Follow-Up System (CFS) allows N.C. 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 NCWorks Commission uses the information from the CFS to complete its annual performance measures report. One of the indicators that is tracked for each program is continuation in higher education and/or other workforce programs. The commission reviews this information annually and reports to the N.C. General Assembly. The Governance and System Alignment committee has met with both WIOA core and partner program leadership to discuss the benefits of a shared database. The natural evolution of all the programs is driving our databases closer together, as leadership acknowledges the need. In the past 2 years, North Carolina has made great strides in aligning our systems. The next step may involve a committee study of the current databases, followed by the commission making recommendations to the Governor on how to further align the core programs with a common database. We may be able to easily interface the NCDHHS Vocational Rehabilitation Title IV database, since they will have the same vendor, but any interface with NCCCS Title II would have a cost and will not be a simple solution. Any common intake system/shared database should have a main priority of facilitating the intake and service delivery process for all North Carolinians, particularly those with barriers to employment and those enrolled in multiple core programs.

While there are no current plans for a common intake system or data collection system, the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) recently announced Geographic Solutions was awarded the contract for developing the case management system for the Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation Services programs for both DVRS and DSB. This has the potential of dramatically improving data integration, as Geographic Solutions is the current developer for the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) NCWorks.gov case management system for WIOA Title I & III. Additionally, the North Carolina SNAP Employment & Training Program (FNS E&T) was added as a module to the same instance of the Geographic Solutions system as NCWorks (NCWorks.gov). There is now an effort underway to have their case management system (NC FAST) actively communicate with NCWorks.gov. Both projects will certainly improve the integration of the state's case management systems and will help ensure customers have a more seamless experience in receiving services.

Each core WIOA agency (NC Commerce, NC DHHS, and NCCCS) maintains their own information management and reporting systems and is responsible for tracking performance and submitting federally required reports for their respective programs. UI Wage data is integrated into the information systems used for federal reporting by the Title I and Title IV programs. Additionally, NCCCS purchases credential clearinghouse data to facilitate reporting on the credential attainment performance, employment outcomes, post-secondary enrollment, and high school completion rates for the Title II program. NCDHHS shares Title IV data on services provided to employers with NC Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions for the Title I ETA-9169 state-level common performance measure on business engagement.

For Title 1 and Title 3 programs, NC Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions submits to USDOL a detailed record of every participant recorded and then certifies the corresponding reports that are created within the WIPS system. Each details record contains information about the individual and the services they received and wage and employment data that comes from the UI and -SWIS data matching.

## B. ASSESSMENT OF PARTICIPANTS' POST-PROGRAM SUCCESS

North Carolina's workforce development system has a long history and experience in the assessment of the state's workforce development and educational programs. This includes the assessment of the WIOA core programs as well as other state and federally funded partner programs. The state maintains a longitudinal data system, the North Carolina Common Follow-up System (CFS) which provides the technical capacity and infrastructure for linking workforce development and education program participant records across agencies and programs with Unemployment Insurance wage and claims data. The CFS is mandated under state law and is operated by the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) in collaboration with the North Carolina Department of Information Technology's Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC). The development and enhancement of the CFS has been supported by both state and federal resources including U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grant funds that were awarded in 2013 and 2019.

The infrastructure and analytical capacity provided by the CFS allows for the assessment of participants and exiters of WIOA core programs as well as other partner programs. The CFS provides the mechanism for measuring pre, concurrent and post-exit employment, wages, employment retention, enrollment in and completion from public educational programs as well as periods of unemployment and incarceration. Contributing entities to the CFS include the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS); the North Carolina Department of Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) and Division of Employment Security (DES); the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS), Division of Services for the Blind (DSB), Division of Social Services (DSS), Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disability and Substance Abuse (DMH), Division of Aging and Adult Services (DAAS); the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and the North Carolina Department of Public Safety's Division of Adult Correction (DAC).

The North Carolina Common Follow-up System maintains historical wage data beginning in the early 1990s and receives updated wage information from the Division of Employment Security on a quarterly basis. The system contains Unemployment Insurance claim information that is updated monthly, with historical information dating back to 2000. Data from the state's education and workforce development programs are provided on a semester, quarterly and/or annual basis depending on program operational and reporting parameters. Contributing entities provide data files containing individual participant records including program and demographic information as well as information related to participation and exit dates, degree attainment, and completion. Historical data varies by program and entity with several dating back to the late 1990s. The Labor and Economic Analysis Division provides the analytical and technical staffing and capacity for the system and the GDAC provides the technology infrastructure.

The CFS is currently utilized to facilitate the assessment of North Carolina's workforce development and educational programs and produce outcome measures such as post-program participation employment and wage information. North Carolina has created various reports and developed online data tools utilizing the CFS infrastructure.

The NCWorks Commission works in collaboration with the Labor and Economic Analysis Division to develop a set of performance measures to assess the effectiveness of the North Carolina's Workforce Development Programs. These efforts are documented in annual reports which include post-program participation outcomes related to employment, employment retention, wage progression and post- participation in education and other workforce development programs. The most recent report Measuring the Performance of North Carolina's Workforce Development System, was issued in January 2022 and contains post-exit measures for six years after participation. The report includes assessment of the following programs: Wagner-Peyser Act (Title III) program; WIA & WIOA (Title I) Adult programs; WIA & WIOA (Title I) Dislocated Worker program; WIA & WIOA (Title I) Youth program; Veteran's Employment program; Division of Services for the Blind (Title IV program); Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (Title IV program); Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) Employment and Training program; Secondary Career and Technical Education (including Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education programs); Apprenticeship programs; Community College Basic Skills programs (including Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act program), Community College NCEdge Customized Training program, Human Resources Development program, Community College Workforce Continuing Education programs (including short term occupational training) and Postsecondary Career, Technical and Vocational Education programs (including Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education programs).

In addition to the annual NCWorks Commission performance report, the Labor and Economic Analysis Division produces annual CFS Operational Reports and bi-annual CFS Evaluation Reports that includes post-exit employment and wage outcomes and enrollment in further education and workforce programs for several state's education and workforce programs. The 2021 Evaluation Report included post-exit outcomes by program year for five program year cohorts for 19 different programmatic areas. LEAD has also developed two online data tools utilizing information from the CFS to support the assessment of the state's education and workforce programs. The North Carolina Tool for Online Education and Workforce Reporting (NC TOWER) provides a web-based data delivery system that displays information on the long term outcomes for the state's publicly supported postsecondary education degree programs offered by the University of North Carolina System (UNCS) institutions and North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) Information available via NC TOWER includes employment and wage outcomes (by industry) and further enrollment in educational programs for up to 17 years after completion for UNCS and NCCCS institutions and programs.

In collaboration with the Division of Workforce Solutions, the Local Workforce Development Boards, and the North Carolina Association of Workforce Development Boards, LEAD developed a North Carolina Workforce Development Board (WDB) Dashboard. The WDB Dashboard is an online data delivery tool that provides a set of measures regarding individuals participating in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity (WIOA) employment and training services for Adult (Title I), Dislocated Workers (Title I), Youth (Title I) and Wagner-Peyser (Title III) programs. The WDB dashboard provides information regarding individuals served, services provided and employment and wage outcomes by program year.

In addition to the infrastructure provided by the CFS, each of the WIOA core programs have data sharing agreements to provide access to the state's Unemployment Insurance wage data as well as out of state unemployment insurance wage data available through the State Wage Interchange System (SWIS). Each of the partner agencies with administrative responsibilities for the WIOA core programs have been designated as Performance Accountability and Customer Information Agencies (PACIAs) under the SWIS agreement. Each of the entities with oversight of the WIOA core programs has the capacity to carry out the performance and assessment requirements outlined under the WIOA.

North Carolina's Workforce Development partners, including the NCWorks Commission, the Labor and Economic Analysis Division, the local Workforce Development Boards, the WIOA core program partners, and other workforce program partners, are committed to the ongoing development and enhancement of the state's program assessment efforts. The CFS analytical capacity and technology infrastructure will continue to be leveraged in the state's assessment activities that focus on employment and wage outcomes, educational progression, skill enhancement and educational attainment of North Carolina's workforce.

### C. USE OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) WAGE RECORD DATA

The core WIOA agencies have different methods of accessing UI wage data including direct access to data to allow immediate reports. Agencies also use UI wage data as part of the reports produced from the Common Follow-up 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 29 years of historical quarterly wage records (since Q4 of 1992). North Carolina has recently executed the data sharing agreement to participate in State Wage Record Interchange System (SWIS). Access to NC UI wage records are completed undersigned Memoranda of Understanding which outline data sharing and confidentiality laws and requirements.

### D. PRIVACY SAFEGUARDS

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

Data from the state's unemployment insurance system used for the computation of WIOA performance measures by the Division of Workforce Solutions and the NCCCS are utilized in compliance with 20. C.F.R Part 603.

North Carolina will continue to make privacy considerations a priority in all initiatives and interfaces.

## 7. PRIORITY OF SERVICE 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 persons of veterans, as defined by 38 U.S.C. 4215(a)(l) (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 persons 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 person either receives access to a service earlier in time than a non-covered person, or, if the resource is limited, the veteran or eligible person 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 is 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 persons 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 submitted to the NC General Assembly, in accordance with General Statute 165-44, and consistent with the federal Jobs for Veterans' Act (P.L. 107-288).

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 North Carolina 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 individualized career 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 persons 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 persons most in need of the individualized career services to address significant barriers to employment. As a result, DVOP specialists will serve fewer veterans and eligible persons, but will be able to provide more individualized career services.

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

1. A special disabled or disabled veteran, as those terms are defined in 38 U.S.C § 4211(1) and (3); Special disabled and disabled veterans are those: who are entitled to compensation (or who but for the receipt of military retired pay would be entitled to compensation) under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs; or, were discharged or released from active duty because of a service connected disability;

2. Homeless, as defined in Section 103(a) of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11302(a)), those that are homeless or at risk of being homeless that are fleeing domestic violence situations;

3. A recently-separated service member, as defined in 38 U.S.C § 4211(6), who has been unemployed for 27 or more weeks in the previous 12 months;

4. An offender, as defined by WIOA Section 3 (38), who is currently incarcerated or who has been released from incarceration;

5. Lacking a high school diploma or equivalent certificate; or

6. Low-income (as defined by WIA at Sec. 101(25) (B).

7. Vietnam Era Veterans

8. Veterans Age 18-24

9. Eligible Transition Service Members

10. Members of the armed forces who are wounded, ill, or injured and receiving treatment at a military transition or warrior transition unit and their persons or caregivers IAW VPL 3-19.

Every veteran on their initial visit to the American Jobs Center will be given the Veterans & Eligible Person Services Assessment Form by Wagner-Peyser or WIOA staff to determine if any barriers to employment exist and what, if any, individualized career services are required. Assessments are not conducted by Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) staff. If any of the questions on the assessment form are answered with an affirmative response to the SBE, the eligible veteran or person must be offered referral to the DVOP or other appropriate staff for further assistance.

Those identified as needing individualized career services are entered into case management by the Disabled Veteran Outreach Program specialist (or other local office staff if there is not a DVOP in the designated NCWorks Career Center). A plan is developed with the individual to provide, refer, and coordinate services needed with the appropriate Workforce Partners, or other agencies that provide the needed services to help the veteran mitigate their barrier to employment.

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 public.

To ensure a continuum of services was provided to our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, the NCWorks Career Centers made the following service modifications:

1. NCWorks Career Centers adapted to virtual services during the pandemic. We encouraged people to use virtual/remote services as much as possible – calling or emailing the center staff rather than coming in – even if their local American Job Center (AJC) is open to the public.

When they reopened, centers maintained public health and safety through protective personal equipment & social distancing guidelines.

Through virtual services veterans were able to:

- Connect with an AJC team member
- Get help with resume preparation or online job application assistance
- Find out about local hiring opportunities
- Get help using NCWorks.gov to search for jobs.

Through virtual services employers were able to:

- Connect with a Business Services Representative
- Access resources to support hiring and training staff
- Advertise employment opportunities on AJC website
- Locate labor market information and data tools

2. NCWorks introduced a "live chat" feature to NCWorks online (during regular business hours), as well as a single help line phone number, 1-855-NCWORKS. Anyone in the state can use that number and be connected to a local AJC by following the instructions and entering their ZIP code.

3. During the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, modifications were made to the initial visit process.

- Career Centers created call centers and automated the Veterans & Eligible Person Services Assessment Form
- Call center staff would be able to ask the questions to the veteran to determine if any barriers to employment exist and what if any individualized career services are required.

4. NCWorks Veterans Services Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) program) requested and was granted approval from DOL VETS to shift our primary focus to supporting the Division Employment Security call centers UI operations from April 1, 2020 – July 31, 2020.

- DWS Staff: 49 JVSG and 251 Career Center staff were equipped with laptop, cell phone and trained for DES UI tasks
- DWS staff were equipped to shift to telework and have remote access to NCWorks and DES applications
- DWS Staff adapted quickly to the new technologies, Microsoft Teams, UI and Call Center functions

The North Carolina Community College System maintains an open-door policy that emphasizes "high-quality, accessible educational opportunities that minimize barriers to post-secondary education, maximize student success, develop a globally and multi-culturally competent workforce, and improve the lives and well-being of individuals". Through the Carl Perkins V Act, the NCCCS has funded the Military Credit for Prior Learning initiative. This initiative compared the military training course work with the for-credit course work in relevant program titles and awards the appropriate academic credits for the military training. This initiative provides the opportunity for veterans to receive curriculum credit for prior military experience and training. As a result, the veterans remain in the program and can complete their academic course work in less time.

The Perkins V Act also serves specific special populations. Under this Act, youth who have a parent who is a member of the armed forces or those who are on active duty are defined as a special population. This means a college may set aside funding to assist these students to achieve success in their program of study.

Several Colleges within the system offer Green Zone Training which is a professional development opportunity for college staff to receive an overview of best practices for working with military and veteran students.

Fayetteville Tech is the community college that serves the Fort Bragg (one of the largest military installations in the world) and the area around it and has multiple programs to specifically serve transitioning military members and veterans. It is the headquarters for the NC Military Business Development Center, to help individuals across the state access business opportunities with the military.

ApprenticeshipNC, the state's apprenticeship program (now based at the NC Community College System) has historically had a large share of its apprentices who are veterans.

Veterans are coded with a special character on their records identifying them as such. This character ensures veterans receive priority for all automated call-ins for job or program referrals, and readily identifies for enrollment in programs which eligible. Further action has been initiated and steps taken to ensure that opportunities and services are made available to veterans most in need of case management and individualized career services.

Wounded Warriors: Two (2) NC DVOP staff will continue with the primary duty of providing services to service members assigned to the Wounded Warriors Barracks. One DVOP is out stationed at the Camp Lejeune Marine Corps Base Wounded Warrior Barracks and the second one is stationed on Fort Bragg. These DVOP staff members will work directly with residents of the Warrior Transition Barracks at each base.

Chapter 31, Veterans Administration Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) program: In compliance with VPL 01-16 and the respective TAG, a DVOP will be designated as the State Intensive Services Coordinator (ISC). This staff has a primary responsibility of tracking and reporting services and outcomes for all veterans enrolled in Chapter 31 within the state. The ISC serves as the State Agency's central point of contact for service to VR&E participants. In addition to case management responsibilities, the assigned ISC will facilitate the dissemination of information to, and compile information from, the DVOP specialists or other SA staff who serve Chapter 31 participants. The ISC serves as the coordination point to communicate information to and from VR&E staff and the state Director Veterans Employment & Training (DVET).

Homeless Veterans: All DVOP staff members are involved with local civic, community, and governmental agencies involved in assisting with and eradicating the homeless situation among veterans. North Carolina has six (6) major metro areas throughout the state: Asheville, Charlotte, Greensboro, Raleigh/Durham, Fayetteville, and Wilmington where the DVOP coordinates with the local Veterans Administration, Homeless Shelters, Competitive Grantees in Asheville and in Durham/Fayetteville, surrounding American Job Centers, Veteran Service Organizations, and Local Government to conduct Homeless Veteran Stand Down each year.

North Carolina has six (6) military facilities. DVOP staff are stationed at both Ft. Bragg and Camp Lejeune as a point of contact for referral of qualified disabled veterans. We also partner with the VA, and many other state and private companies to optimize employment opportunities for disabled veterans. The success of the JVSG Program is monitored daily by American Job Center Managers and management at all levels with the use of monthly and quarterly automated reports.

## 8. ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

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 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance Review Checklist to ensure 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. The certification criteria are reevaluated with each 3-year certification cycle, the current NCWorks Career Center Certification Criteria was approved by the NCWorks Commission on May 17, 2017. Due to the changes in service delivery associated with the pandemic, the NCWorks Commission was granted a one-year waiver (through December 31, 2022), by USDOL to research all the new virtual service strategies being implemented in the career centers throughout the state. The commission will include these virtual service strategies in the new NCWorks Career Center Certification Criteria.

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. 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:

- Entrance and exit must be accessible and free of obstacles with appropriate signage.
- Pedestrian routes inside the host agency facility must be accessible and free of obstacles.
- 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.
- Furniture inside the Center must be arranged to allow wheelchair access.
- Computer and desk workstations must be wheelchair accessible.
- Restrooms must be appropriately accessible.
- Auxiliary aids and services must be available upon request as are interpreter services for ESL customers.
- Emergency drills are to be conducted annually and staff is to be provided with host agency procedures.
- Adequate accessible parking with compliant curb ramp(s) connected to the accessibility route into the Center(s). Accessible parking must be clearly marked.

NCWorks Career Centers are monitored and reviewed every three 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.

During program year 2019, NCWorks Career Center staff received training to follow established procedures to ensure inclusion and programmatic accessibility to center services. This training allows for 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 are 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.

All NC Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act providers describe their plan for their ability to serve eligible individuals with disability including with learning disabilities. This plan is shared with their local One-Stop Center. Title II providers have career pathways programs designed for students with intellectual disabilities. The NCCCS Associate Director, Disability Services supports all Title II programs in serving students with disabilities and providing guidance and professional development. All services and access to these services will be clearly defined and outlined in the One-Stop core partner MOU.

The 58 Community Colleges have at least one Disability Services staff on their campuses that support and provide reasonable accommodations to all qualified students with disabilities. This includes students who are blind or visually impaired, deaf, or hard of hearing that may require specific accommodations based on their disability. The Disability Services staff works with faculty, staff, and students to transform their courses, programs and services to a virtual format utilizing various assistive technologies in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure equal access for all students. Disability Services staff also posted virtual office hours on their websites to support current students with disabilities and to enroll new students on their caseloads to respond to the growing emotional/mental, physical, and learning needs of the student population.

DVRS Staff Adjustments to Address Service Delivery During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- DVRS Services remained available to consumers during the pandemic through offices remaining open to the public with modified staffing patterns and some telework. CDC safety precautions utilized to protect staff and consumers.

- DVRS Staff were provided and received training on technology needed to provide remote services when needed, on COVID-19 vaccine and testing resources as well as helpful pandemic related resources to share with their clients.

- Cloth masks and hand sanitizer made available in all offices for consumers and staff.

- In-person service delivery continued during the pandemic with adjustments made to ensure safety for staff and consumers.

DVRS Adjustments to Services to Persons with Disabilities During the COVID-19 Pandemic

- Collaborated with community resources to make support available to ESL learners.
- Utilized various virtual platforms to communicate with consumers and afford them access to services.
- Increased remote capabilities in local offices.
- Created separate interview spaces in all offices to maintain COVID-19 safety protocols.
- Adjusted funding to support virtual service delivery to all consumers receiving services from providers such as Pre-ETS, Supported Employment and Job Preparation and Placement services.
- Developed remote employment skills classes for consumers and provided virtual training and awareness services to employers.
- Continued internships for college students remotely and developed new paid internship opportunities for DVRS consumers to work remotely and in person in various capacities within the agency (DVRS) and the state government.
- Correspondence in English, Spanish and large print when needed mailed to DVRS consumers making them aware of various resources and COVID-19 information.
- Policy adjustments and contract amendments made to assure access to services during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- WorkSource East & WorkSource West (DVRS Job Training Centers) developed remote classes to assure continuation of services.

DVRS Contribution to Statewide Emergency Pandemic Response

- Letters mailed to DVRS consumers to provide information about Hope4NC Helpline resources (provided in both Spanish and Large Print versions when needed)
- DVRS Staff volunteered at mass vaccination sites.
- Participated in community education on COVID-19 safety and vaccination.
- DVRS Staff organized and delivered over 2 million KN-95 masks Statewide to Department of Social Services offices and local Health Department offices.
- Statewide Rehabilitation Council meetings switched to virtual platform resulting in a 50% attendance improvement.
- DVRS Staff assisted in the orchestration and coordination at mass vaccination and testing sites to include assessing sites for accessibility.

## 9. ADDRESSING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

North Carolina's One-Stop delivery system is able to meet the needs of our English language learners through our Limited English Proficiency (LEP) program. LEP is operated from the

Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) state office using the Applicant Services Unit and a LEP Coordinator. DWS has established policy for providing LEP services to all customers who do not speak English as their primary language. The goal is to deliver the same level of high-quality services to all our customers, even those with LEP.

The LEP state Coordinator is responsible for the following:

- distributing policy to all One Stops or NCWorks Career Centers;
- establishing procedures for serving LEP customers;
- training new NCWorks Career Center staff and providing annual training to keep Career Center staff current on action needed to serve LEP customers ;
- providing Technical Assistance to NCWorks Career Center staff concerning serving LEP customers;
- establishing and regularly updating the LEP Directory, the directory provides a list of persons (DWS and non-DWS) who speak various languages that can be contacted for assistance with LEP customers; monitoring services provided to LEP customers; documenting and Reporting LEP services provided; and
- developing webinars outlining LEP procedures.

In addition to the state LEP Coordinator, all NCWorks Career Centers have a designated LEP Specialist who is the resource person for the center concerning steps to take when serving a LEP customer.

All NC Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act providers describe their ability to be responsive to needs of English Language Learners. Programs have multilingual outreach plans and develop staff's cultural competencies. Activities Title II will collaborate with core partners to ensure English Language Learners (ELL) have access to their services:

- Title II will train One -Stop staff on their services and programs for ELL emphasizing the availability of online, hybrid, and face-to-face options for program delivery and telecommunication and virtual platforms for outreach services.
- One-Stops and partners will develop a tracking system to identify number of ELL accessing services, referrals and follow to ensure outreach is comprehensive. To ensure the creation of a mutually beneficial information dissemination system, Title II will coordinate regularly with partners to share information about services rendered to ELL.
- Title II and One Stops will revise the MOU to clearly outline access and referral process for Title II services for ELL.
- All programs offering Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) will outline in the MOU how core partners will refer and support ELL including the use of training vouchers for programs. IELCE providers will collaborate with MOU core partners to offer holistic services to ELL including developing a sustainable pipeline for career placement and incumbent worker career advancement, providing holistic wrap around services using telecommunications and virtual platforms, and expanding employer networks.

## IV. COORDINATION WITH STATE PLAN PROGRAMS

*WIOA State Steering Council:*

The NCWorks Commission's 2021-2023 strategic plan provides a framework for all workforce programs in North Carolina, including, but not limited to the programs covered under WIOA. The State Steering Council also identified key actions needed to ensure coordination and alignment.

In collaboration with the NCWorks Commission, the WIOA State Steering Council, initially established in 2015 continues as a permanent cross-agency body to coordinate and align policy and ensure continued implementation of WIOA at state and local levels. The steering council will meet quarterly to review progress on WIOA implementation and develop strategies for improvement. In addition, the council will assist NCWorks Commission to review state policies that may inhibit programs from fully aligning required activities. The council will plan site visits to assess coordination of services to be able to provide meaningful assessments and recommendations to the NCWorks Commission and its Governance and System Alignment committee regarding challenges and barriers to completing the work, and suggestions for new policy.

State-level coordination and alignment will continue to 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.

*NC DHHS Program Coordination Activities:*

Since January 2018, North Carolina Division of Social Services has been collaborating as a participant in a cohort that is sponsored by the United States Department of Agriculture. The cohort is comprised of participants of the following programs: Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)/Work First Program and Food and Nutrition Services Employment &Training (FNS E&T). This opportunity allows North Carolina's Employment Services Programs to collaborate to produce a sound plan for unemployed and underemployed citizens of North Carolina. As a state, the decision was made to include the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) in the cohort, since DVRS has a wide range of employment services that are needed by these underserved and underemployed individuals. To maximize the 12-week cohort period, representatives from the NC Division of Social Services and WIOA partners interfaced regularly to design an employment plan that will foster further collaboration, which in turn will lead to a dynamic, comprehensive plan in line with the NC DHHS goal of strengthening and expanding the workforce through effectively addressing the health and wellbeing of workers and their families. In addition to producing a plan for statewide implementation, the WIOA/TANF (NC Work First)/FNS E&T cohort expectation is for each participating program to include methods to leverage and braid funding to attain ultimate outcomes. To provide guidance to the work of this group, an aligned vision statement was produced. That statement is "*By July 2020, WIOA, TANF, FNS E&T and VR will leverage and integrate resources, where appropriate and applicable, to provide a network of services for citizens that will strengthen North Carolina's workforce*". Using this declaration as the goal, the State Cohort Team was able to identify three top strategies that need to be addressed; 1) interagency communication; 2) streamlining processes and removing redundancies and; 3) creating a multi-generational approach to effectively address long-term poverty. The work of this group continues in the form of the NC Employment Cohort which includes all original members and the Division of Workforce Solutions, NC Community College Systems Office, and the Workforce Development Boards.

## V. COMMON ASSURANCES (FOR ALL CORE PROGRAMS)

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| 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; | Yes |
| 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; | Yes |
| 3. The lead State agencies with optimal policy-making authority and 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; | Yes |
| 4. (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 administrating the core programs, required one-stop partners and the other Combined Plan programs (if included in the State Plan), other primary stakeholders, including other organizations that provide services to individuals with barriers to employment, and the general public, and that the Unified or Combined State Plan is available and accessible to the general public;<br>(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; | Yes |
| 5. 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 the core programs to carry out workforce development activities; | Yes |

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| 6. The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with uniform administrative requirements in this Act, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the uniform administrative requirements under WIOA section 184(a)(3); | Yes |
| 7. The State has taken the appropriate action to be in compliance with WIOA section 188, Nondiscrimination, as applicable; | Yes |
| 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; | Yes |
| 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; | Yes |
| 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); | Yes |
| 11. Service providers have a referral process in place for directing Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) to DVOP services, when appropriate; and | Yes |
| 12. Priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses is provided in accordance with 38 USC 4215 in all workforce preparation, development or delivery of programs or services funded directly, in whole or in part, by the Department of Labor. | Yes |

# VI. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

## PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT, DISLOCATED WORKER, AND YOUTH ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE I-B

### A. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

#### 1. REGIONS AND LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AREAS

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 after 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. The regions with their constituent local workforce development areas are:

- Western Region: Southwestern, and Mountain Area WDBs;
- Northwest Region: High Country, Western Piedmont, and Foothills WDBs;
- Piedmont Triad Region: Piedmont Triad Regional, GuilfordWorks, DavidsonWorks, and Regional Partnership WDBs;
- Southwest Region: Centralina, Charlotte Works, 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: Rivers East, Northeastern, and Turning Point WDBs; and
- Southeast Region: Eastern Carolina and Cape Fear WDBs.

The process for the initial designation and subsequent 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. With respect to requests for new local area designations, Commission Policy Statement 03-2022 Transfer of County(ies), which can be found at: CPS 03-2022 Local Workforce Development Area Transfer of County(ies) Policy, has been approved and issued by the NCWorks Commission. This policy outlines the processes and procedures for the realignment or designation of a local area.

Sustained Fiscal Integrity, with respect to a local area, means there has not been a violation of one or more of the following during the previous two program years:

1. A formal determination that either the WIOA Title I grant recipient or the administrative entity of

the local area mis-expended funds provided under Subtitle B due to willful disregard of the

requirements of the provision involved,

2. gross negligence, or
3. failure to comply with accepted standards of administration. Local areas must adhere to the

uniform administrative requirements set forth in Title 2 CFR Part 200 and Title 29 CFR Parts 95 and

97. The state takes into consideration timely reporting of WIOA participant and expenditure data,

timely completion and submission of the required annual single audit, previous monitoring

reports, and any other documentation needed to make the determination.

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, continued realigning 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 economic development 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. The Governor's NC Job Ready plan focuses on employer leadership and a strong relationship between regional economic development partners and local workforce development areas to achieve his vision for the state.

In Program Year 2014, the State determined regional configurations based on regional geography, existing workforce board structure, and labor market areas. The regional designations were discussed with local workforce board staff on numerous occasions during Program Year 2014. Each Local Workforce Development Area submitted Local Area' Regional Plans using these designations. Each Plan was submitted with the approval of its Chief Local Elected Officials and followed the process established for public comment.

There have been no changes to any local area structure or regional economic development structure since the WIOA 2020 Unified State Plan was submitted and approved.

A regional framework enables Local Workforce Development Areas to better align with North Carolina's regional economic development efforts:

- Identify the workforce needs of businesses, job seekers and workers, current and projected employment opportunities, and job skills necessary to obtain employment;
- Address the workforce issues of businesses and individuals on a labor market basis;
- Detail coordination with community colleges and universities;
- Provide a customer-focused coordinated approach to delivery of training, employment services and economic development;
- Promote effective and efficient use of resources;
- Articulate a consistent and defined regional approach to workforce development.

Stronger alignment between regional economic development and local boards has been a priority. In November 2021, the NCWorks Commission announced it would conduct a study to recommend whether the current local areas in North Carolina should be realigned. We currently anticipate a public comment period will occur in Spring 2022, the Commission to vote on its recommendations in May 2022, and that Chief Local Elected Officials will determine how to implement the recommendations locally in summer 2022.

In Program Year 2014, the State determined regional configurations based on regional geography, existing workforce board structure, and labor market areas. The regional designations were discussed with local workforce board staff on numerous occasions during Program Year 2014. Each Local Workforce Development Area submitted Local Area' Regional Plans using these designations. Each Plan was submitted with the approval of its Chief Elected Officials and followed the process established for public comment. These designated regional configurations continue to be used and reflect compatibility with the North Carolina Jobs Plan, issued December 2013 that contains recommended strategies for economic growth during the years 2014 – 2024.

The established regional framework enables Local Areas to better:

- Promote effective and efficient use of resources;
- Align with North Carolina's regional economic development efforts;

- Identify the workforce needs of businesses, job seekers and workers, current and projected employment opportunities and job skills necessary to obtain employment;
- Address the workforce issues of businesses and individuals on a labor market basis;
- Detail coordination with community colleges and universities;
- Provide a customer-focused coordinated approach to delivery of training, employment services and economic development; and
- Articulate a consistent and defined regional approach to workforce development.

Successful performance and sustained fiscal integrity are critical to the success of WIOA programs, and are managed by two units within the Division of Workforce Solutions. The Performance Unit manages the local workforce board annual allocation process as well as the performance metrics established by US DOL and the NCWorks Commission. Policy Statement 11-2020 https://www.nccommerce.com/documents/workforce-policy-ps-11-2020-defining-workforce-innovation-and-opportunity-act-wioa provides guidance to local workforce boards on performance goals and expectations. This DWS policy statement mandates that Boards must meet or exceed all the individual Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I Youth, Adult, and Dislocated Worker federal performance measures. The Performance team uses the "FutureWorks" software platform to track and report performance data on each of the 23 local workforce boards to USDOL.

The Accountability Unit conducts annual monitoring visits to all 23 local workforce development boards in North Carolina. This monitoring team conducts both programmatic and financial monitoring to ensure compliance with all US DOL and state policies and regulations. Summary reports of all monitoring visits are reviewed by DWS executive leadership for final approval.

At the conclusion of the initial two-year designation, North Carolina conducted a review process for subsequent designation per Section 106(b)(3) of WIOA. Also, North Carolina has in place legal contracts with each entity known as Grant Administrative Agreements. These Agreements are between the Division of Workforce Solutions of the North Carolina Department of Commerce, as designee of the Governor of North Carolina under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), Public Law 113-128 and Local Grant Administrator. This Agreement is entered into to facilitate the transfer of federal funds received by the State under the Act. Unless terminated by law or one of the parties, the Agreement remains in effect year to year that the State receives funding under the Act.

Appeals are not necessarily required since at any point in time, Chief Local Elected Officials may generally request to make changes to their composition when considering the case for improved regionalism and performance by submitting a written request to the Division of Workforce Solutions.

Commission Policy Statement 03-2022 Transfer of County(ies), which can be found at: CPS 03-2022 Local Workforce Development Area Transfer of County(ies) Policy, has been approved and issued by the NCWorks Commission. This policy outlines the processes and procedures for the realignment or designation of a local area, which includes a conflict resolution/appeals process.

In addition, North Carolina's annual Local Area Plan requires Local Workforce Development Boards to submit their Consortium Agreements, which was part of the formal request for Local Area designation with multi-county jurisdictions. This provides another opportunity to confirm the designation of the existing local area. Local Plans are written and submitted under the signature of the Chief Elected Official and Local Workforce Development Board Chair each year.

Local Workforce Boards may make an appeal at any time following the procedures in CPS 08-2021, Date: May 13, 2021, though North Carolina distributes funds promptly as required at Sec

182 (e), pending Plan approval. The DWS policy associated with infrastructure funding is OG 23-2021, Date: August 20, 2021.

With respect to appeals, CPS 08-2021 was approved by the NCWorks Commission in 2021. It establishes a comprehensive approach to the appeals process. As required under Title 20 CFR Section 683.600(d), the procedures provide a process for resolving appeals of decisions issued at the local level, a process for dealing with complaints from participants and other interested parties affected by statewide workforce programs, a process for remanding (or returning) complaints related to the Local Area WDB to the local area grievance process, an opportunity for an internal resolution and a hearing to be completed within 60 days of the filing of the complaint, and an opportunity for appeal to the Secretary under certain circumstances. Please see link to NC Commission Policy CPS 08-2021 - https://www.nccommerce.com/documents/commission-policy-cps-08-2021-customer-complaint-appeal-and-resolution-policy

## 2. STATEWIDE ACTIVITIES

NC Works Commission Policy Statements

Commission Policy | CPS 11-2021 Eligible Training Provider Guidelines, Penalties, Appeal Process and Performance Reporting

To provide eligibility criteria, biennial certification procedures, penalties, and appeals processes for implementing Eligible Training Provider (ETP) requirements in accordance with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014. These guidelines are applicable to providers of occupational skills training services for adults, dislocated workers, youth, and other populations as defined by WIOA Title 1-B.

Commission Policy | CPS 10-2021 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Nondiscrimination/Equal Opportunity Standards and Complaint Procedures

To provide Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and other subrecipients minimum standards and procedures designed to ensure that all WIOA programs will be conducted in accordance with applicable equal opportunity and nondiscrimination requirements. This policy provides current contact information and rescinds PS 07-2018.

Commission Policy | CPS 09-2021 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth Formula Funds Expenditure Requirements

To inform Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) of the requirements to meet the mandated 20% work experience expenditure rate for local WIOA Title I Youth formula funds and the mandated expenditure rate of at least 75% for local Youth formula funds used to serve out-of-school youth, as well as to rescind PS 06-2017.

Commission Policy | CPS 05-2021 NC Job Ready Workforce Investment Grants

To transmit guidelines for the NC Job Ready Workforce Investment Grants. The Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) will provide $1 million for the first year of the NC Job Ready Workforce Investment Grants. The DWS has developed policies and guidelines for reviewing and awarding NC Job Ready Workforce Investment Grants to Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) to participate in economic development activities and to foster the alignment of economic and workforce development, both priorities of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (Public Law 113-128).

Commission Policy | CPS 04-2021 Distribution of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Funding

To authorize the Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) to administer, through Operational Guidance, the distribution of WIOA funding, on behalf of the NCWorks Commission.

Commission Policy | CPS 06-2021 Guidelines for North Carolina NCWorks Career Center Code of Conduct Violations

To provide Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) with guidance and procedures for NCWorks Career Center staff to follow regarding customer behaviors that violate the NCWorks Career Center Code of Conduct and for the suspension and banishment of customers from NCWorks Career Centers and to rescind PS 02-2019.

Commission Policy | CPS 07-2021 Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker (MSFW) Complaint System and Appeal Policy Procedures

To establish and implement the Complaint System and Appeal Policy Procedures addressing Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker (MSFW) complaints as mandated by the U.S. Department of Labor.

Commission Policy | CPS 08-2021 Customer Complaint, Appeal, and Resolution Policy

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) mandates that each State and Local Area Workforce Development Board (WDB) establish and maintain procedures for WIOA-related complaints. As required under Title 20 CFR Section 683.600(d), State procedures must provide a process for resolving appeals of decisions issued at the local level, a process for dealing with complaints from participants and other interested parties affected by statewide workforce programs, a process for remanding (or returning) complaints related to the Local Area WDB to the local area grievance process, an opportunity for an internal resolution and a hearing to be completed within 60 days of the filing of the complaint, and an opportunity for appeal to the Secretary under certain circumstances.

Commission Policy | CPS 01-2021 Local Workforce Board Sanctions and Appeal Policy

To establish and implement the State Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) sanctions policy and appeal processes for all subrecipients of federal grant awards and state grants, where applicable, as mandated by the US Department of Labor (USDOL).

Commission Policy | CPS 02-2021 Status and Use of Current Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) Policy Statements

To clarify the status and use of current DWS Policy Statements during the transition of policies according to NCWorks Commission Policy Statement (CPS) 01-2020.

Commission Policy | CPS 03-2021 Updates to Local and Regional Area Plan Instructions for Program Year 2021

To transmit the N.C. Division of Workforce Solutions' (DWS) PY 2021 Local and Regional Area Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Plan Instructions.

Commission Policy | CPS 01-2020 NCWorks Commission Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Policy Making Authority

To clarify the policymaking role of the NCWorks Commission and the operational guidance role of the NC Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS); and to adjust the official method of issuing and disseminating procedural, administrative, management, and program directions to Division staff, Local Workforce Development Boards and other interested parties.

Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) Operational Guidance

Operational Guidance | OG 22-2021, Change 1 On-the-Job Training (OJT) Using Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Funds

This change to Operational Guidance 22-2021 updates the Employer Criteria (assurance 1.e.) detailed in the OJT General Assurances of Attachment C, Employer Agreement and rescinds OG 22-2021.

Operational Guidance | OG 16-2021, Change 1 Defining Data Validation Process and Procedures

To define the data validation process and procedures to be used for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Adult, WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker (DW), WIOA Title I Youth, WIOA Title III Wagner-Peyser (WP), and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) programs.

This update reflects updated procedures for who is performing the validation, how the validation will be conducted including the timing of the validation, and the assignment of Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) elements amongst the validators and rescinds OG 16-2021.

Operational Guidance | OG 28-2021 Finish Line Grants (FLGs) Guidelines

To provide guidance and instructions to Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and North Carolina Community College partners with regards to Finish Line Grants funded by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Operational Guidance │ OG 27-2021 Priority of Service for Adults

To provide guidance to Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) on the requirements for providing priority of service to all covered persons and identified populations.

Operational Guidance | OG 26-2021 Employer Accounts and Job Order Procedures

To provide protocols and procedures regarding the Division of Workforce Solutions' (DWS) Employer Accounts and Job Orders and to rescind PS 02-2016.

This Operational Guidance has been converted from the previous DWS policy format and the procedures contained herein supersedes all previous policy, procedures, and guidelines. Minor edits have been made for clarification and consistency.

Operational Guidance | OG 24-2021 Guidance on the Provision of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Work Experience (WEX) Opportunities

To provide Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) guidance regarding the use, documentation, and tracking of WIOA Title I funds in the provision of WEX opportunities for youth, adult, and dislocated worker participants.

This Operational Guidance rescinds Policy Statement PS 10-2017 and clarifies that Local Area WDBs have two years to expend current program year Title I Youth formula funds and attain a 20% expenditure rate. This Operational Guidance and the procedures herein supersede all previous policy, procedures, and guidelines regarding WEX Opportunities.

Operational Guidance | OG 25-2021 Pseudo Social Security Numbers (SSNs)

The purpose is to provide guidance that establishes the procedures regarding the use of Pseudo SSNs for performance reporting of participants enrolled in Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) programs.

Operational Guidance | OG 05-2021, Change 1 Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) NCWorks Mobile Career Center No Cost Usage Agreement and Fee-for-Use Schedule

To provide updated guidance on the DWS NCWorks Mobile Career Center's no cost usage agreement and fee-for-use schedule and to rescind OG 05-2021. This guidance has been updated to address use of the DWS NCWorks Mobile Career Center.

Operational Guidance | OG 23-2021 NCWorks Career Center Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Partner Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA)

To provide guidance on the required NCWorks Career Center MOU and IFA.

This Operational Guidance and the procedures contained herein supersedes all previous policy, procedures, and guidelines regarding the NCWorks Career Center MOU and IFA.

Operational Guidance | OG 21-2021 Funds Transfer Between Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

To issue the requirements for the transfer of local WIOA formula funds between Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs and to rescind PS 10-2016.

Operational Guidance | OG 08-2021, Change 1 2021 Lower Living Standard Income Level (LLSIL)

To transmit the PY2021 income chart identifying the higher of the "Federal Poverty Level Income Guidelines" and the "70% LLSIL Guidelines" for the year revising the WIOA "disadvantaged youth and disadvantaged adult" reference, in addition to correcting the funding level listed for Family of Two Metropolitan, as well as to rescind OG 08-2021

Operational Guidance | OG 20-2021 Employer Services Grant Funds Policy Guidance and Application

To provide Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) with funding that supports the increase in the number of businesses and employers utilizing the NCWorks system through the provision of solution-based services and to rescind PS 15-2020.

Operational Guidance | OG 19-2021 Priority of Service for Veterans and Eligible Spouses in all U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) Job Training Programs

To emphasize to staff of Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) offices, and NCWorks Career Centers provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Final Rule for Priority in all federally-funded training and employment programs as prescribed in the Jobs for Veterans Act, to provide instruction on the implementation of the provisions, and to rescind PS 03-2017.

Operational Guidance | OG 18-2021 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Supportive Services Guidance

To provide guidance on the use of WIOA funds for supportive services to eligible participants enrolled in WIOA Title I Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs and to rescind PS 10-2020.

Operational Guidance | OG 17-2021 Electronic File Storage and Protecting Personally Identifiable Information (PII)

To provide guidance on the use of electronic file storage, protecting PII and retrieval of workforce and other federal funds' participant, program and financial documents and to rescind PS 08-2017.

Operational Guidance | OG 15-2021 Local Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Workforce Development Program Year 2021 Allocations

The purpose is to transmit WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth Activities Program Allotments for Program Year (PY) 2021.

Operational Guidance | OG 13-2021 Use of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Funds and Federal Pell Grants

To provide information on the use of WIOA resources when combined with Federal Pell Grants and to rescind PS 08-2018.

Operational Guidance | OG 14-2021 Definition of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act's (WIOA) "Requires Additional Assistance" for Youth Eligibility

To provide North Carolina's definition for "requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment" as it relates to eligibility for youth at WIOA Sections 129 (a)(1)(B)(iii)(VIII), (a)(1)(C)(iv)(VII), and (a)(3)(B), and to rescind PS 10-2018.

Operational Guidance | OG 12-2021 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Youth Initiative Grant Application

To transmit guidelines for the WIOA Youth Initiative Grant Application. The Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) has developed a systematic approach to reviewing and approving Local Area Workforce Development Board (WDB) requests for funding to support enhanced Youth WIOA services.

Operational Guidance | OG 11-2021 Voluntary Transfer of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Funds

To transmit procedures for voluntary transfers of WIOA funds between Local Workforce Development Areas (Local Areas) and to rescind PS 09-2016.

Operational Guidance | OG 10-2021 Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion Guidance

To provide Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) formal guidance regarding Rapid Response and Layoff Aversion.

Operational Guidance | OG 09-2021 Guidance on Eligibility for Participation in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Dislocated Worker Program

To provide guidance on eligibility for participation in the WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker Program and to rescind PS 14-2020.

Operational Guidance | OG 07-2021 Revised Local Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Workforce Development Program Year 2020 Allocations

To transmit adjusted WIOA funding levels for Program Year (PY) 2020 Dislocated Worker Local Area Allocations under WIOA Title I Section 132(c) and to rescind PS 06-2020.

Operational Guidance| OG 06-2021 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Wagner-Peyser Employment Act Participant Eligibility Reference Guide

To update the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Wagner-Peyser Employment Act Participant Eligibility Reference Guide and to rescind PS 04-2020, Change 2.

Operational Guidance | OG 03-2021 Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Co-enrollment with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Dislocated Worker Programs

To introduce strategies to strengthen participant outcomes for TAA and WIOA participants by increasing access to multiple services to benefit the long-term success of program participants through simultaneous admission known as co-enrollment (20 CFR 618.600).

Operational Guidance | OG 04-2021 Revised Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program Participant Transportation Operational Guidance

To transmit the revised Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Participant Transportation Policy for Training, Job Search Allowance and Relocation Allowance Reimbursement and to rescind PS 01-2019.

Operational Guidance | OG 02-2021 Guidance for Local Incumbent Worker Grants

To provide operational guidance on Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) guidelines in WIOA Section 134(d)(4) to Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) choosing to use up to 20% of the combined Adult and Dislocated Worker allocated formula program funds to pay for employees' training and to rescind Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) PS 13-2020.

Operational Guidance | OG 01-2021 Utilization of Certified Historically Underutilized Businesses

To provide guidance on how Local Area Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) may take advantage of services provided by the North Carolina Historically Underutilized Businesses (NC HUB) Office and to help meet statewide utilization goals.

North Carolina will use state set aside funding to support the key goals and strategies laid out in NCWorks Commission's strategic plan and move forward with the Governor's Vision for workforce development.

- Sector strategies and business engagement. Funds will be available to help develop and support public-private partnership, increase number of registered apprenticeship programs, and cross-training of staff across programs.
- Work Based Learning staffing grants at the local level to enhance work experience, OJT, and related activities.
- Career center improvements. Funds will be used to update and improve outreach materials, technology upgrades, and staff training.
- Finish Line Grants to assist students with supportive services to insure they finish their credentialed coursework.
- American Job Center Network Branding to maintain compliance with US DOL outreaching criteria.

Upon receipt of any information as it pertains to a mass layoff or facility closure to include notices filed in compliance to WARN, the state Rapid Response Dislocated Worker Unit makes an initial telephone contact to the employer within 48 hours to schedule a management meeting with the employer and Chief Union Official, if applicable. The purpose of the management meeting is to develop a plan of action to ensure that workers have a smooth and successful transition into new employment through a collaborative effort of support from state, regional and local partners. Rapid Response funds are utilized at the state level. Rapid Response contingency funds are available to Workforce Development Boards to assist with a dislocation when local formula funds have been expended or obligated. The Rapid Response Dislocated Worker Unit can help prevent or avert a layoff from any industry by providing a company with an Incumbent Worker Training Grant. North Carolina's "Business Edge" program helps distressed or challenged businesses avert or prevent layoffs. Led by the State and is a partnership with the local Workforce Development Boards, Small Business & Technology Development Center (SBTDC), NCSU Industry Expansion Solutions (IES), NC Community Colleges and Certified Turnaround Professionals, the goal is to provide support to at risk companies to keep manufacturers running and workers in these jobs.

Led by the NC Department of Commerce, the North Carolina Disaster Recovery Task Force was established and comprised of partners from the Small Business Administration, NC Rural Center, NC Community College System, Small Business and Technology Development Center, NC Office of Recovery and Resilience, and Golden Leaf Foundation. The task force is charged with helping small businesses and the community successful emerge from natural disasters. In the

event of a natural disaster, the Division of Workforce Solutions and its Rapid Response team works closely with Workforce Development Boards, USDOL Employment and Training Administration, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and American Red Cross to ensure available resources are provided to dislocated workers and survivors of a natural disaster. The Division can file a National Dislocated Worker Grant as well as provide guidance and/or financial assistance to help impacted communities in organizing support for dislocated workers and meeting the basic needs of their families. Such assistance may include providing heat, shelter, food, clothing and other necessities and services. The Rapid Response Team coordinates with partner agencies to dispatch the mobile career classroom to serve as hub to help small businesses and further assist survivors in locating missing family members or file a claim for Disaster Unemployment Assistance.

The state Rapid Response Dislocated Worker Unit works closely with the state's Trade Adjustment Assistance Unit, which keeps staff apprised of new TAA petitions filed. Information on how to file a petition for TAA is provided to all companies faced with either a mass layoff or facility closure and is part of the employer packet provided to the management team at the initial rapid response meeting. If the company is impacted due to foreign competition or discloses their plans to shift production to another country, then information on the Trade Program is shared. If the company is already certified or becomes certified for TAA while workers are still employed, then Trade orientation sessions are facilitated on–site so workers will understand the expanded benefits the Trade Program offers.

Information about Trade Act Programs is disseminated to impacted individuals in several ways. A press release is provided to the Department of Commerce Public Information Officer, which is then distributed to the appropriate media market. When a Trade petition is certified while employees are/have been released from employment, Division staff contact the trade affected employer and ask them to provide a list with contact information of their incumbent and dislocated workers. These workers are mailed a letter that outlines the types of benefits available and advises them of potential eligibility, and they are instructed to contact their local NCWorks Career Center to complete the required application. This letter includes NCWorks Career Center locations and phone numbers.

Workers are co–enrolled into WIOA to receive timely and individualized career services as well as the wrap around supportive services not offered through the Trade Program.

## B. ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKERS PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

### 1. WORK-BASED TRAINING MODELS

The Division of Workforce Solutions encourages Local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) to emphasize all aspects of work-based learning as part of its engagement with businesses throughout the business lifecycle, including OJT, IWT, apprenticeships, internships, and customized training. Local area workforce boards utilize formula funding to fund Local Incumbent Worker training programs, On the Job Training and internships.

North Carolina's Incumbent Worker Training is branded as a service that the local WDB's may use to assist meeting the demand to up-skill the existing workforce in the area of technical and essential skills, leadership and professional development and desired or required certifications. On-the-Job training (OJT) has successfully been paired with apprenticeship programs in some regions to provide more technical assistance to employers for workforce development and adult education

In addition, DWS partners with the NC Community College System to develop customized training programs for an employer's incumbent workers, as well as provide apprenticeship training and education. All training programs are designed to meet the special requirements of an employer (including a group of employers) to retain a skilled workforce or avert the need to lay off employees by assisting the workers in obtaining the skills necessary to retain employment.

To further assist employers and employees, Customized Training includes WDB staff assistance by providing funding for the employer to provide workforce training. This type of training becomes accessible which would otherwise not be available to many employers given the restrictions for Customized Training funds provided through the NC Community College System.

In addition to the programs already mention, WDBs have participated in Manufacturing Day along with the Manufacturing Institute and Creators Wanted MFG Day event, created Virtual Career Marketplace events featuring numerous manufacturing employers and a monthly exercise of contacting a provided list of key industry sector employers. Workforce Development Boards have partnered with County Economic Development, NC Department of Commerce-Division of Workforce Solutions, and NC State Industry Expansion Solutions to formulate plans aimed at helping companies to serve new markets amid challenges from the impact of COVID-19.

Local apprenticeship programs have been developed with companies such as Columbus McKinnon and Power Curbers by WDBs and NCWorks staff working in partnership as effective business intermediaries. Workforce Boards Business Services teams offer informational virtual meetings for employers providing trends and pertinent business developments within a region.

Our layoff aversion program, Business Edge, has seen a growing need for IWT to upskill employees in new technologies and operations to keep their businesses relevant and competitive. The benefits of this can result in new jobs being created where OJT can be offered, where applicable, alongside Federal Bonding and Work Opportunity Tax Credits. Specific Business Services funding has been awarded in the past, and continues in PY20, to local area workforce boards to support the emphasis of work-based learning models.

Local Workforce Board staff guide candidate businesses in the application processes, ensuring that quality training is customized to address the employees' identified skills gaps, and fits within the WIOA parameters. The application processes include validation of trainers and asks companies 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.

Similar to other in-person services provided by workforce development boards, COVID-19 impacted the ability to deliver the aforementioned work-based learning training models. Business closures, social distance requirements and supply issues all posed challenges to the standard delivery model of these services. As the vaccination rate increases, business closures decrease and the demand for labor strengthens, the State is working with partner agencies and local workforce development boards to encourage work-based learning with businesses.

To continue its primary mission of supporting NC manufacturing companies, the Business Edge program worked with local workforce development boards during the COVID-19 pandemic. A targeted contact campaign to assess the initial impact of business shutdowns was organized by Business Edge and implemented by the workforce boards. The hospitality industry was a secondary focus with similar assessment goals with cooperation of the Prosperity Zones once the initial manufacturing campaign was complete.

The manufacturing contact plan revealed some businesses capable of and willing to pivot production from their primary products to personal protection equipment. Examples range from a football helmet company producing face shields to distilleries producing hand sanitizer

to hospital bedlinen producers shifting to isolation gowns. A strategic partner, North Carolina State University's Industry Expansion Services was essential in assisting identified companies in their efforts to pivot production.

Another strategic partner, the North Carolina Community College System worked to complete specialized training with an important aviation manufacturer. The local workforce board and community college worked together to ensure training of employees in FAA mandated classes would continue during the pandemic. The continuation of training for federal certification requirements prevented delays in resuming production once quarantine mandates were lifted.

## 2. REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP

Registered Apprenticeship, Pre - Apprenticeship, and related strategies operate under the name "ApprenticeshipNC "within the North Carolina Community College System, with a combination of state and regional staff. Close relationships with the Division of Workforce Solutions, NCWorks Career Centers, Community Colleges, NC Department of Public Instruction and public schools enable the program to grow and evolve.

For example, NCWorks Career Centers and the Community College System are working to develop Pre - Apprenticeships for local employers. The career centers will assist with conducting assessments, providing referrals and screening potential apprentices for Pre - Apprenticeship. The Pre-Apprenticeship provides pre-employment training as determined by the employer so that a talent pipeline of workers is created for employers to choose from. Those that successfully complete their Pre-Apprenticeship will go on to a Youth Apprenticeship or a Registered Apprenticeship. High School students that are registered in a Pre-Apprenticeship or a Registered Apprenticeship while in high school and continue into the registered apprenticeship after graduation, will have their tuition waived at a local community college. WIOA funds will be used for those eligible to assist with training needs for the apprentice.

North Carolina is also utilizing public/private partnerships to grow its Registered 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. Another sector strategy is in the area of IT Registered 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 Registered Apprenticeship program.

Additionally, because the US Military is the second largest employer in the state, Fort Bragg has an approved Registered Apprenticeship program to register soldiers in multiple apprenticeable occupations. Camp Lejeune has a pipe fitting/welder Pre-Apprenticeship program that enables Marines to receive training and at successful completion to receive credentials upon transitioning out of the service. Upon graduation from their pre-apprenticeship, the Marine transitions out of the military into civilian life with direct entry to a career with an employer to complete their Registered Apprenticeship. We are looking at connecting more employers to those transitioning out of the service so that more can not only receive nationally recognized credentials but have possible direct entry into employment as they exit the military.

ApprenticeshipNC also works 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. The youth are enrolled into a pre-apprenticeship and upon graduation transition directly into a career with an employer to complete the Registered Apprenticeship. Companies also have the option of beginning with a Youth Apprenticeship for those that begin in high school.

Additionally, apprenticeship staff work in partnership with local workforce development boards to assist employers in finding potential apprentices. NCWorks 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. This integration with NCWorks Career Centers is helping to meet the demand for much needed apprentices. This process is creating models within the state to integrate not only the NCWorks Career Centers, but Community Based Organizations. NCWorks is assisting with recruiting and screening potential apprentices for the employer, in addition to screening for benefits being offered through the center. This model provides braided funding from all entities so that the apprentice and employer are able to benefit from the services available. This has also created the opportunity for outreach to students in middle school about apprenticeships and the many career opportunities that are available. It also has enabled the ability to reach out to a more diverse population so that all have an equal opportunity.

## 3. TRAINING PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY PROCEDURE

The workforce development system, established under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), emphasizes informed customer choice, job-driven training, provider performance, and continuous improvement. The selection of legitimate training providers and quality training programs is vital to achieving these core principles.

The United States Department of Labor (USDOL) has issued guidance that requires states to collect and report performance information on all individuals and WIOA Title I Core Program participants (of Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Programs) served by each program on the state list of Eligible Training Providers (ETP List). The requirements for ETP reporting can be found in WIOA section 116(d)(4) and 116(d)(6)(B) and in the WIOA Joint & Department of Labor Only Final Rules at 20 CFR 677.230 and 20 CFR 680.490. Beginning with Program Year 2021, North Carolina will be required to collect and submit performance data on all individuals for each Eligible Training Provider and their approved training programs.

North Carolina is charged with ensuring that data elements related to the initial application, continued eligibility, and performance information regarding approved training providers and programs are entered into the supported state system, NCWorks Online.

**Eligible Training Provider Determination Process**

1. **Qualifications for Training Providers:**

1. **Licensing/Accreditation**

Eligible Training Providers must be licensed by the appropriate North Carolina or federal licensing authority, as required by both North Carolina and federal law. Training providers must be in good standing and compliant with all other State and federal regulatory agencies including:

- In instances where specific occupations have governing boards that issue licenses, such as the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services – Division of Health Service Regulation, North Carolina Department of Motor Vehicles, Training providers must be licensed by the appropriate governing board to offer training for the occupation.

- Private post-secondary institutions must be approved by a federal or North Carolina authority such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Licensed/Accredited Training Providers not eligible to be on the ETPL include, but are not limited to:

- Training providers that are debarred by State or federal government during the debarment period;
- Private post-secondary training providers who apply for a NC Proprietary license and are denied licensure due to the determination that the training program is not vocational in nature after vetting conducted by the NC Community Colleges.

2. **Business Requirements**

- Training providers must be a legal entity, registered to do business in the State of North Carolina.
- Training providers must have provided training services during all of the 12 months prior to applying for the ETPL and have a proven track record of students successfully completing its programs. Note: this provision does not apply to Registered Apprenticeship programs.
- Training providers are required to have refund policies specifying when refunds for tuition and other costs associated with the training program will be allowed. Refund policies that indicate that no refunds will be made are not acceptable. Refund policies must be written and published so that students are aware of how to request a refund.
- Training providers must have a grievance policy which provides for due process to allow students to file complaints with an organization against faculty, staff, or other employees. Grievance policies must be written and published so that students are aware of how to file a complaint.
- Training providers must have a form of general liability insurance. General Liability Insurance is defined as a standard insurance policy issued to business organizations to protect against liability claims for bodily injury (BI) and property damage (PD) arising out of premises, operations, products, and completed operations; and advertising and personal injury (PI) liability.
- All Public and Private providers of training services must maintain a current insurance policy for the duration of being listed as an eligible training provider per federal and state law. Upon expiration of the certificate, the provider must submit a new certificate to the DWS–ETP Coordinator.
- Training providers must establish, publish, and disseminate materials to students including, but not limited to, official catalogs and other materials. Training providers must provide to students, and to prospective students, information that is complete and accurate. The information provided must be sufficient to enable prospective students to make rational decisions about enrolling in the school and to enable enrolled students to understand their rights and responsibilities as a student in the school.
- A training provider's financial capacity must be appropriate to its scale of operations. The school must demonstrate, principally from its annual comprehensive financial statements, and from other financial information, that it has adequate capability to satisfy its contractual obligation to students, including the capability to provide the programs and services described in its official publications and to meet its financial obligations.
- Training providers must comply with non-discrimination and equal opportunity provisions of all federal and state applicable laws including, but not limited to:
- Regulations under Section 188 of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;

- 29 CFR 37, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964;
- Age Discrimination Claims Assistance Act of 1988;
- Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973;
- Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972;
- Title II Subpart A of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; and
- The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008.

3. **Necessary Documentation for Eligibility Determination**

The training provider must meet all State criteria listed in Part II numbers 1 and 2 of this policy to allow the State to make an eligibility determination, along with the necessary documentation listed below. The information requirements established mandate that a provider of training services submit appropriate, accurate, and timely information to the State, to enable the State to disseminate information that assists participants in choosing training providers. Documents to be collected and reviewed are:

- College's or Company's Accreditation (state or national);
- Legitimacy of the College or Company (must include the provider's NCID # or FEIN #);
- Most recent financial audit or financial statements for the prior six months
- Agreement for a drug-free workplace and;
- General Liability Insurance – If this expires during the Program Year, it is the responsibility of the training provider to submit the current policy.

2. **Eligible Training Provider Exemptions**

Certain training providers are not subject to the requirements of the ETP provisions, as set forth in WIOA Title I-B Section 122, because they are exempt from ETP requirements. However, it is required that such a training provider's basic information be entered in NCWorks Online.

Training services exempt from the ETP eligibility requirements include:

- **On-The-Job Training** (OJT) - Training by an employer that is provided to a paid participant while engaged in productive work in a job that provides knowledge and skills essential to the full and adequate performance of the job and is made available through an OJT program;

- **Customized Training** – Training:

- That is designed to meet the specific requirements of an employer (including a group of employers);

- That is conducted with a commitment by the employer to employ an individual upon successful completion of the training, and;
- For which the employer:
    - Pays a significant portion of the cost of training, as determined by the Local Area WDB involved, taking into account the size of the employer and such other factors as the local board determines to be appropriate, which may include the number of employees participating in training, wage and benefit levels of those employees (at present and anticipated upon completion of the training), relation of the training to the competitiveness of a participant, and other employer-provided training and advancement opportunities; and,
- In the case of customized training involving an employer with locations in multiple local areas in the State, a significant portion of the training cost, as determined by the Governor, takes into account the size of the employer and other factors as the Governor determines to be appropriate.

- **Incumbent Worker Training** – Training designed to assist workers in obtaining the skills necessary to retain employment or avert layoff;

- **Transitional Jobs** – Time-limited work experiences which are to be combined with comprehensive employment and supportive services and are to be designed to help individuals establish a work history, demonstrate success in the workplace, and develop the skills that lead to entry into and retention of unsubsidized employment;

- **Internships and Work Experience** – Planned, structured learning experience that takes place in a workplace for a limited time period. Work experience may be paid or unpaid, as appropriate. An internship or work experience may be arranged within the private (for profit) sector, the non-profit sector, or the public sector.

- Instances where the Local Area WDB provides training services through a pay-for-performance contract, or;

- When circumstances as described in WIOA Section 134(c)(3)(G)(ii) occur, and the Local Area WDB determines that:
- there are insufficient providers, or;
- there is a training services program with demonstrated effectiveness offered in the local area by a community-based organization or other private organization to serve individuals with barriers to employment, or;
- it would be most appropriate to award a contract to an institution of higher education or other eligible provider of training services in order to facilitate the training of multiple individuals in in-demand industry sectors or occupations, and such contract does not limit customer choice.

3.

All providers and programs that have not previously been eligible to provide training services under WIOA sec. 122 or WIA sec. 134, except for Registered Apprenticeship (RA) Programs, must submit required information to be considered for initial eligibility. The requirements to become an eligible training provider apply to all organizations providing WIOA Title I-B training to adults, dislocated workers, and youth with the specific exception of RAs. For RAs, under WIOA, all programs must be included upon request and maintained on the list of ETPs for as long as that program remains registered.

**State ETPL Application Process**

The State of North Carolina uses a two-tier eligibility determination approach. First, the training provider must be an eligible entity to apply for the ETPL by meeting the State's criteria listed in Part II numbers 1 and 2 of this policy. Second, the training programs offered by the training provider must meet eligibility and performance criteria to be listed on the ETPL.

Under WIOA Title I-B, a training provider must provide verifiable program-specific information based on criteria established by the State. The application process for initial eligibility on the ETPL is as follows:

1. The training provider must submit a fully completed online application via the State's website, www.ncworks.gov. Further, the provider must submit any required supporting documentation by electronically uploading such documentation into their online application.

The application will include the following required information:

- At least one or more factors for performance [refer to ETP Performance section for details on performance information];
- A description of the degree in which the training provider is in partnership with a business. This could include information about the quality and quantity of employer partnerships;
- A description of the accessibility of all training programs pertaining to physical access, programmatic process, and communications. This includes, but is not limited to, location, delivery of service, and access for individuals with barriers;
- Other documentation as needed [refer to the Qualifications for Training Providers section for other documentation information].

2. An initial review is conducted by the state's ETP Program Coordinator and/or ETP staff to determine if the training provider is an eligible entity.
3. Once the training provider is deemed eligible, the training provider will receive access to key their training program(s) into their NCWorks Online profile for review.
4. The training provider will then be instructed to submit each desired program for program review and approval via the virtual one-stop system.
5. The application is reviewed by the ETP Program Coordinator and/or ETP staff using a standard ETP Rubric.

Rubric Components include the following factors in determining a quality training program:

- Performance Data

- Partnership(s) with Employer(s)
- In-Demand Occupation/Industry
- Credential obtained upon program completion
- Accessibility of Program

6. A determination of eligibility letter will be sent electronically to the training provider.

If approved, a WIOA Eligible Training Provider Agreement and Approved Program List Addendum (ETPL Contract) is sent by the state's ETP Coordinator or ETP Staff to the provider within 30 days of the provider's application submittal.

Once the contract is signed, the State will disseminate the new program listing on the State's website and virtual one-stop system (NCWorks Online).

If denied, the training provider has the right to appeal or reapply when ready.

4. **Registered Apprenticeships & Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs**

**Registered Apprenticeship (RA)** – TEGL 13-16 defines a Registered Apprenticeship as "…a proven model of job preparation that combines paid on-the-job training (OJT) with related instruction to progressively increase workers' skill levels and wages. Registered Apprenticeship is also a business-driven model that provides an effective way for employers to recruit, train, and retain highly skilled workers. It allows employers to develop and apply industry standards to training programs, thereby increasing productivity and the quality of the workforce. As an 'earn and learn' strategy, Registered Apprenticeship offers job seekers immediate employment opportunities that pay sustainable wages and offer advancement along a career path. Graduates of Registered Apprenticeship programs receive nationally-recognized, portable credentials, and their training may be applied toward further post-secondary education."

Registered Apprenticeship Programs are not subject to the same eligibility procedures for ETPL approval. RA Programs are considered eligible, and will be added to the ETPL, if the program sponsor indicates its desire to be on the ETPL. RA Programs will remain on the ETPL for as long as the program remains registered under the National Apprenticeship Act or until the program sponsor notifies the State that it no longer wants to be included.

**Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Program (IRAP) –** In March 2020, USDOL produced Final Rule 20-386-NAT to define and give specific instructions pertaining to IRAPs. IRAPs are high-quality apprenticeship programs, recognized as such by a third-party entity under standards established by the department in the new rule. Through these programs, individuals will be able to obtain workplace-relevant training and progressively advancing skills that result in an industry-recognized credential, all while getting paid for their work. An IRAP is developed or operated by entities such as trade and industry groups, corporations, non-profit organizations, educational institutions, unions, and joint labor-management organizations. Unlike RA Programs, IRAPs are subject to the same eligibility process and requirements as a standard training provider.

**Eligible Program of Training Services**

A program of training services may be delivered in person, online, or in a blended approach and is defined, under WIOA, as one or more courses or classes, or a structured regimen that leads to:

- a recognized post-secondary credential, secondary school diploma or its equivalent,

Types of acceptable Credentials:

- Secondary School diploma or equivalent
- Associate's Degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree for purposes of the Vocational Rehabilitation program
- Occupational licensure
- Occupational certificate, including RA and Career and Technical Education educational certificates
- Occupational certification
- Other recognized certificates of industry/occupational skills completion sufficient to qualify for entry-level or advancement in employment.
    - employment, or
    - measurable skill gain toward such a credential or employment.
        - The Employment and Training Administration (ETA) defines a measurable skill gain as one of the following types of gains:
- Educational Functioning Level (EFL) gain
- Attainment of Secondary School Diploma
- Secondary Transcript/Report Card
- Training Milestone
- Skills Progression

1. **Initial Period of Eligibility for Approved Programs**

Initial eligibility will be granted for a 12-month period once approved by the State. After the initial period, the training provider is subject to continuing eligibility requirements.

2. **Technology-Based Learning**

Training providers using technology-based learning, also referred to as **distance**, **online**, **web-based**, or **computer-based** learning, must meet the following requirements:

- Training providers offering distance learning programs must be licensed to provide training in the State of North Carolina.
- Training providers must have a platform for student interaction with an instructor or instructors.
- Training providers must ensure periodic assessment of each student.
- Training providers' policy must describe the responsibilities of each party (training provider, participant) to the distance learning experience.

- Training providers must have procedures in place for tracking student's participation in the training program.
- Training providers must comply with any additional requirements determined by the Local Area WDB.

3. **Criteria for Determining Program Eligibility**

**State Criteria –** In establishing criteria pursuant to WIOA Sec. 122(b)(1), the State shall consider each of the following: *(An addendum will be created and added to this policy at a later date to provide more clarity to the following areas.)*

- Performance Accountability and Outcomes
- Ensure access to training services throughout the State (including use of technology)
- Dissemination of the training provider's Performance Outcomes and training information
- Training must lead to "In-Demand" industry occupations and sectors
- State licensing requirements and licensing status of providers
- Encouragement of industry recognized certifications
- Provider's ability to offer a credential
- Quality of training
- Ability to serve individuals with barriers
- Other including:
- Compliance
- Informed Choice
- Providers must meet the needs of local employers and participants
- Accountability of providers

**Local Criteria:** The Local Area WDBs may establish criteria and information requirements in addition to the criteria and information requirements established by the State or may require higher levels of performance than required by the State for purposes of determining eligibility for providers of training services to receive funds. The criteria set by each Local Area WDB will be described in its corresponding ETP policy.

4. **Criteria for Registered Apprenticeship (RA) Program Inclusion**

The inclusion process for a RA program begins once a RA indicates they wish to be placed on the ETPL. At that time, the RA must supply the following information to the State:

- Occupations included in the RA
- The name and address of the RA sponsor
- The name and address of related technical instruction provider and location of instruction if different from the program sponsor's address
- The method and length of instruction and;

- The number of active apprentices

The RAs are automatically eligible to be included in the state's ETPL and are exempt from eligibility and performance requirements. (Note that Pre-Apprenticeship programs do not have the same automatic ETP status. [20 CFR Sec. 680.470]) Any voluntarily provided performance data will be provided by the State Apprenticeship Agency. Once on the state ETPL, RAs will be included and maintained on the list until:

- the RA notifies the State agency that it no longer wants to be included on the list.
- the program becomes deregistered under the National Apprenticeship Act.
- the program is determined to have intentionally supplied inaccurate information.
- a determination is made that the RA substantially violated any provision of Title I of WIOA or the WIOA regulations, including 29 CFR part 38.

5. **Program Costs**

An eligible training provider must make available to the prospective students its schedules of tuition and fees. The institution shall disclose all fees required to be paid by students (including tuition, required fees, books, supplies, activities, etc.), and any non-refundable fees must be so identified. A reduction in tuition, fees, or other charges may be implemented when there are specific criteria for student eligibility and selection procedures precisely disclosed within the policy at the institution. All students within the enrollment period that the reduction is offered shall be eligible to apply. The cost of the training to WIOA participants must not exceed the cost charged to any other student in the program. All costs necessary for successful completion of a program must be clearly stated. A breakdown of cost must be identified for publication on the ETPL. A breakdown may include the following:

- Tuition
- Fees
- Books
- Licensing cost
- Certificate fees
- Graduation fees
- Uniforms
- Tools
- Registration fees
- Supplies

6. **Publication of ETPL**

**[ETA TEGL 08-19 pg. I-8]**

WIOA requires that the State disseminate the statewide list of all eligible training providers and accompanying performance and cost information to WDBs and to the public. The State of North

Carolina will post the list on its Virtual One-Stop System (NCWorks Online). Individuals, counselors, and providers will have direct access to the list.

Training providers will appear on the statewide ETPL after verification by the State to determine eligibility. As new programs, and providers, are verified and approved, the statewide list will be updated on an ongoing basis. If a program is removed from the list, the WDB will cease to approve additional Individual Training Accounts for that program, and the ineligible program will be removed from the statewide list.

The State ETPL must be accompanied by appropriate information to assist participants in choosing employment and training activities. Such information must include the following, disaggregated by local areas served, as applicable:

- Recognized post-secondary credential(s) offered;
- Provider information supplied to meet the State's eligibility procedure;
- Performance and cost information aligned with the time periods; and,
- Additional information as determined by the State as follows:
- Program length including number of units such as credits, hours, weeks, or semesters needed to earn the credential(s) offered.
- Program Service/Location and type
- Class/Faculty size
- Program prerequisites
- Target occupations
- Program description, and
- Additional information as deemed appropriate.

7. **Solicitation of Training Providers**

The State and each Local Area WDB may solicit an invitation to training providers to submit applications to apply for status as approved training providers. This solicitation may be done through various appropriate methods, including, but not limited to, mailings, email, phone conversations, and in-person meetings. The State may also solicit training providers from outside of the State.

**Continuing Eligibility**

Eligible training providers that were determined to be initially eligible under WIOA Title I-B will be subject to the application procedure for continued eligibility when their initial year of eligibility expires. In addition, all providers previously approved under Continuing Eligibility will have a review at least every two years to determine continuing eligibility status.

1. **Application Process**

Initially, one month prior to the expiration of the initial period of eligibility, eligible training providers must submit a new and completed ETP application on the State's virtual one-stop system (NCWorks Online), and for each program for which recertification is sought. The training provider must confirm all detailed program information listed. To maintain eligibility status, training providers must submit any such information as the State may request to

adequately prepare the performance information for each training program for which continued eligibility is being sought.

In determining continuing eligibility status, the State will take into consideration the following elements:

1. Changes in Organization/Provider Information:
    1. Business Requirements
    2. Accreditation/licensure renewals, if necessary
    3. Updated Certificate of Insurance
    4. Updates and/or changes in refund or grievance policies, if any;
2. Changes in Program Information:
    1. Schedule changes
    2. Curriculum updates
    3. Match against In-Demand List
    4. Credential offered
    5. Review of business partners that affect the program; and

    3. The performance of providers of training services on the performance accountability measures described in WIOA Sec 116(b)(2)(A)(i)(I-IV). This includes the timeliness and accuracy of the eligible training provider's performance reports. The State reserves the right to establish minimum performance standards. Until the performance data for all accountability measures are available, the State may consider alternate factors related to performance for that accountability measure. Once training providers have two years of performance outcomes using the WIOA performance indicators specified in section 116, the State will then take them into account.

    4. To ensure equity throughout the State, these factors will be taken into consideration when determining eligibility:
        a.
            i. Specific economic, geographic, and demographic factors in the local area for which providers are seeking continued eligibility; and
            ii. Characteristics of the populations served, including demonstrated difficulties in serving these populations.

Upon review of the factors above, the State will determine if the program maintains eligibility. Continued eligibility status will be confirmed and transmitted to each provider through the NCWorks Online email messaging system.

A continuing eligibility review must be conducted at least once every two years from the date of any prior continuing eligibility review.

2. **Continuing Eligibility Review for Registered Apprenticeship (RA) and Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs (IRAPs)**

RAs that have initially indicated their desire to be placed on the State ETPL are not subject to the same continuing eligibility and performance requirements of the State's ETPL policy.

**Note**: Pre-Apprenticeship programs do not have the same automatic ETP status. [20 CFR sec. 680.470].

The biennial review of provider eligibility will include verification of the registration status of RA and removal of any programs as described in 20 CFR Sec 680.470. Any voluntarily provided performance data on RAs will be provided by the State Registered Apprenticeship Agency. Once on the State ETPL, RAs will be included and maintained on the list until:

- the RA notifies the State agency that it no longer wants to be included on the list.
- the program becomes deregistered under the National Apprenticeship Act.
- the program is determined to have intentionally supplied inaccurate information.
- a determination is made that the RA substantially violated any provision of Title I of WIOA or the WIOA regulations, including 29 CFR part 38.

Unlike RA Programs, IRAPs will be held to the same recertification process as all other Eligible Training Providers.

**Eligible Training Provider Performance**

1. **Background**

In accordance with WIOA section 116 and regulations at 20 CFR 677.230 and 20 CFR 680.490, North Carolina is required to report performance information about ETPs to USDOL ETA. This requirement covers all three WIOA Title I programs: Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth. Further, as noted previously, all waivers regarding the reporting of data for all participants (not solely WIOA participants) have expired. This means that starting with PY 2021 (July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022), all approved programs of study that appear on North Carolina's ETPL must have data submitted not only for the WIOA participants within the program, but also for every individual in that program of study regardless of WIOA participation status.

2. **Annual Performance Data Submission**

Performance reporting for ETPL will be comprised of data from multiple sources:

- NCWorks Online, North Carolina's chosen case management platform
- Provider initial application and recertification documentation
- Data submitted directly from providers

The ETPL contains approved programs of study. This means that a single training provider may have more than one program of study appearing on the ETPL. Therefore, as outlined in TEGL 03-18, providers "must submit data to the State for all of their approved programs in a manner that allows the State to generate and report separate records for each program of study." Further, this policy applies to all programs of study on the ETPL, including those programs that did not serve WIOA participants during the reporting period. In other words, if a program of study appears on the ETPL during a given reporting period, providers will be required to submit data for that program of study, whether or not WIOA participants made use of that program of study.

The State will collect performance data from eligible training providers on an annual basis. Under 20 CFR 680.460, ETPs are required to report the data requested by the State as a criterion of continued eligibility on North Carolina's ETPL. To make this process as easy as possible for providers, North Carolina will be offering a downloadable MS Excel spreadsheet that will enable easy data uploading. The spreadsheet is formatted with tabs for each of a provider's approved programs of study. The provider need only complete the Excel tab for each program, and that will provide the State all of the necessary information to complete its required reporting. The required data elements on the MS Excel spreadsheet are as follows:

- **SSN** – the participant's nine-digit Social Security Number[1]
- **Start Date** – the participant's enrollment date in the approved program of study
- **Status** – the participant's status in the approved program of study; options include Enrolled, Completed, Withdrew, or Transferred
- **Exit Date** – the date the participant left the approved program of study (those with a status of Completed, Withdrew, or Transferred)
- **Credential** – a Yes/No/Unknown response on whether the participant attained the credential tied to the approved program of study

3. **Performance Data for Initial and Continued Eligibility and Program Quality**

For training providers applying for initial or continued eligibility, one of the required factors that the State must consider is performance. This is essential, ensuring that North Carolina maintains a list of high-quality training providers, and enables participants to make informed decisions on the types of training that will lead to their individual success.

For North Carolina, the performance metrics being used to evaluate a provider's performance include:

- Employment Q2: the percentage of all program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program
- Employment Q4: the percentage of all program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program
- Credential Attainment: the percentage of program participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent

Note: The State acknowledges that obtaining timely and accurate information regarding employment is difficult and may represent an undue burden on training providers. The State will work with providers, individually, to develop a corrective action plan to address data collection. Providers and programs will maintain eligibility throughout the corrective action process.

The minimum levels of performance required will be noted in both the initial and continued eligibility applications.

In addition to the performance metrics noted above, in an effort to maintain the highest quality list of training providers, North Carolina may also consider these additional factors:

- The degree in which the training program relates to in-demand industry sectors and occupations

- Length and cost
- Training delivery method including reasonable access for:
    - individuals who are employed
    - individuals with barriers to employment and
    - how easily accessed the program is in rural areas
- Credentials:
    - 
        - is the credential highly valued by employers/industries?
        - are they required for specific occupations?
- Training program completion rates
- Participant outcome information including the percentage of participants who entered unsubsidized employment in an occupation directly related to the program of training.

4. **Insufficient Performance Data**

In the event the training provider does not have the required performance data, it must 1) show good cause as to why the data is unavailable and 2) provide alternative information that demonstrates compliance with State eligibility criteria. "Good cause" should include:

- The training program is new and data on past performance is not available;
    - Only partial performance data is available;
    - Collection of data will cause excessive costs and/or hardship for the training provider during the initial eligibility; and/or
    - Other reasonable circumstances that may cause data to be unavailable.

If the required and alternate information cannot be provided, DWS ETP staff will provide technical assistance to allow the provider an opportunity to demonstrate its ability to meet eligibility criteria. DWS ETP staff will assist the provider in developing a plan of action with an appropriate timeline to be determined on an individual basis. If the provider is unresponsive or unable to meet the requirements set forth by the agreement, the provider may be ruled ineligible.

5. **Alternate Performance Information**

Until the performance data for each accountability measure is available, the State may consider alternate factors related to performance for that accountability measure if the information is substantially similar to the information otherwise required. In considering alternate factors related to performance, the State may set minimal performance criteria, use existing available data, or develop other proxies as appropriate. Once training providers have two years of performance outcomes using the WIOA performance indicators specified in section 116, the providers will be expected to supply the originally required information.

Supplemental data may include documentation on self-employment and self-reported earnings, a copy of a W-2 form or pay stub that documents employment during the time period in the measure.

**Notice of Ineligibility, Suspension, Termination of Eligible Training Providers, and Complaints from Participants against Training Providers**

1. **Complaints from Participants**

If a participant wishes to file a complaint against a Training Provider, DWS staff and/or Local Area WDB staff must refer to NCWorks Commission Policy Statement Number CPS 08-2021.

DWS ETP Program Coordinator and staff, DWS Ombudsman, and the Local Area WDB will work transparently through the investigation process to ensure:

- a safe process is provided for the complainant.
- a thorough and efficient investigation into the allegations has been performed to determine the appropriate action.

2. **Initial Eligibility Denials**

A training provider may be denied initial eligibility for the following reasons:

- The application is not complete, or information was not provided in a timely manner;
- The training provider does not meet the WIOA definition of an eligible training entity;
- The training program does not meet the WIOA definition of an eligible training service;
- The training program does not result in a WIOA recognized credential;
- Performance data is not included with the application.
- The training program does not support in-demand occupations and/or sectors identified through labor market analysis;
- The training provider is not in compliance with the WIOA statute, regulations, or any agreement executed under WIOA law;
- The State or Local Area WDB determines that the training provider intentionally supplied inaccurate information.

3. **Reapplication**

When a training provider or program is denied for any reason other than lack of documentation or information, the provider must wait six months to reapply.

4. **Denial Notice**

Within 10 business days after the State determines that a training provider's application does not meet the eligibility criteria, the State shall issue a denial notice to the training provider.

The notice shall be emailed to the training provider at the email address listed on the application and to the attention of the contact person identified on the application. The notice shall clearly:

- display the “date emailed”;
- identify the program that was denied or terminated;
- state specific reason(s) for the action; and
- state the training provider has the right to appeal within 30 calendar days of the date the notice is emailed.

5. **Suspension/Removal**

A **training program** may be removed from the ETPL for the following reasons:

- The State determines that the training provider supplied inaccurate information;
- The training program no longer meets the WIOA definition of occupational skills training;
- The program does not meet minimum performance standards once established. If there are not students enrolled in the training program during the past year, there will be no performance data to review for continued eligibility. The State must examine the demand for the related occupation to determine if there is still a demand for it and decide whether to keep the program on the ETPL for another year.

A **training provider** may be removed from the ETPL for the following reasons:

- Intentionally supplying inaccurate or false information;
- Substantially violating a provision of WIOA Title I or its implementing regulations;
- Failure to meet required performance outcomes;
- Failure to abide by the equal opportunity and nondiscrimination requirements under WIOA Section 188;
- Failure to comply with monitoring and audits;
- Failure to maintain required licenses and accreditation requirements;
- Failure to comply with all applicable provisions in the ETPL contract and/or policy; or
- Other just cause.

6. **Notification and Termination Letter**

Within 10 days after the State determines that a training provider is in violation of any of the reasons indicated above, a notice of violation or finding shall be issued by the State, requiring the development of a corrective action plan. The letter should include a detailed description of the violation or finding, an invitation to work collaboratively to develop a mutually agreed upon corrective action plan, and a specific timeframe of 14 days to respond to the notification. If the training provider fails to respond, a termination letter will then be issued.

The termination notice shall be mailed to the training provider at the address listed on the application and to the attention of the contact person identified on the application.

The notice shall clearly:

- display the “date mailed”;

- identify the violation or finding;
- state specific reason(s) for the action; and
- state the training provider has the right to appeal within 30 calendar days of the date indicated on the notice. When a training program is removed from the State ETPL, WIOA participants currently enrolled in the program may complete their training as outlined in their WIOA Individual Employment Plan (IEP) unless the program or provider has lost state licensing, certification, or authorization to operate by the appropriate state oversight agency.

**Note**: The State reserves the right to terminate a provider based on prior violation history if violations reoccur. The State will bypass the Corrective Action Plan (CAP) process and send a termination letter to the training provider if the evidence gathered during the investigation does prove gross negligence on behalf of the training provider occurred. The training provider will have 30 days from the date of the termination letter to appeal. A due process hearing will be set up for a final ruling on whether the training provider will be allowed to remain on the State ETPL.

7. **Corrective Action Plan (CAP)**

The State and the Eligible Training Provider must develop a mutually agreed upon CAP, if the provider is:

- found in violation of their contract, or
- if the provider is requesting technical assistance to become compliant.

1. **Prior to Plan Development*:***

If the provider is found in violation of the contract, the State must identify the finding and how it was acquired. Examples include, but are not limited to, Local Area WDB's monitoring report, State's compliance and monitoring report, continuing eligibility review, and information reported through an anonymous tip or random review; i.e., secret shopper, Secretary of State website check, or other means that provides evidence of potential non-compliance with ETPL contract provisions or ETPL policy.

Identify which law or provision is being violated. Gather supporting documents and/or conduct interviews (if necessary) to determine if the finding or allegation of wrongdoing is factually based. This will determine whether the provider can continue to receive referrals during the CAP process or not.

2. **Notification Letter:**

The State will send a letter via mail within 10 business days of determining a violation has occurred. The letter should include what the violation or allegation is, an invitation to develop a corrective action plan, and specific timeframe of 14 days to respond to the notification. If the training provider chooses not to respond to the letter, it is confirming its decision to withdraw participation from the ETPL.

3. **Development of CAP:**

The training provider, along with assistance from the State, must develop a corrective action plan. The CAP will serve as a reapplication and should contain the following:

- Details of discussion; date, time, method of communication (phone, in-person meeting, online meeting, etc.), persons involved in discussion, and relevant details;

- Description of circumstances;
- Description of steps that will be taken to rectify the situation, including procedural changes to prevent reoccurrence;
- Appropriate timeframe to achieve completion/resolution:
- Depending on severity of issue, time frames will vary
- An evaluation of progress must be periodically conducted. The State will determine the date(s) of progress evaluation, based on the severity of the issue and the complexity of the actions necessary to achieve completion/resolution.

4. **Repayment of Program Funds**

A provider of training services whose eligibility is terminated due to the termination causes displayed above, shall be liable for the repayment of funds of all adult, dislocated worker, and youth funds received under Title I-B of WIOA during the period of noncompliance. [Ref. Act Sec 122(f)(1)(c)] No repayment funds should be collected from the training provider until the opportunity to appeal is over, which is 90 days from the date of the initial denial notice.

8. **Appeal Hearing Process**

Following issuance of a denial of eligibility, determination of suspension, or termination of eligibility, the training provider will have 30 days in which to submit an appeal to the DWS. Within 30 days of the receipt of the appeal, the training provider will be notified of the date, time, and place where a due process hearing will be conducted. After that hearing, a final decision will be issued within 30 days.

The Appeals Hearing Panel will consist of staff who serve a one-year rotating term and shall be represented in the following manner:

1. One DWS Management representative
2. One Local Area WDB Director
3. One Regional Director

All appeals must be forwarded, in writing, to the following address:

**NC Division of Workforce Solutions**

**Attn: ETP Program Coordinator**

**4316 Mail Service Center**

**Raleigh, NC 27699-4316**

4. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL IMPLEMENT AND MONITOR THE PRIORITY FOR PUBLIC ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS, OTHER LOW-INCOME INDIVIDUALS, AND INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE REQUIREMENTS OF WIOA SEC. 134(C)(3)(E), WHICH APPLIES TO INDIVIDUALIZED CAREER SERVICES AND TRAINING SERVICES FUNDED BY THE ADULT FORMULA PROGRAM

The State has a process in place to ensure Adult program funds provide a priority in the delivery of career and training services to individuals who are Veterans with barriers to employment, low-income, public assistance recipients or basic skills deficient. In addition, the State requires that Workforce Development Boards describe in their annual plan a description of their priority of services processes, including any related policies, to meet priority of service requirements for Adult Training Services.

Efforts to ensure that special populations receive much needed services are addressed through North Carolina's integrated services delivery (ISD) approach. As part of ISD, community resource staff are assigned to each career center. These staff are knowledgeable of specific program(s) and work to provide services and resources such as transportation, food, housing, and training opportunities.

The State's Field Services Teams continuously monitor special population priority, for compliance, using North Carolina's management information system (MIS), NCWorks Online, along with face-to-face interviews, using a comprehensive monitoring tool.

DWS has provided priority of service notification to all local Workforce Boards. During annual program audits, Program Monitors with the DWS Accountability Unit will review a sample size of cases to see that local areas are adhering to WIOA sec. 134 (c)(3)(E). The process for the monitoring will focus on reviewing notations in NCWorks where jobseekers may self-disclose that they are receiving public assistance during the welcome/intake process. Modifying the Priority of Service model used to serve our Veteran population, Career Center staff will provide these services to these customers. DWS is looking to see how the EEO function may be able to assist with providing guidance in the process.

## 5. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S CRITERIA REGARDING LOCAL AREA TRANSFER OF FUNDS BETWEEN THE ADULT AND DISLOCATED WORKER PROGRAMS

The State has implemented Operational Guidance for the transfer of local WIOA funds between the Adult and Dislocated Worker funding streams. The guidance establishes procedures to manage transfers and to facilitate accurate reporting to the U.S. Department of Labor. The guidance dictates that while 100% transfer is allowable, local workforce development areas are reminded that appropriate services to both dislocated workers and adult customers are required. Local areas are to include rationale for requesting transfer and explanation of how services to adults and dislocated workers will be maintained, along with meeting priority of service requirements. 100% transferability gives local workforce areas:

- more flexibility to move funds where they are most needed and can provide the greatest benefit;
- ability to better respond to ongoing changes within local areas;
- increased local control over program design and delivery;
- enhanced collaboration between industry needs and worker training;
- more ability to leverage non–WIOA resources; and
- better control in the implementation of WIOA programs and services to best to meet both employer and participant need.

The State has established criteria, issued through DWS Operational Guidance for determining when transfer of funds is appropriate. Local Areas must submit requests via the State's online Workforce Information System Enterprise (WISE) system. Once the request has been received

by the State, it will be reviewed within 5 business days to determine approval or denial of request. All requests must include the following:

- Reason for transfer request, including current service level information,
- Listing of other Local Area funding availability to serve the A/DW population (i.e., NDWG, other Federal or State funding, other Special Grant funding).
- Statement that participants served with transferred funds will be subject to performance outcomes of new funding source.
- Statement that all funds transfers are subject to priority of service requirements. Upon review, Local Areas will receive written notification.

Please see DWS Operational Guidance regarding transfer of funds for additional information.

https://www.nccommerce.com/documents/operational-guidance-og-21-2021-funds-transfer-between-adult-and-dislocated-worker

C. WITH RESPECT TO YOUTH WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES AUTHORIZED IN SECTION 129 OF WIOA—

1. IDENTIFY THE STATE-DEVELOPED CRITERIA TO BE USED BY LOCAL BOARDS IN AWARDING GRANTS OR CONTRACTS FOR YOUTH WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES AND DESCRIBE HOW THE LOCAL BOARDS WILL TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE ABILITY OF THE PROVIDERS TO MEET PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES BASED ON PRIMARY INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE FOR THE YOUTH PROGRAM AS DESCRIBED IN SECTION 116(B)(2)(A)(II) OF WIOA IN AWARDING SUCH GRANTS OR CONTRACTS.[11]

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 pre-apprenticeship, youth apprenticeship and registered 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 workforce development 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 post-secondary 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 will follow the procurement procedures set forth in their own local comprehensive regional 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 Local Workforce Development Board, with recommendations from its designated youth committee and in accordance with criteria outlined in the local WIOA 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 sub-committees to the Board, may 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 Local Workforce Development Boards regarding youth service providers. As part of the local plan, each local area must have written criteria to identify effective youth activities and providers. The local Boards 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 - 21. Local Areas' youth program design must offer a unique opportunity to provide a creative and

innovative mix of services designed to address the academic, vocational, and employment needs of at-risk youth.

Targeted activities include employment opportunities available throughout the school year as well as during the summer months so that young adults have access to work experiences and Local Areas are able to expend required funds for in school and out of school youth in addition to:

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 post-secondary 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 available throughout the school year;
    b. pre-apprenticeship programs;
    c. registered apprenticeship programs
    d. internships and job shadowing; and
    e. on-the-job training opportunities;

1. Occupational skills training, which shall include priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized post-secondary 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;
2. Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
3. Leadership development opportunities, which may include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors, as appropriate;
4. Supportive services;
5. Adult mentoring for the period of participation and a subsequent period, for a total of not less than 12 months;
6. Follow-up services for not less than 12 months after the completion of participation, as appropriate;
7. Comprehensive guidance and counseling, which may include drug and alcohol abuse counseling and referral, as appropriate;
8. Financial literacy education;
9. Entrepreneurial skills training;
10. 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

11. Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to post-secondary education and training.

Each local board shall ensure that each participant shall be provided information on the full array of applicable or appropriate services that are available through the local board, other providers, one-stop partners, including those providers or partners receiving funds under this subtitle; and (ii) referral to appropriate training and educational programs that have the capacity to serve the participant either on a sequential or concurrent basis.

The Local Workforce Development Boards must comply with the most restrictive local, state, or federal regulations for the procurement process. At a minimum, the procurement process (but not inclusive) must ensure:

- Procurement follows Local Workforce Development Board written policies and procedures;
- Solicitation methods that promote fair and open competition, such as a request for proposal (RFP);
- Written code of conduct that includes arms-length negotiations, specific conflict of interest provisions to ensure those who develop or issue a proposal are separate and distinct from those who are involved in the selection process;
- Clear and accurate description of the services being procured;
- Must provide an opportunity to Small, Minority and Women's (SMW) Business' organizations and labor surplus suppliers to participate in its procurement process;
- 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; and
- Local Workforce Development Boards shall maintain records sufficient to detail the significant history of procurement.

In addition, each Local Workforce Development Board must use the following criteria in awarding contracts for youth services:

- Proposals must state the extent to which the organization specifically focuses on serving at-risk youth, including youth who are at risk of school dropout or at-risk of school displacement due to suspension or expulsion;
- Proposals must state whether the organization leverages community-based resources, including partnerships with organizations that provide mentoring services and private-sector employment involvement;
- Proposals must illustrate the use of an evidenced-based program model by the organization, with a proven track record of success;
- Proposals must illustrate the inclusion of rigorous, quantitative performance measures by the organization, to confirm effectiveness of the program;
- Proposals must illustrate the deployment of comprehensive support services to youth, including addressing behavioral issues, emphasizing academic and career growth, and enhancing parent and family engagement.

WIOA has established core performance indicators 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.

| N.C. State WIOA Performance Indicators – (Table 1) | | |
|---|---|---|
| Category | Measure | Description |
| Youth | Employment Rate – 2nd Quarter After Exit | The percentage of participants who are in education or training services, or in unsubsidized employment during the 2nd quarter after exit. |
| Employment Rate – 4th Quarter After Exit | | The percentage of participants who are in education or training services, or in unsubsidized employment during the 4th quarter after exit. |
| Median Earnings | | The median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the 2nd quarter after exit. |
| Credential Rate | | The percentage of participants who obtain a recognized post-secondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation or within 1 year after exit. |
| Measurable Skills Gain | | The percentage of participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized post-secondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment. |
| | | |
| Employers | Effectiveness in Serving Employers: Repeat Business Customers | Percentage of employers who have used WIOA core program services more than once during the last three reporting periods. |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers: Employer Penetration Rate | | Percentage of employers using WIOA core program services out of all employers in the State |

## 2. DESCRIBE THE STRATEGIES THE STATE WILL USE TO ACHIEVE IMPROVED OUTCOMES FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH AS DESCRIBED IN 129(A)(1)(B), INCLUDING HOW IT WILL LEVERAGE AND ALIGN THE CORE PROGRAMS, ANY COMBINED STATE PLAN PARTNER PROGRAMS INCLUDED IN THIS PLAN, REQUIRED AND OPTIONAL ONE-STOP PARTNER PROGRAMS, AND ANY OTHER RESOURCES AVAILABLE.

Through administrative oversight and monitoring of the Local Workforce Development Boards, the state ensures local area program design incorporates the availability of all Youth Program elements. The state requires all Local Workforce Development Boards to 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 and enhanced involvement with employers to address and 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 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.

The State intends to achieve improved outcomes for Out of School Youth by implementing an increased focus in monitoring service providers and performance levels and providing technical assistance to Local Workforce Development Boards. The State participates in regular meetings with local Youth Leads, offers technical assistance, and assists with presentations on best practices panels on topics which include outreach, predicated on evidenced based research and keep Local Areas abreast of additional national best practices by circulating WorkforceGPS and other articles.

### 3. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL ENSURE THAT ALL 14 PROGRAM ELEMENTS DESCRIBED IN WIOA SECTION 129(C)(2) ARE MADE AVAILABLE AND EFFECTIVELY IMPLEMENTED, INCLUDING QUALITY PRE-APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS UNDER THE WORK EXPERIENCE PROGRAM ELEMENT. [12]

In the local Comprehensive Four-Year and Regional Plan and again in subsequent Program Years, each Workforce Development Board is required to provide a detailed chart and description of how each of the required fourteen program elements will be made available to youth. Each local plan identifies how these services will be administered through referral, WIOA resources or both. Boards are required to establish procedures for the delivery of these elements in their respective local workforce development areas and the individual's Service Strategy.

The State's program and fiscal field services teams monitor local area implementation practices, on an ongoing basis, utilizing North Carolina's management information system, NCWorks Online, in addition to other monitoring practices.

education, and career readiness for participants, programs shall provide elements consisting of-—

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-—

- summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year;
- pre-apprenticeship programs; (While students can pursue pre-apprenticeship training when still in school, programs for out-of-school youth are often sponsored by community organizations that work with apprenticeship sponsors or other employers to address behavioral, economic and other barriers to employment of youth who do not have a career path. North Carolina's apprenticeships are managed by the North Carolina Community College system. More about the program ApprenticeshipNC can be found on the website at ttps://www.apprenticeshipnc.com/.)
- internships and job shadowing; and
- 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.

4. PROVIDE THE LANGUAGE CONTAINED IN THE STATE POLICY FOR "REQUIRING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO ENTER OR COMPLETE AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM, OR TO SECURE AND HOLD EMPLOYMENT" CRITERION FOR OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(B)(III)(VIII) AND FOR "REQUIRING ADDITIONAL ASSISTANCE TO COMPLETE AN EDUCATION PROGRAM, OR TO SECURE AND HOLD EMPLOYMENT" CRITERION FOR IN-SCHOOL YOUTH SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(C)(IV)(VII). IF THE STATE DOES NOT HAVE A POLICY, DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL ENSURE THAT LOCAL AREAS WILL HAVE A POLICY FOR THESE CRITERIA.

In North Carolina, "requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment" is defined for In-School Youth, including youth with a disability, who meet the criteria in category one. [WIOA Section 129(a)(1)(C)(iv)(VII)]

1. In-School Youth, ages 14-21, low-income, and

1. Has poor attendance patterns in an educational program during

the last 12 calendar months; or

2. Has been expelled from school within the last 12 calendar

months; or

3. Has been suspended from school within the last 12 calendar

months; or

4. Has below average grades of less than a "C" grade point average;

or

5. 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

6. Has a currently incarcerated parent(s)/guardian.

In each local area, not more than 5% of the newly enrolled In-School Youth assisted in a given program year may be made eligible based upon WIOA Section 129(a)(3)(B) as an individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment. [Section 129(a)(1)(C)(iv)(VII)]

In North Carolina, "a low-income individual who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment" is defined for Out-of-School Youth, including youth with a disability, who meet the criteria in category two.

2. Out-of-School Youth, ages 16-24, low-income and

1. Has dropped out of a post-secondary educational program during

the past 12 calendar months; or

2. Has a poor work history, to include no work history, or has been

fired from a job in the last 6 calendar months; or

3. 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

4. Currently has an incarcerated parent(s)/guardian.

Exception:

WIOA allows a low-income exception where 5% of WIOA youth may be participants who ordinarily would be required to be low-income for eligibility purposes and meet all other eligibility criteria for WIOA youth except the low-income criteria. A program must calculate the 5% based on the percent of newly enrolled youth in the Local Area's WIOA youth program in a given program year who would ordinarily be required to meet the low-income criteria. [WIOA Section 129(a)(3)(A)(ii) and 20 C.F.R. § 681.250]

5. INCLUDE THE STATE DEFINITION, AS DEFINED IN LAW, FOR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL AND ATTENDING SCHOOL AS SPECIFIED IN WIOA SECTION 129(A)(1)(B)(I) AND SECTION 129(A)(1)(C)(I). IF STATE LAW DOES NOT DEFINE "NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL" OR "ATTENDING SCHOOL," INDICATE THAT IS THE CASE AND PROVIDE THE STATE POLICY FOR DETERMINING WHETHER A YOUTH IS ATTENDING OR NOT 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 sixteen 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.

North Carolina follows the following rules for out-of-school youth:

To be eligible to participate in activities carried out under any Title I WIOA program an individual shall, at the time the eligibility determination is made, be an out-of-school youth or an in-school youth. (B) OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH.—In this title, the term ''out-of-school youth'' means an individual who is—

(i) not attending any school (as defined under State law); (ii) not younger than age 16 or older than age 24; and (iii) one or more of the following:

(I) A school dropout.

(II) A youth who is within the age of compulsory school attendance, but has not attended school for at least the most recent complete school year calendar quarter.

(III) A recipient of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent who is a low-income individual and is—

(aa) basic skills deficient; or

(bb) an English language learner.

(IV) An individual who is subject to the juvenile or adult justice system.

(V) A homeless individual (as defined in section 41403(6) of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (42 U.S.C. 14043e–2(6))), a homeless child or youth (as defined in section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a(2))), a runaway, in foster care or has aged out of the foster care system, a child eligible for assistance under section 477 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 677), or in an out-of-home placement.

(VI) An individual who is pregnant or parenting.

(VII) A youth who is an individual with a disability.

(VIII) A low-income individual who requires additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment.

For In-School Youth, North Carolina uses the following Title I WIOA rules:

In this section, the term ''in-school youth'' means an individual who is—

1. attending school (as defined by State law);
2. not younger than age 14 or (unless an individual with a disability who is attending school under State law) older than age 21;
3. a low-income individual; and
4. one or more of the following:

1. Basic skills deficient.
2. An English language learner.
3. An offender.
4. A homeless individual (as defined in section 41403(6) of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (42 U.S.C. 14043e–2(6))), a homeless child or youth (as defined in section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11434a(2))), a runaway, in foster care or has aged out of the foster care system, a child eligible for assistance under section 477 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 677), or in an out-of-home placement.
5. Pregnant or parenting.
6. A youth who is an individual with a disability.
7. An individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment.

6. IF USING THE BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT DEFINITION CONTAINED IN WIOA SECTION 3(5)(B), INCLUDE THE STATE DEFINITION WHICH MUST FURTHER DEFINE HOW TO DETERMINE IF AN 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. IF NOT USING THE PORTION OF THE DEFINITION CONTAINED IN WIOA SECTION 3(5)(B), INDICATE THAT IS THE CASE.

As included in WIOA Section 3(5)(B):

(5) BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT. —The term ''basic skills deficient'' means, with respect to an individual—

- 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
- 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 defines "below the 8th grade level" to mean a testing score at or below 8.9. 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.

D. SINGLE-AREA STATE REQUIREMENTS

1. ANY COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD THAT REPRESENT DISAGREEMENT WITH THE PLAN. (WIOA SECTION 108(D)(3).)

2. THE ENTITY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DISBURSAL OF GRANT FUNDS, AS DETERMINED BY THE GOVERNOR, IF DIFFERENT FROM THAT FOR THE STATE. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(15).)

3. A DESCRIPTION OF THE TYPE AND AVAILABILITY OF WIOA TITLE I YOUTH ACTIVITIES AND SUCCESSFUL MODELS, INCLUDING FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES. (WIOA SECTION 108(B)(9).)

**Not Applicable**

4. A DESCRIPTION OF THE ROLES AND RESOURCE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ONE-STOP PARTNERS.

**Not Applicable**

5. THE COMPETITIVE PROCESS USED TO AWARD THE SUBGRANTS AND CONTRACTS FOR TITLE I ACTIVITIES.

**Not Applicable**

6. HOW TRAINING SERVICES OUTLINED IN SECTION 134 WILL BE PROVIDED THROUGH INDIVIDUAL TRAINING ACCOUNTS AND/OR THROUGH CONTRACTS, AND HOW SUCH TRAINING APPROACHES WILL BE COORDINATED. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL MEET INFORMED CUSTOMER CHOICE REQUIREMENTS REGARDLESS OF TRAINING APPROACH.

**Not Applicable**

7. HOW THE STATE BOARD, IN FULFILLING LOCAL BOARD FUNCTIONS, WILL COORDINATE TITLE I ACTIVITIES WITH THOSE ACTIVITIES UNDER TITLE II. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE BOARD WILL CARRY OUT THE REVIEW OF LOCAL APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED UNDER TITLE II CONSISTENT WITH WIOA SECS. 107(D)(11)(A) AND (B)(I) AND WIOA SEC. 232.

**Not Applicable**

8. COPIES OF EXECUTED COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WHICH DEFINE HOW ALL LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDERS WILL CARRY OUT THE REQUIREMENTS FOR INTEGRATION OF AND ACCESS TO THE ENTIRE SET OF SERVICES AVAILABLE IN THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM, INCLUDING COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH ENTITIES ADMINISTERING REHABILITATION ACT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.

**Not Applicable**

E. WAIVER REQUESTS (OPTIONAL)

Not Applicable

TITLE I-B ASSURANCES

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| 1. The State has implemented a policy to ensure Adult program funds provide a priority in the delivery of training services and individualized career services to individuals who are low income, public assistance recipients and basic skills deficient; | Yes |
| 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; | Yes |
| 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; | Yes |
| 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); | Yes |
| 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; | Yes |
| 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 | Yes |

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| 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); | Yes |
| 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; | Yes |
| 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; | Yes |
| 10. The State agrees to report on the impact and outcomes of its approved waivers in its WIOA Annual Report. | Yes |
| 11. 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); | Yes |

ADULT PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

| Performance Indicators | PY 2022 Expected Level | PY 2022 Negotiated Level | PY 2023 Expected Level | PY 2023 Negotiated Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employment (Second Quarter After Exit) | 78.0% | 78.0% | 78.5% | 78.5% |
| Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit) | 76.0% | 76.0% | 77.0% | 77.0% |
| Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit) | $6,800 | $7,052 | $6,900 | $7,052 |
| Credential Attainment Rate | 62.4% | 62.4% | 63.4% | 63.4% |
| Measurable Skill | 52.2% | 52.2% | 53.2% | 53.2% |

| Performance Indicators | PY 2022 Expected Level | PY 2022 Negotiated Level | PY 2023 Expected Level | PY 2023 Negotiated Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gains | | | | |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] |

*1*

*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

DISLOCATED PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

| Performance Indicators | PY 2022 Expected Level | PY 2022 Negotiated Level | PY 2023 Expected Level | PY 2023 Negotiated Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employment (Second Quarter After Exit) | 70.7% | 70.7% | 71.7% | 71.7% |
| Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit) | 72.4% | 72.4% | 73.4% | 73.4% |
| Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit) | $7,350 | $7,604 | $7,450 | $7,604 |
| Credential Attainment Rate | 64.6% | 64.6% | 65.1% | 65.1% |
| Measurable Skill Gains | 58.3% | 58.3% | 59.3% | 59.3% |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] |

*1*

*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

YOUTH PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

| Performance Indicators | PY 2022 Expected Level | PY 2022 Negotiated Level | PY 2023 Expected Level | PY 2023 Negotiated Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employment (Second Quarter After Exit) | 70.7% | 70.7% | 71.7% | 71.7% |
| Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit) | 70.3% | 70.3% | 71.3% | 71.3% |
| Median Earnings (Second Quarter | $3200 | $3200 | $3300 | $3300 |

| Performance Indicators | PY 2022 Expected Level | PY 2022 Negotiated Level | PY 2023 Expected Level | PY 2023 Negotiated Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| After Exit) | | | | |
| Credential Attainment Rate | 51.9% | 51.9% | 52.9% | 52.9% |
| Measurable Skill Gains | 43.5% | 50.0% | 44.5% | 50.0% |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] |

*1*

*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

## PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR WAGNER-PEYSER PROGRAM (EMPLOYMENT SERVICES)

### A. EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF

#### 1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL STAFF THE PROVISION OF LABOR EXCHANGE SERVICES UNDER THE WAGNER-PEYSER ACT, SUCH AS THROUGH STATE EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING BUT NOT LIMITED TO STATE MERIT STAFF EMPLOYEES, STAFF OF A SUBRECIPIENT, OR SOME COMBINATION THEREOF.

DWS staff (state merit staff employees) are physically housed at all certified NCWorks Career Centers across the state. Under the Integrated Service Delivery model, these Wagner-Peyser funded state employees lead the RESEA program, assist with Title I programs, career counseling, employer services, job search activities, and other related labor exchange services. Most importantly, these area Career Center staff are directly accountable for implementing the Governor's vision for workforce development at the local level. Regional Operations Directors, also funded by Wagner-Peyser, are instrumental in oversight of all Wagner-Peyser services. While local Workforce Boards have operational control of all NCWorks Career Centers, Regional Operations Directors provide the continuity needed to insure the Governor's vision for workforce development comes to fruition.

#### 2. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL UTILIZE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICE STAFF TO ENSURE STAFF IS ABLE TO PROVIDE HIGH QUALITY SERVICES TO BOTH JOBSEEKERS AND EMPLOYERS

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. Having a well-trained workforce development staff ensures that the Governor's NC Job Ready Plan can be fully implemented.

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 online training courses, workshops by professional, peer, and in-house trainers in both face- to-face sessions and online webinars and tutorials, and an online library of training resources. The NCWorks

Training Center also provides a vast list of supportive services including meeting and conference preparation and planning, along with other customized event services as requested.

The NCWorks Training Center is located in a self-contained facility and boasts two well-equipped classrooms. The largest classroom can seat 42 in a traditional set-up and over 100 if set theater style with no tables. The computer lab accommodates 24 learners using laptops, which can be removed to convert to a traditional classroom. The NCWorks Training Center team is comprised of four 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 training and events are retained and managed through the Training Registration and Information Network (TRAIN). This comprehensive system is managed by the Training Center and Division staff to access online training options and resources, to collect and retain student records, to maintain data for easy reporting, to store student transcripts, and to manage event and training self-service registration online.

The NCWorks Training Center is readily available with logistical planning of events, registration, data collection, supportive services, and training delivery. The current catalog of 88 interactive online courses successfully enhances accessibility of training on a variety of on demand topics.

Several of these courses are bundled into a product entitled *Welcome to Workforce*, which provides a structure for comprehensive system orientation and skill development over a 2-year period. This basic foundation is critical for new staff to acquire a solid understanding of the work they perform and is also a useful refresher for more seasoned staff.

The NCWorks Training Center continues to provide workforce development professionals a globally recognized credentialing opportunity through the Facilitating Career Development (FCD) course. This 120-hour course uses the curriculum of the National Career Development Association (NCDA) 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. This course is offered 4-6 times per year depending on the need.

Another credentialing course available and offered as needed is the Business and Employer Services Professional (BESP) course, which is comprised of 40 hours of online work, 2 classroom days, and completion of an independent project. This course is designed for any staff in the NCWorks Career Center who interfaces with the business community and the content encourages for development of strong relationships with business, effective communication skills, and using needs assessment to determine solutions for businesses in recruiting and retaining a viable workforce. The curriculum was developed and is delivered by Lengel Vocational Services.

Each year, the NCWorks Training Center plans, coordinates, and hosts the NCWorks Partnership Conference. This event is traditionally offered as an in-person conference and offers opportunities for attendees to participate in more than 60 workshops provided by professional trainers from around the country and peers from around the state. Attendees include frontline staff of NCWorks Career Centers, Workforce Board Directors and staff, private sector business representatives, staff and management of various government agencies, and non-profit organizations. The conference attendance each year averages 1,000. The theme, workshop topics, and networking activities are planned by an interagency team working together over a 10-month period and guided by the Training Center team. During the pandemic, the conference

was offered in a fully virtual format and maintained similar participation rates from the same groups.

The newest initiative lead by the Training Center is a comprehensive leadership development course entitled *STAR: Successful Teams Achieve Results.* The course values and structure were developed using a team of workforce professionals that included Workforce Board Directors, senior leadership at the Division, and NCWorks Career Center Managers. Six cohorts have been offered since 2019 with 95 graduates who attended 12-13 sessions over a six-month period. The course is open to existing staff of the core workforce system (Division, Workforce Boards, service contractors) who are recommended by leadership.

Another initiative designed to enhance accessibility to training and increase awareness of professional development opportunities is the *NCWorks Training Champions*. Each Workforce Board was given the opportunity, in collaboration with Division leadership, to identify staff of the NCWorks Career Centers to participate in the training. The training consists of two sessions led by the Training Center team and exposes participants to tools and techniques for designing training and team activities, how to access and effectively utilize existing online course options and develop their own skills as a training advocate. The 35 staff who graduated are actively encouraging staff development in their local areas, supporting their peers in professional growth, and providing the Training Center with accurate and tangible information on local training needs and preferences.

Another area of emphasis is providing training support to other work units of the Division. This year included live virtual training with Division's Accountability Section in collaboration with Maher and Maher to upskill the internal staff and the workforce boards on fiscal and contractual issues. Other topical areas supported were NCWorks Online basis training for local staff, several data-related and programmatic monitoring technical trainings, and quarterly training for veterans staff.

## 3. DESCRIBE STRATEGIES DEVELOPED TO SUPPORT TRAINING AND AWARENESS ACROSS CORE PROGRAMS AND THE UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (UI) PROGRAM AND THE TRAINING PROVIDED FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND WIOA STAFF ON IDENTIFICATION OF UI ELIGIBILITY ISSUES AND REFERRAL TO UI STAFF FOR ADJUDICATION

The Division of Workforce Solutions, the Workforce Development Boards, and the Division of Employment Security (DES) continue to collaborate on ways to provide significant assistance to individuals requesting help in filing for unemployment insurance compensation. In this focus on collaborative efforts, DWS, Workforce Development Boards, and DES is revising a joint task force to develop short range improvement goals within the NCWorks Career Centers. A major initiative that was previously derived from the task force was DES statewide unemployment insurance training of Career Center Staff: providing an overview of the unemployment insurance program, instruction on utilizing claimant databases, and processes and expectations for staff serving customers. DWS Analysts meet monthly with the DES Chief of Programs and his Unemployment Insurance Department leaders to exchange information on unemployment insurance and potential barriers and/or concerns of the Career Centers. In addition, Assistant Secretary from DES and DWS, along with their executive staff meet quarterly to discuss unemployment insurance policy, keep abreast of program changes, and identify any potential issues. Changes or corrections to unemployment insurance procedures are 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.des.nc.gov) or by calling the Customer Call Center (1-888-737-0259). Individuals are able to access the computers and telephones within

the NCWorks Career Resource Center, with or without assistance from NCWorks Career Center staff, to file a claim.

In the past, DES held UI training sessions to help NCWorks Career Center staff understand how to provide targeted UI assistance to jobseekers, and when to hand-off jobseekers with claims issues to DES for processing. Having established clearer expectations of UI assistance within Career Centers has become very beneficial to jobseekers.

Guidance and information are provided using the "North Carolina Unemployment Insurance Guide' pamphlet which includes information such as:

- How to File a Claim
- Where to call concerning claim question
- Eligibility criteria
- Where to call if I have questions regarding my appeal

Copies of the pamphlets have been shared with all the State's Local Workforce Development Boards for distribution through the NCWorks Career Centers. DES and DWS worked together to create Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for UI processes. Additional resource materials have been provided for sharing of information such as: poster sized flyers addressing work search tips and fraud prevention, as well as printable documents accessible through the DES website including 'Top 10 Things You Should Know When Filing Your Claim, Common Unemployment Insurance Mistakes, and How to Prevent UI Fraud.

### B. EXPLAIN HOW THE STATE WILL PROVIDE INFORMATION AND MEANINGFUL ASSISTANCE TO INDIVIDUALS REQUESTING ASSISTANCE IN FILING A CLAIM FOR UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION THROUGH ONE-STOP CENTERS, AS REQUIRED BY WIOA AS A CAREER SERVICE

Customers entering an NCWorks Career Center to learn about or to apply for Unemployment Insurance (UI) benefits are assisted by trained professionals. DES provided comprehensive statewide training to Career Center staff on UI and as a result are well versed in the topic and can answer general questions about the program and the level of benefits available to recipients in North Carolina. The DES UI training was recorded and is being shared via TRAIN as a continuous resource for Center staff along with FAQs developed based upon questions asked during the training sessions. DES has also developed a website robust of program information for use by Center staff as well as individuals attempting to apply for UI or learn more about UI.

Customers who wish to apply for UI are directed to the public computers in each Career Center and, if assistance is requested for any reason, including limited English proficiency, disabilities, or other barriers, staff will provide the requested assistance to the customer in completing the online application for benefits. Assistance with UI questions is also available to customers by phone. Staff are also available to help connect customers with the UI call center operated by the Division of Employment Security, the state's administrator of UI. Call center staff will answer very specific questions concerning individual claims and their benefits. Certain staff within the DWS hierarchy have also been provided with additional application accesses to resolve certain technical issues and address claims issues or request expediting as needed.

### C. DESCRIBE THE STATE'S STRATEGY FOR PROVIDING REEMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE TO UI CLAIMANTS AND OTHER UNEMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS

Labor exchange services are provided to unemployment insurance claimants when they participate in their reemployment appointment. Each claimant is notified by mail of a mandatory reemployment appointment with a NCWorks Career Center. Included with each appointment notice is blank Work Search log and guidelines. During this appointment claimants

receive an orientation of employment services to provide an awareness of Career Center services offered, new customers visiting a NCWorks Career Center receive the same orientation of employment services provided to UI claimants. This is essential in allowing all customers to take advantage of services he/she views as beneficial. The employment services orientation combined with an employability and skills assessment conducted by Career Center staff ensures customers benefit from Governor Roy Cooper's initiative "NC Job Ready", a holistic approach to providing a better trained workforce for employers and providing new work opportunities for job seekers. 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. DES and DWS plan to expand the use of NCWorks Online by implementing the work search repository functionality. This would allow UI customers to more easily keep track of their work search and provide a greater advantage for staff to be able to help customers with their job hunting.

During the reemployment visit, the NCWorks Career Center staff discuss job referrals, Job Development Contacts, referrals to workshops (e.g., resume writing, job seeking skills, keeping a job, etc.), referrals to supportive services and make referrals for applicable training programs. The NCWorks Career Center staff also reviews claimants work test requirements. The requirements include:

1) the claimant continues to be out of work due to no fault of their own;

2) the claimant has not returned to work;

3) the claimant is able, available, and actively seeking employment.

D. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE W-P FUNDS TO SUPPORT UI CLAIMANTS, AND THE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN W-P AND UI, AS APPROPRIATE INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

The Division of Workforce Solutions, the Workforce Development Boards, and the Division of Employment Security, which administers the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program, work very closely together to meet the employment needs of UI recipients. As described in questions (b) and (c) above, Wagner-Peyser funded staff, (WIOA Title I funded staff or partner staff in select areas) in NCWorks Career Centers meet with UI recipients within the first four weeks of receiving benefits, document that they are registered for work, review their job search activities, and make referrals to available jobs or WIOA Title I training, if appropriate. If the claimant has not complied with the Work Search and Claims Filing requirements, the Division of Employment Security is notified of the non-compliance and the case is referred for adjudication.

NCWorks Career Center staff meet with UI recipients within the first four weeks of receiving benefits, verify that they are registered for work, review their job search activities, and make referrals to available jobs or WIOA Title I training, if appropriate. If the claimant has not complied with the Work Search and Claims Filing requirements, the Division of Employment Security is notified of the non-compliance and the case is referred for adjudication.

**If the claimant has not complied with the Work Search and Claims Filing requirements, the Division of Employment Security is notified of the non-compliance and the case is referred to UI Adjudication for investigation.

NCWorks Career Center staff meet with UI recipients within the first four weeks of receiving benefits, document that they are registered for work, review their job search activities, and make referrals to available jobs or WIOA Title I training, if appropriate.

E. AGRICULTURAL OUTREACH PLAN (AOP). EACH STATE AGENCY MUST DEVELOP AN AOP EVERY FOUR YEARS AS PART OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN REQUIRED UNDER SECTIONS 102 OR 103 OF WIOA. THE AOP MUST INCLUDE AN ASSESSMENT OF NEED. AN ASSESSMENT NEED DESCRIBES THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS IN THE AREA BASED ON PAST AND PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL AND FARMWORKER ACTIVITY IN THE STATE. SUCH NEEDS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND HOUSING.

1. ASSESSMENT OF NEED. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS IN THE AREA BASED ON PAST AND PROJECTED AGRICULTURAL AND FARMWORKER ACTIVITY IN THE STATE. SUCH NEEDS MAY INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO: EMPLOYMENT, TRAINING, AND HOUSING.

Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFWs) generally live in rural, isolated areas throughout North Carolina. Approximately 95 percent are of Hispanic/Latino origin; many are primarily monolingual in Spanish; and more than 50 percent are from Mexico. These farmworkers have several obstacles to employment which include transportation, childcare, limited English-speaking abilities and education, and job training. All of these barriers are major reasons for their lack of economic mobility. North Carolina has an estimated 80,000 farmworkers during peak harvest season.

• 23,595 are Migrant Farmworkers

• 17,155 are Seasonal Farmworkers

• 10,145 are farmworkers who work more than 150 days (year round)

• 23,454 are H-2A foreign farmworkers

The DWS and Telamon Corporation (NFJP Grantee) plan to continue assisting farmworkers and their families by consolidating outreach programs that provide crucially needed individualized career services in mostly rural areas where the majority of farmworkers live and work.

2. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITY IN THE STATE MEANS: 1) IDENTIFYING THE TOP FIVE LABOR-INTENSIVE CROPS, THE MONTHS OF HEAVY ACTIVITY, AND THE GEOGRAPHIC AREA OF PRIME ACTIVITY; 2) SUMMARIZE THE AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS' NEEDS IN THE STATE (I.E. ARE THEY PREDOMINANTLY HIRING LOCAL OR FOREIGN WORKERS, ARE THEY EXPRESSING THAT THERE IS A SCARCITY IN THE AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE); AND 3) IDENTIFYING ANY ECONOMIC, NATURAL, OR OTHER FACTORS THAT ARE AFFECTING AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE OR ANY PROJECTED FACTORS THAT WILL AFFECT AGRICULTURE IN THE STATE

**Assessment of Agricultural Activity in North Carolina**

(1) North Carolina is a farm labor demand state. The following are its five most labor-intensive crops:

- Tobacco (April through Nov.) – Statewide
- Sweet Potato (May, Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov.) – Northeast, Southeast, Piedmont
- Blueberry (May, June, July) – Southeast
- Nursery/Horticulture (March through December) - Statewide
- Christmas Tree (Feb. through Dec.) – Western

The following factors are affecting agriculture in the state:

- The effects of frequent and intense hurricanes, flooding, extreme temperatures, droughts, hailstorms, saltwater intrusion, and beach erosion have already impacted and will continue to impact North Carolina's economy and agriculture production.

- Farm Labor Contractors working in North Carolina have increased use of the H-2A program substantially in recent years.
- MSFW's are aware of higher wages paid to workers coming to North Carolina under the H-2A program. Staff have become aware many MSFW's now request higher wages normally closely tied to the H-2A required wage rate.
- With land use practices changing due to our state becoming more urbanized and with the cost of land increasing, many farmers are being forced to sell their land and are losing their rented land to development/urban sprawl.
- The COVID-19 pandemic and pursuing variants continue to impact the agriculture community including MSFW's and Agricultural Employers. The tightened labor market has created job opportunities with increased pay rates and additional incentives that lure farmworkers from seasonal and temporary farm labor. Fears and uncertainties tied to COVID-19 have also had an impact on migrant farmworker populations who travel to North Carolina to harvest a variety of crops, most notably blueberries. Agricultural employers have continued to increase utilization of the H-2A program annually in North Carolina and that has remained constant during the pandemic.

3. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE UNIQUE NEEDS OF FARMWORKERS MEANS SUMMARIZING MIGRANT AND SEASONAL FARM WORKER (MSFW) CHARACTERISTICS (INCLUDING IF THEY ARE PREDOMINANTLY FROM CERTAIN COUNTRIES, WHAT LANGUAGE(S) THEY SPEAK, THE APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF MSFWS IN THE STATE DURING PEAK SEASON AND DURING LOW SEASON, AND WHETHER THEY TEND TO BE MIGRANT, SEASONAL, OR YEAR-ROUND FARMWORKERS). THIS INFORMATION MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT DATA SUPPLIED BY WIOA SECTION 167 NATIONAL FARMWORKER JOBS PROGRAM (NFJP) GRANTEES, OTHER MSFW ORGANIZATIONS, EMPLOYER ORGANIZATIONS, AND STATE AND/OR FEDERAL AGENCY DATA SOURCES SUCH AS THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE AND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR (DOL) EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING ADMINISTRATION

**Assessment of the Unique Needs of Farmworkers**

Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFWs) generally live in rural, isolated areas throughout North Carolina. Approximately 95 percent are of Hispanic/Latino origin; many are primarily monolingual in Spanish; and more than 50 percent are from Mexico. These farmworkers have several obstacles to employment which include transportation, childcare, limited English-speaking abilities and education, and job training. All of these barriers are major reasons for their lack of economic mobility. North Carolina has an estimated farmworker population of 80,000 during peak harvest season.

- 23,595 are Migrant Farmworkers
- 17,155 are Seasonal Farmworkers

• 10,145 are farmworkers who work more than 150 days (year-round)

• 23,454 are H-2A foreign farmworkers

The DWS and Telamon Corporation (NFJP Grantee) plan to continue assisting farmworkers and their families by consolidating outreach programs that provide crucially needed individualized career services in mostly rural areas where the majority of farmworkers live and work.

## 4. OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

- Contacting farmworkers who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by the employment service offices.
- Providing technical assistance to outreach workers. Technical assistance must include trainings, conferences, additional resources, and increased collaboration with other organizations on topics such as one-stop center services (i.e. availability of referrals to training, supportive services, and career services, as well as specific employment opportunities), the employment service complaint system, information on the other organizations serving MSFWs in the area, and a basic summary of farmworker rights, including their rights with respect to the terms and conditions of employment.
- Increasing outreach worker training and awareness across core programs including the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program and the training on identification of UI eligibility issues.
- Providing State merit staff outreach workers professional development activities to ensure they are able to provide high quality services to both jobseekers and employers.
- Coordinating outreach efforts with NFJP grantees as well as with public and private community service agencies and MSFW groups.

The local offices outreach activities must be designed to meet the needs of MSFWs in the State and to locate and contact MSFWs who are not being reached through normal intake activities. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for contacting farmworkers who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by the employment service offices:

- The outreach efforts as required by 20 CFR 653.107 (b) (2) will be conducted by permanent and temporary outreach staff members through personal contact, phone call, emails, and through virtual outreach. Staff will reach out to the National Monitor Advocate Team and collaborate with other agencies for new and creative ideas to perform virtual outreach when unforeseen events prevent in person outreach from occurring. Outreach workers will report to agricultural field supervisors who will have primary responsibility for ensuring accomplishments of outreach goals. North Carolina is divided into four regions: Each region has one field supervisor and two to four permanent agriculture employment consultants. Temporary outreach workers are hired during the peak harvest seasons to supplement outreach activities in areas with the highest concentration of MSFWs. These temporary outreach workers, co-funded by DWS and Telamon Corporation, will provide MSFW's with the full array of employment and training services offered by DWS and Telamon Corporation. Pandemic related restrictions may affect temporary outreach worker staffing decisions. Hiring decisions will be made annually.

DWS will continue to promote an aggressive outreach program. MSFWs will be contacted throughout North Carolina and be offered a full range of employment and training services to the extent that staff funding will allow.

- Services will continue to be delivered with priority outreach in NCWorks Career Centers that have high concentrations of MSFWs in their service areas.
- DWS has established policy for providing LEP services to all customers who do not speak English as their primary language. All outreach staff will remain up to date on all LEP services.

The following NCWorks Career Centers have been designated as MSFW Significant: Clayton, Clinton, Kenansville, Lumberton, North Wilkesboro, and Wilson.

The Agricultural Employment Services program of the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solution (DWS) is 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 who desire agricultural employment. Serving the agricultural industry is part of Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready Plan. As needed, interstate or migrant farmworkers and H-2A temporary foreign guest workers are brought in using the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) to supplement the existing agricultural workforce. Local seasonal and year-round farmworkers are permanent customers whom DWS staff members serve throughout the year. Migrant and H-2A workers will be in North Carolina in varying numbers throughout much of the year, primarily for harvest operations. Additionally, migrant farmworkers are brought in to supplement local workers in transplanting operations.

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 program area specialist, agricultural field supervisors, agricultural employment consultants, and the state monitor advocate. Training will consist of basic orientation to the full range of employment services: Unemployment Insurance (UI) program, application and job order-taking, recruitment and referral procedures, complaint processing procedures, recognition of apparent violations, farmworkers' rights, supportive services, coordination of outreach efforts with other community-based organizations, completion of outreach logs and reports, and MSFWs' contacts. Outreach staff will also receive training in PC usage so that they will be able to access DWS automated services via desktop or laptop computers. The state 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.

Annual training is conducted for all permanent and temporary outreach workers on all workforce programs and for additional required training. This training includes outreach safety, migrant housing, field checks, Employment Service and Employment-Related Law Complaint System, human trafficking, farmworkers' rights, Unemployment Insurance (UI) Disaster Unemployment Assistance (DUA), Prevailing Practice and Prevailing Wage Surveys, and MSFW registrations.

Outreach workers report to agricultural field supervisors who have primary responsibility for ensuring accomplishments of outreach goals. Through improved reporting practices, better local office coordination of time, and more flexibility by management in assignment of outreach duties, outreach will be conducted virtually and in person. Outreach workers, as well as other staff, will visit living areas, work sites, and gathering areas to explain the full range of services provided by the DWS and other agencies. When state guidance limits travel workers will be contacted by phone, email, on state approved social media, and utilizing state messaging apps. Unemployed and underemployed farmworkers will be advised of agricultural and nonagricultural job opportunities. Outreach workers will provide information and referrals to MSFWs to supportive services, as well as assist them in securing aid such as food stamps, clothing, blankets, hygiene kits, and migrant shelter, when needed.

DWS works closely with other agencies concerned with the needs of MSFWs to coordinate the provision of referral services to these agencies. Copies of the AOP will be provided, upon request, to agencies concerned with the needs of MSFWs. In addition, DWS partners with Telamon to strengthen the ability of eligible MSFWs and their dependents to obtain or retain employment, stabilize their employment, and achieve economic self-sufficiency.

## 5. SERVICES PROVIDED TO FARMWORKERS AND AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYERS THROUGH THE ONE-STOP DELIVERY SYSTEM

All NCWorks Career Centers provide basic career services, individualized career services and follow-up 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. Agricultural employment consultants and temporary agricultural outreach specialists will be strategically assigned to NCWorks Career Centers for the purpose of providing employment and training services to both agricultural employers and MSFWs. Training will be provided to NCWorks Career Center staff where no agricultural employment consultant/outreach staff are assigned to serve the MSFW population.

Outreach workers will locate and contact MSFWs who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by NCWorks Career Centers. Outreach workers will visit working, living, or gathering areas and explain the following services available through NCWorks Career Centers in a language understood by them: availability of referrals to training, supportive services, career services, employment opportunities, information on the Employment Service and Employment-related Law Complaint System, information on the other organizations serving MSFWs, and a basic summary of farmworkers' rights. Outreach workers will then encourage MSFWs to visit their local NCWorks Career Centers to obtain the full range of employment and training services.

Agricultural services staff members reach out to agricultural employers in rural areas throughout North Carolina, assisting them in their pursuit of agricultural workers. Agricultural employers who are expected to hire MSFWs will be identified through coordination with various providers of workforce development services. Services to these employers will be marketed by performing the following activities: conducting employer visits, promotional telephone contacts, and staff participation in growers' meetings and training seminars, workshops, and conferences. Staff will continue to partner with other agencies to provide Farm Labor Contractor Workshops in person or virtually when opportunities arise. Partner agencies include, but are not limited to, the US DOL Wage & Hour Division, North Carolina Department of Labor, and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension. These trainings are intended to educate, train, and assist farm labor contractors on compliance with various state and federal regulations.

The Employment Service and Employment-Related Law Complaint System is marketed to farmworkers and farmworker advocacy groups in the following manner: through presentations at different community events, conferences, workshops, farmworkers' worksites and living areas.

The Agricultural Recruitment System will be marketed to agricultural employers through presentations at GAP (Good Agricultural Practices) events, by posting farm work available posters in English and Spanish, and performing outreach. Outreach staff will conduct employer visits and will be involved in continuous recruitment efforts for local, interstate, and intrastate farmworkers. As funds allow, all media, including Hispanic radio, TV, and newspapers, will be utilized to ensure positive recruitment of agricultural workers. Brochures will also be distributed in Spanish and English in public-gathering places.

## 6. OTHER REQUIREMENTS

A. COLLABORATION

**DWS Collaborative Agreements and Efforts Description:**

- A Memorandum of Understanding was entered with Telamon to establish protocols for cooperatively serving the MSFW population in North Carolina.
- A Memorandum of Understanding was entered with the U.S. DOL Wage & Hour Division to form a partnership to more effectively and efficiently communicate and cooperate on areas of common interest, including training materials, providing employers and employees with compliance assistance information, and sharing information, as appropriate.
- The DWS serves as an advisory member of the Farm Labor Practices Group (FLPG). The FLPG is a multi-sector diverse group of businesses, grower groups, advocacy organizations, and government entities which serve as: a facilitated forum for learning about farm labor issues from the diverse perspective of members; an opportunity to deepen mutual understanding and build productive new relationships through informal discussions with other members; an opportunity for members to work collaboratively to address farm labor challenges of mutual interest; and a means to offer constructive support to growers and farmworkers.
- DWS also collaborates with GAP Connections and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension service agencies. The agricultural services outreach staff participates in Farm Safety & Compliance events and Farm Labor Contractor Workshops. These events provide the opportunity for both employer and farmworkers to be informed and educated on a variety of topics including common violations, migrant housing, field sanitation, green tobacco sickness, heat stress, basic first aid and CPR, H-2A clearance orders, farm labor contractor registrations, pesticide safety, and human trafficking. In addition, training on compliance topics such as labor laws, worker rights, and harassment are included.
- DWS is a member of the North Carolina Agricultural Stakeholders Text Tree Meteorological Disaster Preparedness. This group has been assembled to assist vulnerable worker populations in North Carolina in the event of an impending meteorological disaster.
- DWS has established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the North Carolina Department of Labor (NCDOL). This is to set forth the principles of the working relationship which establishes general procedures for cooperation between the two agencies in order to ensure effective preoccupancy inspections and to eliminate duplication of efforts. Specifically, this MOU will establish a process and framework to: 1) train DWS inspection personnel to conduct preoccupancy inspections of migrant housing; 2) establish procedures for DWS personnel to complete and submit reports related to preoccupancy inspections of migrant housing; and 3) institute new procedures for reimbursing NCDOC for a portion of the cost associated with DWS personnel conducting preoccupancy inspections of migrant housing.
- As a result of COVID-19 DWS has enhanced its partnership with North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services and healthcare agencies throughout the state. This collaboration has helped provide MSFW's and Agricultural Employers with essential PPE, COVID-19 education, and partnerships at the county level to provide all interested with opportunities for vaccinations and testing. DWS will continue to assist providing healthcare resources as well as other supportive services to the agricultural community statewide.

The State Workforce agency intends to continue collaboration with existing partners and to establish new partners over the next four years. We will continue to participate and collaborate with other service agency by providing presentations, coordination of outreach efforts when possible, and participating in public meetings, conferences, and workshops to better serve the agricultural population in our state.

NCSWA will meet with MSFW service providers including our NFJP, Telamon Corporation annually where parties can request establishing agreements or building upon existing agreements.

## B. REVIEW AND PUBLIC COMMENT

The DWS solicited information and suggestions from public agencies, employer organizations, and other interested groups. Comments, feedback, and suggestions will be requested from the following agencies:

- North Carolina Department of Agriculture
- North Carolina Department of Labor Agricultural Safety and Health
- North Carolina Migrant Education
- Telamon Corporation
- Farm Bureau Federation of North Carolina
- Governor's Council for Hispanic/Latino Affairs
- North Carolina Cooperative Extension Services
- Legal Services of North Carolina, Farmworker Unit
- Farmworker Advocacy Network (FAN)
- North Carolina Agromedicine Institute
- US Department of Labor Wage & Hour Division

Due to significant staffing changes to both the NFJP and NCSWA the AOP updates have yet to be reviewed and there are no comments at this time. NCSWA will provide the NFJP with all AOP updates in May 2022. NCSWA will inform all commenting parties in writing whether their comments have been incorporated and, if not, the reasons therefore by June 2022.

## C. DATA ASSESSMENT

DWS has successfully provided quantitatively proportionate services as compared to the general population and continues to meet the MSFW equity ratio indicators and minimum service level indicators as required by the US DOL at 20 CFR 653.109. The statewide MSFW Service Level Indicators report for the past four years show compliance with all equity ratio indicators and two of three minimum-service level indicators.

- Total active MSFW applications – 11, 323
- Referred to employment – 7,140
- Placed in Jobs – 4,595

## D. ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

DWS successfully collaborated with other service providers and adhered to the requirements of WIOA and the Wagner-Peyser Act at sections 20 CFR, parts 651, 652, 653, 655, and 658. As such, MSFWs were offered and provided the full array of employment and training services equitable and quantitatively comparable to that offered and provided to non-MSFWs. Outreach activities were conducted statewide by agricultural employment consultants, as well as temporarily funded MSFW outreach staff who were bilingual in English/Spanish. These staff members were co-funded through an ongoing and very successful cooperative outreach service agreement between DWS and Telamon.

In the last four years, H-2A Foreign Labor Certification program activities have increased. Each year agricultural employers have requested more than 20,000 foreign workers to fill temporary agricultural job openings in North Carolina. The increase usage of this program has been a challenge for outreach staff to meet MSFW registration goals. The number of MSFWs has slightly decreased while the number of foreign workers continues to increase. As noted in Gov. Roy Cooper's Job Ready Initiative, DWS will focus on creating strategies and solutions to current challenges, and recruit more MSFWs, placing emphasis on job placement in both agricultural and nonagricultural industries. For many years, DWS has focused on recruitment for labor intensive crops; however, with changes/updates made by the US DOL to the definition of agriculture, DWS will expand recruitment efforts in other areas of the agriculture industry, such as pine straw, reforestation, hog, chicken, dairy farms, greenhouses and nurseries, beekeeping, hemp farms, construction on farm sites, and other work activities that are incidental to farm work.

## E. STATE MONITOR ADVOCATE

The State Monitor Advocate (SMA) submits his recommendations concerning the DWS 2020 Agricultural Outreach Plan in accordance with federal regulation section 20 CFR 653.107(c)(1)(v).

The SMA has reviewed and approved the AOP and has offered valuable suggestions, which will be incorporated into the final AOP. In the last three years, the previous SMA and the current SMA conducted more in-depth onsite reviews. The SMA utilized a monitoring guide questionnaire that was created to interview various career center staff members in order to measure their knowledge and to recognize where training was needed. In addition, the SMA and the program manager created training focused on the Complaint System that was presented specifically to career center managers who then assigned complaint specialists and backups. This training was conducted statewide giving exposure to the Monitor Advocate System and the Agricultural Services Program. Upon completion of the training, it was noted that career centers were capturing and recording more complaints statewide.

The SMA will continue to conduct onsite reviews at the MSFW significant offices, but will also perform onsite reviews at career centers with permanent outreach staff. The monitoring guide will also be updated and modified to better fit changes in the program and in the state. The SMA will continue to review the delivery of services to MSFWs and provide training and technical assistance, as needed. The SMA and outreach staff will continue to provide training on the Complaint System statewide on an as-needed basis or when requested.

## WAGNER-PEYSER ASSURANCES

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| 1. The Wagner-Peyser Act 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)); | Yes |

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| 2. If the State has significant MSFW one-stop centers, the State agency is complying with the requirements under 20 CFR 653.111, State Workforce Agency staffing requirements; | Yes |
| 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 Act services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I; and | Yes |
| 4. SWA officials:<br>1) Initiate the discontinuation of services;<br>2) Make the determination that services need to be discontinued;<br>3) Make the determination to reinstate services after the services have been discontinued;<br>4) Approve corrective action plans;<br>5) Approve the removal of an employer's clearance orders from interstate or intrastate clearance if the employer was granted conditional access to ARS and did not come into compliance within 5 calendar days;<br>6) Enter into agreements with State and Federal enforcement agencies for enforcement-agency staff to conduct field checks on the SWAs' behalf (if the SWA so chooses); and<br>7) Decide whether to consent to the withdrawal of complaints if a party who requested a hearing wishes to withdraw its request for hearing in writing before the hearing. | Yes |

WAGNER PEYSER PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

| Performance Indicators | PY 2022 Expected Level | PY 2022 Negotiated Level | PY 2023 Expected Level | PY 2023 Negotiated Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employment (Second Quarter After Exit) | 67.8% | 67.8% | 68.8% | 68.8% |
| Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit) | 67.1% | 67.1% | 68.1% | 68.1% |
| Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit) | $5300 | $5410 | $5400 | $5410 |
| Credential Attainment Rate | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |

| Performance Indicators | PY 2022 Expected Level | PY 2022 Negotiated Level | PY 2023 Expected Level | PY 2023 Negotiated Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Measurable Skill Gains | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable | Not Applicable |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] |

*1*

*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

## PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAMS

### A. ALIGNING OF CONTENT STANDARDS

The state of North Carolina adopted the North Carolina Community College System College and Career Readiness Adult Education Standards in 2010. In April 2013, when the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) introduced the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education, the NCCCS College and Career Readiness Adult Education Standards were reviewed and aligned to reflect the new OCTAE standards. At that time the standards were renamed The NCCC Adult Education Content Standards (NCCCAECS). NC requires that all adult education instruction be aligned to the NCCC Adult Education Content Standards. NC requires that English language instruction be aligned to the OCTAE English Language Proficiency Standards for Adult Education (ELPS). The ELPS outline language demands across academic areas that must be developed for success in postsecondary and occupational training.

NC has aligned its content standards to postsecondary entry assessments. Specific math and reading curriculum have been developed to include postsecondary entry standards contextualized to career clusters. This project, Career READY trains in the use of these standards and operating two courses, math and English that specifically designed for students to enroll in secondary without remediation.

NC provides training on standards-based instruction (SBI) through our NC Core Credentialing System. The NCCC CCR Department will create a virtual on-demand training on Standards Based Instruction in 2023. NC Title II participated in OCTAE, Standards In Action Instructional Training on Developing ELL Lessons aligned to the Content Standards and is disseminating this training by establishing a cohort of ELL instructors regionally located, to serve as trainers and to provide technical assistance. contracted English language ,

Documentation of SBI is part of the NCCCS Title II program monitoring process and it continues to be in the competitive RFP process.

### B. LOCAL ACTIVITIES

### ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY ACTIVITIES (SECTION 203 OF WIOA)

The NC Community College System (NCCCS), College and Career Readiness (CCR) is the State's agency for administering the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 2014 Title ll Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA). CCR is responsible for allocating funds to eligible provides and providing program oversight for adult education and literacy services.

College and Career Readiness, Title ll will build local program capacity to develop and implement career and educational programing that ensures all NC adults, eligible for our services, can achieve economic self-sufficiency and full participate in their community.

In response to the pandemic, CCR created guiding themes to inform our work: 1. Build Economic Equity, 2. Identify Opportunities, 3. Support Digital Transformation. 1. Build Economic Equity: The CCR office will collaborate with NC Works and NCCCS to identify and implement career pathways that include Integrated Education and Training service approach. They will have multiple on ramps targeting those adults identified in the state plan as having multiple barriers to attendance. A marketing and outreach plan will be created to target these adults which will ensure equitable access to these programs. 2. Identify Opportunities: In keeping with the NCCCS office goals: to serve as engine for NC workforce development, serve as North Carolinians first choice for accessible and affordable post-secondary education and training and provide a national model for diversity and inclusion, CCR will participate in state level projects that support credential attainment. CCR will support the REACH project which develops career pathways to increase the number of credentials earned by communities of color. It will support the Career Pathways for Students with Disabilities and other community college projects that leverage our resources to increase credential attainment for adult education students. 3. Digital Transformation: CCR launched the Digital Literacy Project to build programs' capacity to improve digital skills, access to a device and broadband connection for students in all program areas so they can navigate the digital economy, education and life needs. CCR will collaborate with the NC Digital Equity Office to be a participating member of the National Governors Association, Digital Equity Project.

NCCCS will allocate AEFLA funds for multiyear awards for four years with a re-application process for continued funding in year two, three and four for grantees who meet are in good standing.

The NCCCS will require all eligible providers' use the same application process for sections 231, 225, and 243. All three programs will use the same grant application and process. Funds will be allocated through a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) to eligible providers who may be the following but not limited to: 1. Local educational agencies, 2. Community-based organizations or faith-based organizations, 3. Volunteer literacy organizations, 4. Institutions of higher education, 5. Public or private nonprofit agencies, Libraries, 6. Public housing authorities 7. Nonprofit institutions that are not described in any of the above and have the ability to provide adult education and literacy activities to eligible individuals 8. Consortia or coalitions of the agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries, or authorities described above, and 9. Partnerships between an employer and an entity described above.

NC Community College System, College and Career Readiness Program (CCR), Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, Title II prepares adults, functioning below post-secondary level, with the academic knowledge, workplace readiness skills, and post-secondary transition skills required to earn credentials in a career pathway and lead to employment with family sustaining wages. NC CCR will fund eligible providers through a competitive Request for Proposal process to implement the following activities:

- Adult Education and Literacy services that increase an individual's ability to read, write and speak in English and perform mathematics or other activities necessary for attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equipment: transition to postsecondary education and training and obtain employment.
    - English Language Acquisition (ELA) program to 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 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 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.
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    - 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; -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.
    - Integrated Education and Training service approach that 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.

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    - 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 must include Integrated Education and Training.
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        - Included in the RFP is a process for local board review to determine whether they are consistent with the approved local plan (section 107(d)(11)(B)(i)(I) of WIOA and 34 CFR. The Local Board will make recommendations to the eligible agency to promote alignment with the approved local plan (section 107(d)(11)(B)(i)(II) of WIOA and 34 CFR. Per Section 231(e) of WIOA, the application will require a description of program design and implementation based on the 13 considerations and

a description of how the plan is aligned to their Local Workforce Development Board. The 13 considerations are listed below: (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.

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C. CORRECTIONS EDUCATION AND OTHER EDUCATION OF INSTITUTIONALIZED INDIVIDUALS

Each eligible agency using funds provided under Programs for Corrections Education and Other Institutionalized Individuals to carry out a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution must give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within 5 years of participation in the program.

The North Carolina Department of Public Safety housed 29,725 individuals on 11/30/2021, as reported on the North Carolina Department of Public Safety Custom Offender Reports https://webapps.doc.state.nc.us/apps/asqExt/ASQ. Approximately 69% of those adults lack a high school diploma, or a high school equivalency credential, or score below the sixth-grade level on either the reading or math NRS approved assessment.

North Carolina Community College System's strategic plan incorporates Economic and Workforce Impact in serving the citizens of North Carolina citizens by ensuring that the educational pipeline prepares a workforce possessing the interest, knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet the needs of employers, now and into the future. College and Career Readiness (CCR), Title II will collaborate with NCCCS to create pipelines for justice involved students who are within 5 years of release.

At least sixty percent of North Carolina's literacy providers offer basic skills instruction in 55 NC Department of Public Safety (NCDPS) adult correctional prison facilities, in addition to local detention centers, jails, and youth development centers. One way to gain understanding and resources and to develop partnerships to serve justice-involved students is through the North Carolina's Governor's State Reentry Council Collaborative (SRCC). Since its inception in 2017, the North Carolina Community College System has provided a minimum of two representatives who serve on the Council which actively works with community and faith-based organizations, law enforcement, workforce commissions, business, health and human services, government agencies and formerly incarcerated individuals to study the needs of recently released individuals. In 2018, the SRCC Council made recommendations to the North Carolina Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Justice and Public Safety and is currently implementing those recommendations into effective strategies for supporting individuals and their successful reintegration into society. SRCC teams charged with implementing these recommendations have met regularly since 2019, and the full SRCC continues to meet quarterly to discuss progress on implementation goals.

From funds made available under section 222(a)(1) Title II WIOA, 6 percent will allocate for Section 225 funds and be awarded according to a formula adopted by the North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges in 2019. NCCCS will allocate AEFLA funds for multiyear awards for four years with a re-application process for continued funding in year two, three, and four for grantees in good standing. The NCCCS will require that all eligible providers use the same application process as referenced in Common Elements, Distribution of funds for Core Programs, section 5 B of the NC Unified State Plan for sections 231, 225, and 243 to ensure direct and equitable access for all eligible providers.

The Title II WIOA Section 225 funding formula has three components:

1. Base: 30% of available funding is allocated equally across providers.

2. Participation: 30 % of available funding is allocated based on the provider's share of participants. That share is multiplied by a dedicated allotment to determine provider allocation. Participant is defined as an individual in a Title II program who has received at least 12 hours of service in a Period of Participation (POP). The participation component is available only to providers who have submitted 2019-2020 data.

3. Performance: 40% of available funding is allocated based on provider's share of Measurable Skill Gains (MSGs). That share is multiplied by a dedicated allotment to determine provider allocation.

## D. INTEGRATED ENGLISH LITERACY AND CIVICS EDUCATION PROGRAM

The North Carolina Community College System Office, College and Career Readiness Unit, will establish and operate Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IEL/CE) under Section 243 to provide educational services to adult English Language Learners (ELLs). Educational services will be provided to ELLs who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries, that enables such adults to achieve competency in the English language and acquire the skills necessary to function as effectively as parent, workers, and citizens in the United States.

IELCE providers will be established through a competitive Request for Proposal (RFP) process. The competitive RFP process requires applicants describe and demonstrate :

- Plans to integrate English language acquisition activities and civics education concurrently and contextualized to identified career pathways,
- Collaborative agreements with local workforce board, employers and post-secondary training providers,
- Recruitment and outreach plan,
- Demographic and in-demand industry data,
- Funds available under section 211 (a) (2) of WIOA will be for a four year cycle using the same process as described for Section 231 and 225 funds.

NC College and Career Readiness, IELCE program is updating its guidance and processes for IELCE providers. A Director of Career Pathways for English Language Learners will provide oversight of this award. And, an IELCE planning map will be required for all IELCE providers. The map will guide programs on how to collaborate with local workforce boards, employers and training providers to create career paths with multiple on ramps for low level learners. Monthly tracking of IELCE program plan implementation and budget will ensure compliance and identify programs in need of technical assistance.

IELCE providers are required to have partnerships with local workforce boards to meet the requirement of placing adults in unsubsidized employment. All IELCE participants will be registered in NCR Works and have accounts and training on the use of in NC Careers.org, a central online resource for students, parents, educators, job seeker and career counselors looking for high quality job and career information.

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## E. STATE LEADERSHIP

1. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT THE REQUIRED STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA

To meet this requirement, College and Career Readiness Unit Title II Professional Development System will use funds made available under section 222(a)(2) to engage adult education providers on their roles and responsibilities as core WIOA partners to participate in the operation of their local one-stop center, NC Works. This will include trainings delivered using a virtual format such as on-demand training and webinars. CCR, Title II has identified senior staff to lead the training and technical assistance to providers on collaboration with the 23 NC Workforce Development Boards.

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. To meet this requirement, College and Career Readiness Unit Title II Professional Development System will use funds made available under section 222(a)(2) to engage adult education providers on their roles and responsibilities as core WIOA partners to participate on the operation of their local one-stop center, NC Works. CCR, Title II has identified senior staff to lead the training and technical assistance to providers on collaboration with the 23 NC Workforce Development Boards. A three-prong strategy will be used that includes: 1. Building relationships with Title II providers and local workforce boards. CCR office will meet quarterly with NC Workforce Development Board Association and include representatives of Title II program directors to meet quarterly to plan and collaborate on strategies to support access to employment and access to employment and training services for individuals in adult education and literacy activities. Title II providers will be delegated the responsibilities of working with local workforce boards on content and signing the Memorandum of Understanding. Additionally, the monthly CCR newsletter will be distributed to the workforce development boards to aid in building their knowledge of CCR priorities and activities. 2. CCR, Title II will collaborate with Local Workforce Development Boards to define a process for reviewing, amending and signing the Memorandum of Understanding. Once defined, the process will be documented in a memo approved by the Title II State Director and accessible to CCR senior staff. 3. CCR, Title II will collaborate with core partners to provide training on Career Services using an appropriate delivery format. The goal of the training is to ensure adult education students are aware and have access to Career Service and to avoid duplication of services. In addition, CCR, Title II, State Director will serve on the WIOA State Steering Committee.

*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.*

The NC Title II Professional Development Office's vision for professional development is that NC adult educators and their partners engage in professional learning communities to improve lives through learning. Our mission is to engage practitioners and partners in ongoing, accessible, and reflective learning opportunities that positively impact practice and connect adult educators in the field. In order to facilitate this vision, we have collaborated with the NCCC System's Virtual Learning Community to create an online meeting place for instructors to learn research-based instructional practices, exchange ideas with their peers, and to participate in many types of professional development opportunities including synchronous and asynchronous classes as well as on-demand self-paced courses. Our goal in moving all professional development online is to ensure that high-quality, research-based, adult-ed

focused professional development is available to every Title II instructor in North Carolina, no matter how remote their location.

NC Title II Professional Development Office will use funds made available under section 222(a)(2) to provide a high-quality professional development system to improve instruction with an emphasis on:

1. Ensuring instruction is contextualized to careers
2. Improving North Carolina's comprehensive instructor credentialing system
3. Building each program's capacity for implementing models to accelerate transition, such as Integrated Education and Training and Pre-Apprenticeships that lead to a registered apprenticeship.
4. Improving instruction offered via distance education
5. Improving the digital literacy of both our students and instructors.
6. Standardizing the curriculum used across the state

The priorities of the NC Title II Professional Development Office were informed by an analysis utilizing the LINCS State Leadership Self-Assessment Tool. The PD Office used the self-assessment tool to develop a plan for prioritizing and implementing required activities. As a result of the analysis, we have moved all professional development into a virtual environment hosted by the NCCC System's Virtual Learning Community Moodle Portal. We will continue to offer, solely online, on-demand, asynchronous, and synchronous professional development opportunities for the foreseeable future. The flagship courses of our online offerings are three instructor facilitated certification courses: the Core Credential, ASE Language Arts, and ASE Mathematics. All three credentials are offered 100% at a distance through a collaborative relationship with the NCCC System Virtual Learning Community. The three credentialing courses introduce students to the essential components of reading as well as up-to-date research-based methods for teaching literacy to adult students. They also provide fundamental knowledge, skills and researched-based methods of instruction for adult education including for English language learners, essential components of reading, and meeting needs of students with disabilities.

NC Title II funds two Centers of Excellence tasked with providing professional development and technical assistance to providers. These centers are hosted by high performing providers who have a demonstrated record of innovative and effective strategies. These centers, the Center of Excellence for Adult Ed Performance (CEAEP)and the Center of Excellence for English Language Learners Transition to the Workplace (CEELW) provide professional development and technical assistance, disseminate researched-based practices, and serve as a resource for all providers. This approach allows for an authentic assessment of needs to target assistance. Centers can identify and better understand challenges experienced by local providers. As such, they create targeted, just-in-time, hands-on training. In collaboration with the State office team, The Centers of Excellence model will be evaluated and replicated to include other essential topic areas.

The CEAEP has created three on-demand courses focused on improving the NRS knowledge of Title II staff across the state. The three courses are:

- An Introduction to Title II Performance & Accountability
- Conquering Your Data Challenges
- NRS Post-Exit Primary Performance Indicators

The CEAEP will continue to create at least one on-demand course each year. Along with creating professional development, the CEAEP also provides targeted technical assistance to providers

struggling to meet NRS requirements. This technical assistance is offered through a combination of in-person and virtual modalities.

The CEELW has created an on-demand certification course entitled The IELCE Certificate Training Course. The course introduces and dives deeply into the legislation and regulations surrounding IELCE programs. The staff at the CEELW work very closely with IELCE providers by meeting with them weekly to guide them in the creation of their IELCE programs. The CEELW also offers multiple webinars throughout the year to disseminate research-based best practices for IELCE programs.

NC Title II also partners with NCCCS Student Success Center to offer professional development and to disseminate research-based models for advising, establishing and improving online instruction, and developing online training to improve instruction.

In addition to the many professional development opportunities offered through our collaboration with the VLC, the Centers of Excellence, and the Student Success Center. NC Title II also takes advantage of many training opportunities funded by OCTAE, including the Standards In Action Instructional Training on Developing ELL Lessons aligned to the Content Standards, Teaching Skills that Matter, The Serving All Students series of webinars, and the many courses and certificates offered by LINCS. We will continue to offer these high-quality pd offerings from OCTAE in the future.

C. A recently established publication by NC Title II to disseminate local best practices, as well as information about models and promising practices in adult ed programs, is the monthly newsletter produced by the Title II Professional Development office and published on the first Friday of each month. The Newsletter is sent to all Title II providers in North Carolina. The publication of the monthly newsletter is a major activity of the CCR Professional Development team and is the preferred platform for the state team to communicate important information to the field. Each issue contains a letter from the State Director, student success stories from North Carolina Title II programs, upcoming professional development opportunities, updates from each office in the Title II unit, and, most importantly, each issue highlights a research-based best practice for adult education instructors, frequently submitted by local Title II providers.

NCCCS, CCR unit has created technical assistance centers, partners with NCCCS office and has subject matter experts on staff to meet the provision of technical assistance to eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities receiving funds under this title, including--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; the role of eligible providers as a one-stop partner to provide access to employment, education, and training services; and assistance in the use of technology, including for staff training, to eligible providers, especially the use of technology to improve system efficiencies.

ICCR, Tittle ll Professional Development System partners with NCCCS Virtual Learning Center to offer on demand and regional training on using technology to improve instruction, improve distance learning opportunities. NCCCS, CCR Title ll plans on expanding staff with subject matter expertise in creating career pathways and coordinating with NC Registered Apprenticeships.

D. CCR, Title ll created the Regional Representatives model to monitor and evaluate 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. All programs have an assigned Representative who serves as the first point of contact and monitors submission of required documentation. They hold monthly webinars, review performance and provide a summary monthly report highlighting innovation, best practices and or identify needed technical assistance. They provide resources for program improvement. The unit for

Performance and Workforce Partners provides a monthly data report to assist Provider Representatives in data monitoring.

2. DESCRIBE HOW THE STATE WILL USE THE FUNDS TO CARRY OUT PERMISSIBLE STATE LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES UNDER SECTION 223 OF WIOA, IF APPLICABLE

CCR, Title II will use funds to carry out permissible state leaderships activities to support statewide initiatives to promote the purpose of this title to include:

The development and implementation of technology applications, translation technology, or distance education, including professional development to support the use of instructional technology.

The professional development unit of NC's Title II office offers guidance, support, and professional development on technology and distance education. We will continue vetting and purchasing high-quality research-based state licenses for adult education instructional software. For every state license, we provide a series of instructional webinars on best practices on utilizing the new software.

The Title II PD office also produces the annual NC Title II Distance Learning Manual which contains policy and guidance on all OCTAE approved distance learning methods including the proxy contact hour, teacher verification, and learner mastery models. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and in order to serve all students in North Carolina, Title II has created a paper-based distance learning option for students with limited access to technology and for students living in a correctional setting. We call this option Alternative Learning Packets or ALPs. Although our first priority is to ensure that all Title II students have access to both high speed internet and an appropriate device, when those are unavailable, we intend to continue using ALPs

C. Developing and disseminating curricula, including curricula incorporating the essential components of reading instruction as such components related to adults.

The Title II state leadership team has embarked on a project to standardize NC Title II curriculum across the state. Members of the state team have written Course Plans and Course Syllabi for each of the NRS ABE, ASE, and ESL Levels. These courses are aligned to the NCCC Adult Education Content Standards and the English Language Proficiency Standards for Adults. Coastal Carolina Community College has been contracted with Title II funds to write curriculum specifically for classes focusing on Digital Literacy. They have completed two courses: *Transition Digital Skills* and *Transition Digital Applications*.

We intend to continue focusing on curriculum standardization in the coming years by creating more course plans and syllabi. We are also intentionally focusing our professional development on improving curriculum and instruction by joining the Standards in Action and Teaching Skills That Matter cohorts. We will roll out both of these programs state-wide in the next two years.

D. Developing content and models for integrated education and training and career pathways

REACH

NC Title ll is partnering with the NCCCS on Racial Equity for Adult Credentials in Higher Education (REACH) Collaborative. The goal is a two percent increase in credential attainment for Black, Hispanic and Native Americans ages 25-64 with the focus on building economic equity

for College and Career Readiness students. Participation in the project required adult education directors to be on the planning and implementation team. The project will provide technical assistance and professional development on identifying four credential pathways with embedded short-term credentials leading to family sustaining wage jobs.

E. The provision of assistance to eligible providers in developing and implementing programs that achieve the objectives of this title and in measuring the progress of those programs in achieving such objectives, including meeting the State adjusted levels of performance described in section 116(b)(3). In collaboration with NCCCS Research and Performance, providers will have Data Dashboards to provide data analytic tools to monitor program performance and meet state adjusted level of performance. The data dashboards will allow providers to pull data to create specific data reports for programs to analyze and identify potential performance problems and or to resolve those problems. Within the dashboards, providers will be able to uses the detailed student-level views of data that are submitted monthly to the North Carolina Community College System Office Data Warehouse to monitor their programs performance and outcome measures.

A new global database management system that is being implemented for providers will also allow cross functionality between the new database management system and 3rd party data vendors and will serve as a linking system to help support the sharing of student data between providers. The database management system will incorporate National Reporting System (NRS) Adult Education performance outcome measures using common definitions and categories. NRS tables will calculate accurately to include error checks and prevent double counting which will increase the accuracy of programs performance measure outcomes. This new database management system will increase the accessibility of sharing student data amongst providers breaking away from data silos and system rigidity allowing for a more accurate data collection. State staff will provide monthly virtual statewide meetings with programs to provide important guidance/policy updates and resources for programs regarding the development of the new database management system and the performance dashboards.

F. The development and implementation of a system to assist in the transition from adult education to postsecondary education, including linkages with postsecondary educational institutions or institutions of higher education, including identifying curriculum frameworks and aligning rigorous content standards.

Career READY prepares adult learners to complete their Adult High School (AHS), or High School Equivalency (HSE) diploma and, concurrently, complete the mastery-based learning activities required to enroll into a certificate, diploma, degree, or Continuing Education program at a postsecondary level. CCR developed Transition English and Transition Math which are aligned academic standards required for entry int gate-way math and English. The courses are contextualized to career clusters. In addition, students enrolled in the Career READY program engage in high-touch academic advising, career advising, and academic preparation support services. Thus, by providing holistic wrap-around services, adult learners enrolled in the Career READY program enter gateway courses without the need for remedial placement at the North Carolina Community Colleges. The Career READY program provides equitable educational services and opportunities for the most academically at-risk students.

The Objectives of the Career READY Program:

- Master foundational academic skills,

- Prepare adult learners for successful completion of HSE assessments,
- Connect the content in mathematics and English courses to job skills required for high demand careers and,
- Transition to Curriculum or Continuing Education programs with no delay due to remediation courses

G. Integration of literacy and English language instruction with occupational skill training, including promoting linkages with employers.

To increase digital equity regarding the integration of literacy and English language instruction, providers will enhance their English Language Acquisition curriculum through technology integration. Providers will integrate both technology and digital literacy components into their existing curriculum aligned to in-demand careers. The integration of the technology and use of digital platforms to facilitate curriculum will serve as another apparatus to increase both access and participation in adult education programs. The integration of technology and digital platforms will increase the schedule flexibility and access for English Language Learners. Also, the occupational training skills portion will integrate digital literacy and technology to support the 21st century skills needed to enter most in-demand careers. Furthermore, the integration of digital literacy skills into existing in-demand curriculum will increase adult ELL ability to secure a career that earns a family sustaining wage.

H . Activities to promote workplace adult education and literacy activities

Pre-Apprenticeships CCR, Title II will collaborate with Apprenticeship NC to provide training and support to create pre-apprenticeships linked to Registered Apprenticeships. Through this partnership, CCR, Title II will explore models that link and connect student interests to instruction. A framework will be developed that will assist programs in helping students identify career needs and opportunities, develop a process that will place students on a pathway, career awareness and instructional mapping designed to illustrate a student's movement from basic skills instruction to registered apprenticeships that lead to family-sustaining careers. CCR, Title II will support this credential attainment and workforce development through ongoing technical assistance with collaboration from ApprenticeshipNC. With feedback from the Department of Education during their Rethink Adult Ed Challenge, we are supporting seven providers who will form the models for a variety of in-demand pre-apprenticeships. The content and models may include but will not be limited to construction, healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, and transportation. CCR, Title II will continue to partner with businesses, state agencies, Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, and post-secondary education. Further research of workplace programs will be conducted in order to connect students to robust employment. Additionally, toolkits will be developed to assist programs in the development and implementation of pre-apprenticeships. This may include support services, sector/industry-recognized credentials, outreach plans, and infusion of distance education.

In late 2020, CCR, Title II committed $350,000 of state leadership funding to invest in the implementation and demonstration of pre-apprenticeship models developed during the Department of Education's Rethink Adult Education Challenge. With input and collaboration with ApprenticeshipNC, the funded pre-apprenticeship programs will expand workforce learning and allow for increased credential attainment for North Carolinians. Recruitment and retention strategies will be researched and implemented to attract and sustain participation in these pre-apprenticeship programs.

The provision of assistance to eligible providers in developing and implementing programs that achieve the objectives of this title and in measuring the progress of those programs in achieving

such objectives, including meeting the State adjusted levels of performance described in section 116(b)(3).

In collaboration with NCCCS Research and Performance, providers will have Data Dashboards to provide data analytic tools to monitor program performance and meet state adjusted level of performance. The data dashboards will allow providers to pull data to create specific data reports for programs to analyze and identify potential performance problems and or to resolve those problems. Within the dashboards, providers will be able to uses the detailed student-level views of data that are submitted monthly to the North Carolina Community College System Office Data Warehouse to monitor their programs performance and outcome measures.

In collaboration with the Center of Excellence for Adult Education Performance (CEAEP), providers will have professional development and technical assistance support to assist in improving their performance and meeting the performance measure outcomes. Professional development and technical assistance will be provided to programs focused on performance accountability, post-exit indicators, conquering their data challenges, and tools and strategies to increase their overall Measurable Skills Gain rates. State staff will provide monthly virtual statewide meetings with programs to provide important guidance/policy updates and resources for programs regarding the development of data performance professional development, technical assistance support, and performance dashboards.

M. Other activities of statewide significance that promote the purpose of this title

Digital Equity Project

The Digital Equity Project was conceived and implemented out of necessity. Data reported during the early shutdown of the pandemic showed that communities of color were disproportionally affected by COVID-19. And, as the shutdown continued and education and work went online, this community, already experiencing the digital divide, were disproportionally impacted. In keeping with Title ll mission and performance measures, digital equity is essential to increasing credential attainment. The overreaching goal of the multiphase Digital Equity Project is to build NC Title II programs' capacity to act on creating digital equity and inclusion to meet the rapid transformation of a digital economy and life. In fall 2020-spring 2021, the NC Community College System Office supported the Digital Literacy project with NC 2020 COVID-19 Recovery Act and Title II funds. Six adult education providers (5 colleges and 1 community-based organization) representing varying NC regions, program size and expertise in providing digital literacy instruction and distance learning options, were selected to lead this work. This work resulted in curriculum, courses and student services support needed to improve students' capacities to navigate workforce development sites and services platforms and to be prepared to navigate academic learning platforms. In Phase II, Title II funds were allocated to a cohort of 5 adult education providers to support course instruction, digital literacy project development, and digital navigator professional development and training for statewide dissemination. The NC Community College System Office, through approval from the State Board allocated $1,075,000 to implement Phase III - Digital Navigator Network in the Spring of 2022 to 43 Title II providers. The focus of Phase III is to create a network of trained student support staff to provide support to programs to implement the courses Transition Digital Skills (BSP 4010) and Transition Digital Skills Application (BSP 4011), and to assist students to navigate resources to transition to post-secondary programs of study or credentialed training.

## F. ASSESSING QUALITY

The North Carolina Community College's College and Career Readiness (CCR), Title II program will continuously assess the quality of all sub-grant recipients for performance and fiscal accountability through risk assessments, data monitoring, and on-site monitoring visits.

Risk Assessment

The initial process will begin with an annual risk-assessment designed to assess the extent to which an adult education service provider is at risk of not being able to fulfil its grant responsibilities. Programs are classified as high, moderate, or low risk based on the following criteria:

- New director (3 years or less)
- Low performance Measurable Skills Gains
- Date of last monitoring
- Newly established programs

The level of risk will determine the monitoring plan. Providers that are deemed high risk may be required to attend additional training and engage in technical assistance sessions. Providers that are classified moderate and low risk will engage in continuous general fiscal and programmatic monitoring during the program year. Programs will also complete a self-assessment profile that focuses on topics that support the primary indicators of performance.

Program Performance Self-Assessment Profile

The self-assessment profile focuses topics that support meeting the primary indicators of performance, allowing College and Career Readiness program managers a comprehensive understanding of the requirements, expectations, and priorities of WIOA, Title II. The assessments will be completed by the Title II program directors and reviewed by NCCCS's CCR office staff. Data received will inform technical assistance and professional development needs.

**Monitoring**

Throughout the fiscal year programs will be monitored in the following ways based on the outcomes of the risk assessment:

- Continuous Fiscal and Programmatic Monitoring – Financial and data performance records are received and reviewed monthly.
- Comprehensive Program Monitoring - Programs identified for review will be assessed on compliance, instruction, performance, and fiscal responsibility management.

Per the requirements of Title II, providers are required to submit documentation that demonstrates both fiscal and program compliance.

As a requirement of the federal award, the pass-through entity, which in this case would be the NCCCS System Office and auditors are to have access to the subgrantees records and financial statements as necessary for the pass-through entity to meet the requirements. In most circumstances, the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) of the institution will have all the required financial documentation. Documents that should be available for review may include:

- General Ledger Chart of Accounts
- Prior Year General Ledger that includes monthly expenditures
- Maintenance of Effort (MOE) Documentation
- Payroll information to document the staff paid out of the federal award
- Time and Effort Documentation
- Cash Management Procedure

- Allowability Procedure
- Travel Policy
- Procurement Procedure

**Additional program quality evaluation will be based on:**

**Program Practices**

- number of years that the program administrator has been in the position
- number of years that the data administrator has been in the position
- percentage of instructors who are credentialed
- if there has been a Corrective Action Plan in the last five years and how many findings
- how many years since an onsite review

**Performance and Assessment**

- What is the agency's retention rate for the preceding year
- What is the agency's post-test rate
- What is the agency's overall MSG rate by POPs
- does the agency have a trained, fulltime data manager
- does the agency have a trained assessment specialist

**Monitoring Team**

The comprehensive monitoring sessions are conducted by the NCCCS, College and Career Readiness Section's Title II Compliance and Monitoring Team. Additionally, other NCCCS Title II staff members will attend the comprehensive monitoring sessions, which will include the grant representatives and members of the Data and Performance Accountability team.

**Corrective Action Plan (CAP)**

Upon completion of the monitoring, a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) may be required to resolve the compliance issues identified during the evaluation. The Provider will be required to submit a plan detailing how the incorrect programmatic and/or fiscal practices will be amended within the required time frame. If there are unresolved CAP(s) findings, specific award conditions and restrictions may occur.

**CCR, Title II Regional Grant Representatives**

Each grantee will be assigned to a CCR, Title II Regional Program Representative. The representatives will provide technical assistance and identify targeted professional development needs. Specific responsibilities will include:

- Coordinating and providing technical assistance for the purpose of improving program compliance, performance, and accountability,
- Coordinating monthly webinars with their assigned provider,
- Identifying training and professional development activities training as needed,
- Serving as main point of contact for their assigned provider,
- Assisting in the Risk Assessment process.

Assessing Quality of Professional Development

The platforms and tools that we use in collaboration with the VLC's Moodle portal allow us to better track attendance and receive participant evaluations for all of our professional development offerings. Upon completion of every Moodle course (both self-paced on-demand courses and instructor-facilitated synchronous and asynchronous courses), participants will immediately receive a survey requesting their evaluation of the course. Based on the feedback obtained in these surveys, the CCR Professional Development Team will work with the VLC and our instructors to improve future iterations of the course. The VLC Moodle also includes a robust tracking system. We are able to collect invaluable data on each course including but not limited to the percentage of completers per course, which providers are utilizing the professional development opportunities being offered by the NCCCS, the amount of time participants are spending studying for each course, and the cost per participant for each course. This data combined with the participant evaluations will help inform our decisions in order to both improve our current as well as create better professional development opportunities in the future.

One technique that we have begun using and will continue to use in the future is requiring every professional development participant who attends a specific series of webinars to present during a showcase. For example, the cohort of ELL instructors who will be attending the Standards in Action (SIA) series will have a few months to put into practice in their classrooms the strategies that they learned in the SIA training. After a few months of implementation, the instructors will come together and offer brief presentations on how they incorporated the new techniques in their classrooms. We began using the Showcase System during the Professional Development Network Facilitators Project and have continued it with the CEELW IELCE series of trainings. We will use in with both the Standards in Action and Teaching Skills That Matter cohorts in the future.

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM CERTIFICATIONS

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| 1. The plan is submitted by the State agency that is eligible to submit the plan; | Yes |
| 2. The State agency has authority under State law to perform the functions of the State under the program; | Yes |
| 3. The State legally may carry out each provision of the plan; | Yes |
| 4. All provisions of the plan are consistent with State law; | Yes |
| 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; | Yes |

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| 6. The State officer who is submitting the plan, specified by the title in the certification, has authority to submit the plan; | Yes |
| 7. The agency that is submitting the plan has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan; and | Yes |
| 8. The plan is the basis for State operation and administration of the program; | Yes |

ADULT EDUCATION AND FAMILY LITERACY ACT PROGRAM ASSURANCES

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| 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 the supplement-not-supplant requirement); | Yes |
| 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; | Yes |
| 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; | Yes |
| 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. | Yes |
| 5. The eligible agency agrees that in expending funds made available under Title II of WIOA, the eligible agency will comply with sections 8301 through 8303 of the Buy American Act (41 U.S.C. 8301-8303). | Yes |

AUTHORIZING OR CERTIFYING REPRESENTATIVE

| **APPLICANT'S ORGANIZATION** | **Enter information in this column** |
|---|---|
| Applicant's Organization | NC Community Colleges System Office |

| INTED NAME AND TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE | Enter information in this column |
|---|---|
| First Name | Gilda |
| Last Name | Rubio-Festa |
| Title Associate VP, College and Career Readiness | Associate Vice President, College and Career Readiness |
| Email | rubio-festag@nccommunitycolleges.edu |

SECTION 427 OF THE GENERAL EDUCATION PROVISIONS ACT (GEPA)

NCCCS responds to GEPA through the RFP process. It requires all applications responding to the Title ll, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act describe steps to meet the requirements of Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA). The state partners with NCCCS Student Support Services to provide training to providers on providing accommodations and ADA accessible activities. The State uses state leadership funds to support the career pathways targeted to underrepresented communities, specifically Native Americans, African American and Hispanics. The focus is on removing barriers to access by providing access to grants, financial aid and counseling, instruction and services. Title ll partners with the NC Student Success Center, regional Equity Coaches. Providers disseminate anti-discrimination policies through employee and student handbooks and other official materials. The NCCCS staff periodically review provider's programs to assess compliance with GEPA as outlined in their plan.

ADULT EDUCATION AND LITERACY PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

| Performance Indicators | PY 2022 Expected Level | PY 2022 Negotiated Level | PY 2023 Expected Level | PY 2023 Negotiated Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employment (Second Quarter After Exit) | 37.0 | 37.0 | 38.0 | 38.0 |
| Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit) | 36.9 | 36.9 | 37.0 | 37.0 |
| Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit) | $3,932 | $3,932 | $3,932 | $3,932 |
| Credential Attainment Rate | 29.0 | 29.0 | 30.0 | 30.0 |
| Measurable Skill Gains | 43.6 | 43.6 | 43.6 | 44.6 |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] |

*1*

*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

# PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL)

## A. INPUT OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

### 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;

For DVRS, State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) members 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. Prior to the onset of the pandemic March 2020, the SRC had facilitated in-person Spring and Fall listening forums in various locations across the state. During recent years covered in this plan, listening forums had been held as follows: April 2018- Dallas, NC; December 2018 Goldsboro, NC; April 2019 Cherokee, NC, and September 2019 Lumberton, NC. In response to the pandemic restrictions for in-person sessions, the committee worked with Division staff to successfully host four videoconference listening sessions during the following dates in 2021: March 11, June 10, September 30, and December 9. This new virtual venue increased the rate of active participation by stakeholders significantly compared to the on-site sessions previously held. Stakeholder input from these and prior-year sessions are incorporated within and influence 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. Since the last plan update in 2018, the following policy revisions have received input from this committee:

- Pre-Employment Transition Services
- Residential Modifications
- Prior Approval Requirements
- Extended Services
- Louisburg Jr. College Support Services Policy
- Cash Management Policies
- Employment Engagement Survey
- Background Checks Policy

- Rehabilitation Counselor Proficiency Process
- Work Adjustment Training policy and transition plan
- Records sharing procedures with NC Disability Determination Services
- Prosthetics & Orthotics purchasing process streamlining

Most recently, during 2020-2021, the SRC's Policy and Rules Committee reviewed the following policy drafts:

- Financial Needs Survey Allowable Net Monthly Income
- In-Home and In-Person Services during COVID-19 Pandemic
- Release of Confidential Information without the Consent of the Client
- Arranging for Pre-Employment Transition Services
- ADHD Policy Manual Entry Updates
- Comprehensive Transition Program
- Residence Modification Approval Limit Increases
- Work Adjustment Services Updates
- Self-Employment Policy Updates
- NVRA Voter Registration and Application Revisions
- Background Checks Policy
- Rehabilitation Counselor Proficiency Process
- Consent for In-Person or In-Home Services During Health Emergency
- Remote Services via Videoconferencing
- Work Incentives/Benefits Counseling Fee for Service
- Records Management Update.

Other recommendations DVRS received from the NC State Rehabilitation Council:

In December 2019, the SRC developed an updated strategic plan (2020-2022) comprised of three strategic goals and sub-strategies, which provide guidance when formulating SRC meetings and establishing committee priorities and shape the agency's approach to policy development implementation. The current goals::

**Goal 1:** Increase marketing and outreach to individuals with disabilities, employers, and potentials partners, including colleges and universities.

a. Develop proposal for outreach, including leverage social media and sharing success stories.

b. Identify strategies that can be achieved within the timeframe of the strategic plan.

c. Promote and/or implement the outreach strategies identified by the SRC.

**Goal 2:** Honor people's life choices by assuring that IPE goals and service provision are consumer-driven/consumer-focused.

a. Review how VR is measuring casework quality and recommend new measures as the SRC finds appropriate.

b. Identify measures of consumer satisfaction with their involvement in their IPE to establish baseline data.

c. Monitor and evaluate performance on consumer satisfaction with their involvement in their IPE.

**Goal 3:** Facilitate the development of the VR program's capacity to improve service delivery capacity and staff and leadership training through review of available documents, data, and dialogue with Division staff.

a. Continuously evaluate the VR program's current service delivery capacity and staff and leadership training through review of available documents, data, and dialogue with Division staff.

b. Offer input and make recommendations for improvement.

Recommendation 1: In support of their strategic plan pertaining to increased marketing and outreach to individuals with disabilities, employers, and potential partners, including colleges and universities, the Council recommended to conduct stakeholder listening sessions remotely with increased measures of outreach including mailed out invitations, emailed invites, and social media blasts to invite stakeholders to attend the professionally coordinated virtual listening sessions to be held a minimum of 3X per year.

Recommendation 2: The Council recommends to improve the efficiency of the vocational rehabilitation process through the exploration of ways to expedite the provision of consumer services, including client purchases; conduct reviews of processes for increased efficiencies; explore ways to involve staff in identifying and addressing inefficiencies, and, in general, increase capacity to serve consumers who use English as a second language. DVRS supports all components of this recommendation and are currently addressing them.

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 4: The Council recommended to continue to jointly conduct consumer input sessions to be held a minimum of three times 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

canvassing various communities across the state focusing on how the VR program is addressing consumers' VR needs through its service provision.

Recommendation 5: 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 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 6: 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 continue the use of the telephonic client satisfaction survey. Further, the Council recommends continuing the practice of surveying clients in active status and to continue employing a weighted sampling method to maintain costs and ensure representation across disability types, minority status, age, and gender.

## 2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS; AND

Recommendation 1: (increased marketing and outreach) The Division has supported all recommended adjustments and expansions to the methods of outreach, including increased frequency and expansion of outreach venues to potential clients and partners.

Recommendation 2: (improving efficiency of the vocational rehabilitation process) The DVRS supports all components of this recommendation and are currently addressing them. The procedures for purchasing prosthetics and orthotics has been improved and ongoing work is being done to simplify the self-employment evaluation process to a feasible extent.

Recommendation 3: (regular reports from the Client Assistance Program at SRC meetings) DVRS has incorporated the recommended changes and will continue with these standing topics until the Council recommends further adjustments.

Recommendation 4: (jointly conducted public input sessions) DVRS will continue to actively support jointly conducted input sessions canvassing various communities across the state focusing on how the VR program is addressing consumers' VR needs through its service provision. This has been accomplished virtually since June, 2020 and the Consumer Input and Public Outreach committee meets with Division staff regularly to steadily improve and expand the means of accomplishing this.

Recommendation 5: (regular reports on direct service position vacancies) DVRS supports this recommendation and will continue to work with Council members to regularly provide updates through statewide and regional vacancy reports.

Recommendation 6: (telephonic client satisfaction surveys) The Division supports this recommendation and will continue its adjusted sampling practices, contracts, and purchase orders accordingly.

## 3. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S EXPLANATIONS FOR REJECTING ANY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT OR RECOMMENDATIONS.

The DVRS Vocational Rehabilitation program did not reject any of the State Rehabilitation Council's input or recommendations.

## B. REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS

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;

This section is not applicable. DVRS does not have a waiver of the statewideness requirement. DVRS is also not requesting a waiver of the statewideness requirement for any of the period covered under this plan.

2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL APPROVE EACH PROPOSED SERVICE BEFORE IT IS PUT INTO EFFECT; AND

This section is not applicable. DVRS does not have a waiver of the statewideness requirement. DVRS is also not requesting a waiver of the statewideness requirement for any of the period covered under this plan.

3. REQUIREMENTS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN WILL APPLY TO THE SERVICES APPROVED UNDER THE WAIVER.

This section is not applicable. DVRS does not have a waiver of the statewideness requirement. DVRS is also not requesting a waiver of the statewideness requirement for any of the period covered under this plan.

C. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH AGENCIES NOT CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES UNDER THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

1. FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS;

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 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 DHHS Division of Health Benefits; Division of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Office of Long-Term Services and Supports; Division of Disability Determination; Division of Social Services; 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 Brain Injury Association of North Carolina; the Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehab and Employment; 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 colocation 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 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 nonresidential, 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, peer counseling, and transition are the five 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 nonprofit 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 DSB). 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.

DVRS 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, and NC Cooperative Extension. Further, DVRS consumers 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).

## 2. STATE PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;

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 by Rehabilitation Engineers, Assistive Technology Consultants, and other agency staff as well as 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. 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 nineteen staff serving the state of North Carolina, which includes the Director, AT Information/ Referral /Funding Specialist, Intake Coordinator, Inventory Specialist, 1 AT Re-use Special Projects Assistant, 4 Speech Language Pathologists (SLP) and 8 Assistive Technology Consultants. The 8 AT Consultants and 4 SLPs provide direct one-on-one services in the Assistive Technology Centers.

Since 2015 DVRS has progressively increased their collaborative efforts with NCATP and other AgrAbility partners to provide assistive technologies and related services to farmers and farmworkers within the state. There have also been joint outreach efforts to Veterans with disabilities who may be interested in pursuing agriculturally-oriented occupations.

Additionally, the current interagency agreement between DVRS and education agencies, including the 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. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;

DVRS is 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. Additionally, DVRS consumers 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).

4. NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH; AND

DVRS staff work with the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to coordinate services for specific individuals and also to address areas of broader systemic impact such as community education, disability awareness, and outreach services to various disability groups, including out of-school youth. 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, peer counseling, and transition services are the five 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.

5. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS.

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 DVRS consumers through contracts with entities such as the NC Department of Transportation for maintenance of facilities and distribution of safety campaign materials. DVRS does promote training and employment practices that align with competitive integrated employment standards.

## D. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS

### 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 and NC Division of Services for the Blind continue to operate under a state level memorandum of agreement (MOA) with DPI. The MOA includes the requirements 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 specifies the way Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) 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 and DSB local 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 VR 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 Divisions to carry out the VR program. DVRS TPCAs with 90 of the 115 city/county-wide LEAs in North Carolina contribute funding towards 190 positions including VR counselors, business relations representatives, vocational evaluators and additional VR support staff such as casework assistants and casework technicians available to provide VR transition services to students with disabilities served by the local education agency. In areas where a TPCA has not been established, the local manager designs a process for students and youth in the local area to access VR services. Since the issuance of WIOA Title IV regulations, DVRS has worked to formalize and implement the requirements under WIOA including Pre-ETS. Following a series of interim policy directives, DVRS released policies and procedures in March 2018 outlining three primary mechanisms for making Pre-ETS available to students with disabilities in the state who need them: DVRS staff-provided, purchased via fee-for-service, and contracted projects. These mechanisms allow for flexibility and growth to meet the varied needs of students with disabilities across the state based on a diversity of staff capacity and local resources as well as the needs of local schools and school districts. DVRS continues to target a flexible approach to making VR and pre-ETS available to students with disabilities for added value to citizens and NC public schools.

*Plans for Coordination with Education Officials*

DVRS maintains and strengthens its programmatic relationships with school transition services through active participation by the Division's Transition Program Specialist on the State Transition Team. This team, including DVRS, NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI), college/university, parent, student, and community and advocacy organization representation

was formed to develop statewide goals to coordinate transition activities for students with disabilities resulting in improved post-school outcomes, including obtaining employment or attending post-secondary education. Currently, NC's Capacity Building Plan consists of five goals in two focus areas: (1) Interagency Collaboration and (2) Family Engagement. tools. In 2018, a sub-team of the State Transition Team was formed to focus on targeted impact that could be achieved by state agency membership. This Core Sub-Team continues to implement a joint technical assistance and training initiative coined the NC Collaborative on Secondary Transition to provide state-level technical assistance and training on WIOA requirements as well as to promote training around alignment with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Perkins V programs. The TA and training mechanism focuses on common messaging to special educators, career technical education professionals, and VR staff across the state to move them forward with compliance and innovation so that they may achieve the very best post-school outcomes for students with disabilities around the state. So far, thirty-one (31) local, interagency transition teams have participated in this intensive training.

*DESCRIPTION OF POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS*

DVRS policies associated with transition and pre-ETS services were updated and enhanced in March 2018. The policies outline methods for assessing the local needs for Pre-ETS and for requesting and arranging pre-ETS, beginning as early as a student would qualify in NC (age 14). The Division's policies further outline mechanisms for the outreach and identification of students with disabilities who require VR transition services and participation in and coordination of student-level planning with school personnel. The Division's policies also address VR staff coverage for local education agencies to assure that any eligible student may access VR transition services and require annual reporting of VR services to local education officials.

*DEVELOPMENT AND APPROVAL OF INDIVIDUALIZED PLAN FOR EMPLOYMENT (IPE) FOR TRANSITIONING STUDENTS*

The Division's casework policies on 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. 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 VR 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;

In order to ensure effective facilitation of the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, DHHS (the designated DSA) maintains both a joint formal agreement with the Exceptional Children and Career Technical Education Divisions of DPI and also maintains 90 separately held TPCAs with local education agencies (LEA's) or school programs. The agreement with DPI was revised in 2018 and includes the following components:

- Local cooperative agreements
- Consultation and technical assistance
- Transition planning
- Pre-employment transition services
- Roles and responsibilities
- Outreach and identification of students with disabilities
- Coordination responsibilities of each agency that promote the coordination, timely and appropriate delivery of transition services (IDEA)
- Criteria related to subminimum wage requirements in Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act
- Procedures for resolving interagency disputes
- Data sharing

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, DVRS 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 DHHS and DPI, the consultation and technical assistance section requires that the Departments:

- Make consultation and technical assistance available through in-person meetings or through other means, such as conference calls, webinars, or video conferences
- Provide educational and training opportunities, including joint training opportunities, to SEA and LEA staff to ensure understanding of pre-employment transition services and other transition services and the roles and responsibilities of SEA, LEA, and VR partners in the provision of these services
- Meet annually to address systems, policy, practice, and funding issues that facilitate or negatively impact the transition of students with disabilities from school to work or post-secondary education.
- Align policy and practices at the state and local level to facilitate the seamless transition of students with disabilities from school to work or post-secondary education
- Designate individuals to represent the agencies and act as liaisons to facilitate the joint efforts of the two agencies
- Provide consultation, when requested by local staff, on determining responsibility in instances where services required by a student may be both a special education or related service under IDEA and a VR service under WIOA

Considering the reauthorization of the federal Perkins Act, along with the relative newness of WIOA, the Division is working with the Career Technical Education and Exceptional Children Divisions of DPI through the NC Collaborative on Secondary Transition to offer training and technical assistance to local, interagency transition teams in carrying out formal agreements.

At the local level, TPCAs between local VR units and the LEAs mirror the components of the state level MOU. Therefore, at the local level, Division staff are required to provide consultation, technical assistance, and administrative support to their assigned school system. They are also required to participate in joint planning with the LEA to assess the needs of students with disabilities and prioritize VR service-delivery strategies, including those for providing pre-employment transition services. Lastly, the local VR Unit and LEA are required to exchange policy information relevant to the coordination of services and participate in training made available by the opposite party when possible.

B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS;

Within the current formal interagency agreement between DHHS and DPI, transition planning requires that the Departments:

- Cooperate and work jointly in providing/promoting transition planning for students with disabilities.
- Assist local education agencies (LEAs) in planning for/promoting the transition of students with disabilities in the development and completion of the IEP required under IDEA and the IPE required under WIOA.
- Coordinate with/support the development of students' IEPs and IPEs through local third party agreements.
- Communicate/encourage communication regarding students' IEP and IPE goals and needed transition services as soon as possible after the IEP and IPE are developed.

- Foster innovation in transition program design and service delivery strategies between the local DVRS and DSB offices and the LEAs.
- Support local involvement in the planning and activities of area workforce boards as well as partnerships with local employers to promote programs and services for students and youth with disabilities.
- Provide consultation to assure access to and programming for students with disabilities in career and technical education, work-based learning, career assessment, career decision-making training, and career counseling as determined by the local transition planning teams.

At the local level, TPCAs between local VR units and the LEAs mirror the components of the state level MOU such that the local VR Unit and the LEA are required to engage in planning that promotes the development of the IPE and IEP and which prepares students for transition from school to post-school activities, including planning for pre-employment transition services. The parties shall also use existing data when appropriate or obtain supplementary assessments and for each eligible individual, the local DVRS unit shall complete a comprehensive assessment that consults the transition component of the student's IEP if an IEP exists.

C. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES;

The NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) is the State Education Agency with whom the DSA partners to promote and implement the VR program throughout NC public schools. As a locally controlled state, VR transition services are further coordinated with LEAs who opt in to such agreements. Where LEAs do not opt in to agreements, DVRS provides VR transition and pre-ETS according to the state level MOU using an itinerant staff structure as opposed to a designated staff structure so that VR transition and pre-ETS can still be made available to students with disabilities statewide. The current interagency agreement between DVRS and the state education agency includes two sections relevant to roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities:

- Roles and responsibilities
- Procedures for resolving interagency disputes including procedures for LEAs to initiate the process to receive reimbursement or regarding implementation of the Agreement

The Roles and Responsibilities section requires that:

- The Departments administer aspects of their respective programs. [Insomuch as public education services are locally controlled, this requires that DPI assist LEAs in the planning, development, and implementation of transition services to students with disabilities to become college, career, and community ready. DHHS as the DSA is required to administer all aspects of the State vocational rehabilitation program including the determination of eligibility, diagnostic and evaluation services, rehabilitation planning, transition services and the provision of a program of vocational rehabilitation services, some of which are subject to financial need or comparable benefits.]
- DHHS assumes responsibility, within the limitation of resources, for the cost of services included in the students IPE, according to the established DHHS policies and fee schedule

- DHHS reports annually the total amount of state-appropriated monies expended for rehabilitation services for students with disabilities. The reports should be made available annually to DPI within 60 days of the end of the state fiscal year.
- DPI provides access to annual report data on students serviced through the Career Technical Education and Exceptional Children Divisions.
- DPI supports the sharing of diagnostic information of students with disabilities for the purpose of accessing vocational rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services, so long as sharing is in compliance with the requirements of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act and other legal requirements relating to student privacy rights.
- DPI supports practices for LEAs to secure psychological, vocational and educational assessments, according to state and local policies, for students suspected of needing assessments.

In addition to collaborative practices put in place by the state-level agreement, the local TPCAs between the local VR unit and LEA narrow down more specific responsibilities including requiring that:

- The parties assist in outreach and identification of students with disabilities who require VR services or pre-ETS,
- The parties develop a system for generating referrals to the VR program
- The LEA assists with securing and sharing diagnostic information required for students to access the VR process
- The local VR unit contacts the student at the earliest possible time to initiate a VR application and/or request pre-ETS.
- The local VR Unit, in collaboration with the LEA, provides or arranges for the provision of pre-ETS to students with disabilities who need them
- The LEA supports the Division in providing pre-ETS to students in their district.

The section of the state-level MOU between DHHS and DPI regarding Procedures for Resolving Interagency Disputes requires the following:

- That parties utilize best efforts to resolve any dispute that may arise in the provision of services outlined in the agreement and collaborate to achieve the best possible outcome for students with disabilities
- When there are real or perceived overlaps in the responsibilities for special education or other related services under IDEA and VR services under the Rehab Act, DHHS and DPI support and advise local staff in considering the following factors to determine the responsible party:

1. whether the service is customary to the party from whom the service is requested (if customary, the party shall provide);
2. the primary objective of the service/support (educational or vocational);
3. the impacts of delaying service provision;
4. agency-specific policies or limitations around the provision of the service (e.g., maximum purchase rates, selection of providers);
5. eligibility of student under Part B of IDEA;

6. length of time to exit from school in terms of ongoing need for and replacement frequency of service or equipment (e.g., if equipment is needed, will the lifespan of the equipment be contained to the student's time within the secondary educational setting or extend to the transition from school to post-school activities?); and/or

7. the need for transferability of skills and practice with service/equipment to be prepared for post-school IPE participation (e.g., will the student need time to practice using equipment or receiving a specific transition service to facilitate transition to post-school services/outcome as planned on the IPE without delay or interruption? If so, this may warrant VR funding of the equipment or service.)

The local TPCAs between local VR units and LEAs mirror the state level agreement in terms of resolving interagency disputes and include a requirement that the parties consult with state level designees from DVRS and DPI when a resolution cannot be achieved at the local level.

In terms of other financial responsibilities and qualified personnel for delivering transition services, the TPCAs require that:

- each participating LEA contribute an annually specified sum for rehabilitation services directly provided by Division staff and for the administration of those services, that expenditures are made under the approved agency State plan; and that the expenditures are made under the control and supervision of DVRS
- DVRS finances the program by use of State and Federal matching funds, as required under Title I of the Rehab Act and that financing the rehabilitation program occurs on an annual budget basis to insure continuity of operations; and that DVRS must provide State funds equal to the State's share of planned expenditures as specified in the Federal Act
- DVRS maintains accounts and supporting documents that permit an accurate determination at any time of the status and State and Federal participation of expenditures incurred in the operation of the rehabilitation program; and that the specific items of each annual budget are determined jointly and agreed to by the parties prior to the beginning of each fiscal year
- The contribution by the LEA to DVRS is made upon submission of an invoice by DVRS to the LEA for the state's share of the annually agreed upon budget and consist totally of non-Federal funds which have not or will not be used to match Federal funds other than Federal Vocational Rehabilitation funds used in this program
- DVRS provides Federal funding in the amount of 78.7 percent of the agreed-upon annual budget depending on the availability of Federal funds and the program arrangements
- DVRS provides, within the limitations of available resources, case service funds necessary to the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services
- DVRS assigns rehabilitation staff to serve each high school within the LEA who will maintain an active caseload at all assigned schools; and that rehabilitation staff visit the assigned school on a scheduled routine basis to receive referrals and transact other matters necessary to effectively administer the rehabilitation program; and that in the event of a staff vacancy or leave of absence, DVRS exercised best efforts to maintain the continued delivery of services to students
- The LEA identifies a staff person(s) to serve as liaison to rehabilitation staff assigned by the Division in carrying out the planning, coordination, and delivery of services as outlined in this agreement

- The LEA shall provide adequate meeting space in all assigned schools that is accessible to staff and individuals with disabilities, private for individual counseling, and environmentally comfortable, with conditions that are conducive to confidentiality and counseling; and that any and all equipment purchased under the Agreement remains property of the Division

D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES.

The procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services is addressed specifically through the state-level MOU between DVRS and DPI. The agreement requires that:

- DPI inform LEAs of services available from DVRS and promote referrals for students with disabilities who may or may not be receiving special education and are in need of pre-employment transition services and/or VR transition services, including the development of an IPE
- DVRS reviews the required documentation of students with disabilities who have been referred by the LEA to determine eligible for the vocational rehabilitation services; and that this eligibility determination remain the sole responsibility of the DVRS.

In addition to procedures put in place by the state-level agreement, the local TPCAs between the local VR unit and LEA specify the responsibilities related to outreach for the locally-controlled education party as well as VR:

- The parties assist in outreach and identification of students with disabilities who require VR services or pre-employment transition services,
- The parties develop a system for generating referrals to the VR program
- The LEA assists with securing and sharing diagnostic information required for students to access the VR process
- The local VR unit contacts the student at the earliest possible time to initiate a VR application and/or request pre-employment transition services.

<u>Other Evidence and Historical Information on Collaboration with EducationOfficials</u>

Since 2003, the DVRS 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 DVRS staff participate 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 hosted transition training in Spring 2016 that included presentations by many of our partnering agencies and focused on policy changes and program development as a result of WIOA. DVRS 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 Pre-Employment Transition Services offerings, and DVRS continues to expand Project SEARCH™ in NC, with a total of fourteen (14) sites supported this past year.

Additionally, DVRS 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.

## E. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH PRIVATE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

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. 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 130 private for profit and non-profit VR service providers providing an array of services to DVRS consumers. Fifty-One (51) private-non-profit VR 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 goal of competitive integrated employment. Additionally, performance-based cooperative agreements engaging non-profit organizations encompass brain injury support services, Project SEARCH™, Individual Placement and Support Services, and Pre-Employment Transition Services. Details of this system and its implementation were developed in collaboration with the community rehabilitation provider community through representation via the CRP-DVRS steering committee and through feedback solicitations made via web-based feedback mechanisms.

DVRS and DSB have jointly collaborated to engage non-profit organizations through an ongoing RFA (Request for Application) advertised through the DHHS website, which is the method of procuring business with non-profit organizations for a variety of services. An interested non-profit service provider who successfully applies can enter an agreement or contract with DVRS once it has gone through the DVRS 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 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 DHHS 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 extended 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 and again since October 2016, the program director for the Lumbee Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation program (LTVRS) became a participating member of the State Rehabilitation Council and regularly attends quarterly meetings. Most 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, implemented on September 28, 2009 and remains in effect.

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 VR needs of eligible individuals in their service area through a collaborative relationship. From July 2015 through August 2016, the Executive Director of VOC/CTVRP served on 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, which also remains in effect.

## F. ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

The North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) has developed a cooperative agreement with both NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services (DMHDDSAS) and NC Division of Health Benefits Medical Assistance (DHVMA) for the purpose of establishing cooperative guidelines to ensure individuals with disabilities have equal access to employment services, a continuum of employment services, and independent community living. The relationship among the divisions continues to improve services for both individuals with mental illness and substance abuse disorders and individuals with developmental disabilities has been enhanced over the past several years through changes in personnel at DMHDDSAS as well as a change in their focus towards a recovery-oriented system of care which incorporates employment as a goal for consumers. Due to continuously changing staff, ongoing efforts are required to maintain an effective working relationship between both divisions.

NC DHHS 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, DMHDDSAS, and Division of Health Benefits (DHB) 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 2018 and 2019, the state's IPS team leaders attended the annual meeting of the Johnson & Johnson/Dartmouth IPS Learning Community meeting in Cleveland, OH along with representatives from the other 21 states, Alameda County, CA, the District of Columbia, and six international countries to learn more about and discuss implementation of the IPS model of SE. DMHDDSAS 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 provider 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 all teams who are contracted by the LME/MCO. Currently, seventeen (17) 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 DMHDDSAS 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 DMHDDSAS 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. Extensive technical assistance has been provided to facilitate service delivery with local VR and IPS teams as well as broader technical assistance provided through large training sessions, webinar instruction, and one on one assistance. A brochure has been developed to better assist the marketing effort and foster greater informed choice in the selection of the service by consumers.

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 supported employment 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. In recent years, NC DMHDDSAS has partnered with DVRS to implement an ODEP grant for technical assistance. The goal 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, the Department of Commerce, NCCCS, and DPI 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 during which additional supported employment 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, NCCDD 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 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 NCCCS, 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 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.

Beginning in 2012 and through 2017, the NCCDD funded training and technical assistance for the development of Project SEARCH™ sites across the state of NC. DVRS has been a core partner of each of the fourteen (14) Project SEARCH™ programs developed in NC and contributes to the braided model by funding internship, job placement, and job training services for program participants. DVRS has committed to funding a statewide Project SEARCH™ specialist position to support continued growth and collaboration for this evidenced-based model of supported employment. Finally, DVRS maintains active membership on 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, DVRS 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 DVRS.

An agreement between 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.

## G. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

### 1. VR SERVICES; AND

DVRS continues to utilize 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 70 community employment program specialists that serve the statewide program. These individuals often have education and experience in a business-related field, such as human resources and marketing, so that DVRS 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 businesses fosters these relationships so that they can have a sustainable impact in supporting the individuals with disabilities in finding, maintaining, and advancing in employment.

DVRS services to job seekers 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 in order to identify these intersection points between the VR services that DVRS provides to jobseekers and those services provided to business. The unique role of the business relations representatives highlights this intersection well.

In 2016, DVRS incorporated several changes to our internship program to better meet the needs of interns and business. Changes included providing worker's compensation coverage for interns, internal management and distribution of funds for internship wages, and improved guidance on selecting internship opportunities that promote training and preparation across a variety of industries and levels of employment. As a result of these changes, DVRS' utilization of internship services (funding) increased by 800%. DVRS plans to continue promoting the use of internships as a means for exposing the diverse talent pipeline of individuals with disabilities to business in our community.

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 Marketing 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.

Additionally, DVRS has invested in disability sensitivity training in 2018 to promote the transition of students with disabilities to employment after high school. DVRS community employment program specialists will received Windmills Sensitivity Training with special focus on promoting the diversity and talent of students with disabilities as they exit high school and embark on career pathways. Train the Trainer workshops were held in December 2019 to train new business relations representatives and State Office personnel. Windmills Training will continue to be a viable business service that we offer to all employers who are interested in diversifying their workforce. Furthermore, DVRS will continue to pursue customized training partnerships like one developed with Fenner Drives in 2016. This project engaged high school students with significant disabilities in semester-long employer-based training at the Fenner Drives facility, located in Wilmington, NC. The students earned school credit while they gained career exploration and specific skills in the manufacturing industry and were provided internship wages and on-the-job supports. A very similar customized training partnership has been established with New Hanover County Schools which provides work-based learning for an underserved population and will serve as a pipeline for difficult to fill positions in environmental services within New Hanover County Schools. DVRS aims to identify additional opportunities to prepare workers for local jobs using a combination of supports and employment training services and by engaging with other workforce partners (e.g., community colleges). ).

DVRS plans for continued emphasis on the number and depth of our business relationships. DVRS entered into a contract with Geographic Solutions to develop a replacement case management system by early January 2023, which will include an account management module for this system. The objective of account management features is to provide improved customer service and strategic planning towards services to business. DVRS hopes to be a part of regional initiatives around engaging with business and aims to be participatory and responsive to business needs across internal organizational boundaries.

## 2. TRANSITION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES.

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. DVRS continues to work towards meeting its 15% required spending allocation for pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities.

Since 2014, DVRS has worked towards implementing pre-employment transition services in the following ways:

- Enhancing existing pre-employment transition service delivery models and developing tracking and reporting mechanisms consistent with federal regulations. For example, as a result of changes to our internship program, more students with disabilities have participated in work-based learning through internship opportunities. Additionally, work-based learning and workplace readiness components of the Project SEARCH™ model continue to be provided to students with disabilities in eleven (11) of the fourteen (14) sites across NC.
- Contracted pre-employment transition services: At the time of this report, thus far in FFYs 2017 and 2018, DVRS implemented sixteen (16) pre-employment transition services contracts with community rehabilitation programs and community agencies for the provision of two or more of the five (5) pre-employment transition services required activities. Through these contracts, DVRS has the capacity to reach 2000 students with disabilities.

- Local transition planning to identify opportunities for DVRS staff to provide pre-employment transition services in a way that best meets the needs of students with disabilities in each local education agency
- Developed agreement with the Juvenile Education Services Division of the state's Department of Public Safety to provide pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities in NC's four youth development centers serving adjudicated youth. DVRS has also committed funds to a pre-employment transition services Coordinator who will directly provide pre-employment transition services to these students.

Through the mechanisms described above and others, DVRS will continue to work towards meeting its 15% spending obligation for pre-employment transition services. Additionally, DVRS is pursuing a number of pre-employment transition services authorized activities to build capacity for effective and innovative practices for transitioning students with disabilities from school to postsecondary education and competitive integrated employment outcomes. Authorized activities being pursued include: informational fairs; training opportunities for VR, education, and community agency staff; research on pre-employment transition services service outcomes; and model demonstration projects for innovative pre-employment service delivery methods.

DVRS will continue to coordinate with local and state education agencies under revised formal agreements to best align resources and services to students with disabilities across the state in the areas of pre-employment transition and transition services. DVRS' agreements with local school districts enables DVRS to employ approximately 130 staff who are dedicated to providing, coordinated, and arranging for pre-employment transition services and transition services to students in the partnering districts. These agreements enable DVRS to provide expertise on VR transition services to students in these districts through coordinated service delivery strategies as well as local systems level consultation, coordination, and planning.

## H. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

### 1. THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN UNDER TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT;

The NC DHHS Division of Health Benefits (DHB) is the state agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act. DVRS has developed a cooperative agreement with DHB to ensure that individuals with the most significant disabilities have equal access to VR and best practice employment services. DHB is a lead partner agency, in addition to the DVRS and DMHDDSAS, for the implementation of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment in North Carolina, as described in Section F of the General VR Portion of the Unified Plan. Additionally, the case management system for the VR program has an interface with the State's Medicaid information system, "NC Tracks," for the purpose of identifying rates to support the purchase of medical equipment and services for VR participants as part of their vocational rehabilitation program.

### 2. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES; AND

DVRS is partnering with the DMHDDSAS and other divisions and departments in developing competitive, integrated employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities through initiatives such as the recent technical assistance grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Policy (ODEP). With ODEP funded technical assistance from a national subject matter expert, progress was made in modifying service definitions which will lead to much greater supports and sharing of resources. Through this technical assistance grant, the DMH/DD/SAS is exploring a pilot project with LME/MCOs where a select group of providers of IPS services for individuals with mental illness will model the DVRS milestone format for contracted outcomes. DVRS continues to contract with providers to provide specialized services for traumatic brain injuries in the Charlotte, Winston-Salem,

Raleigh, and Greenville areas and surrounding counties. This service model consists of a blend of cognitive rehabilitation therapy along with career exploration, job placement and extended services. DVRS will continue to look toward expanding availability of such services in unserved and/or underserved areas of the state. DVRS is represented at the NC Statewide Brain Injury Advisory Council.

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.

3. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.

DVRS continues to partner with the DMHDDSAS in implementing individual placement and support supported employment (IPS SE) throughout the state. Currently, there are 38 fidelity IPS SE teams with 19 unique providers programs throughout the state and DVRS contracts with 18 of them. DVRS offers such programs the opportunity to apply to become and IPS contractor through an ongoing RFA. DVRS also works alongside the DMHDDSAS and the University of NC Chapel Hill

Institute for Best Practices staff to conduct onsite fidelity reviews of the IPS SE programs, training of IPS Teams, including DVRS field staff, statewide IPS learning collaborative, provider steering committees, monthly calls with the

Rockville Institute (formerly the Dartmouth Supported Employment Center), as well as the annual IPS SE Rockville Institute's Learning Collaborative. DVRS also works with DMHDDSAS to inform providers and beneficiaries on the impact of employment on federal and state benefits and have collaborated in efforts to increase capacity of benefits counseling experts in the state.

I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT; DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

1. SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

A. QUALIFIED PERSONNEL NEEDS

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;

DVRS utilizes the state human resource and payroll system called Building Enterprise Access for North Carolina's Core Operations (BEACON), which was fully implemented in 2008. Reports on staff positions and vacancies pertaining to the Unified Plan are customized from this system. Data on the number of VR program participants are provided through the BEAM case management and service payment system.

The table below shows the number of personnel employed in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category. In total, the ratio of VR counselors to individuals served is 53,013 served / 370 total counselor positions or 143:1 for DVRS.

Number of personnel who are employed in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, and vacancies by personnel category:

| Job Title | Total positions |
|---|---|
| Rehabilitation Counselor I | 213 |

| Job Title | Total positions |
|---|---|
| Rehabilitation Counselor II | 98 |
| Rehabilitation Counselor in Charge | 59 |
| Rehabilitation Admin Counselor I | 3 |
| Rehabilitation Admin Counselor II | 14 |
| Rehabilitation Admin Counselor III | 14 |
| Vocational Evaluator II | 42 |
| Community Employment Program Specialist | 70 |
| Human Services Coordinator I | 0 |
| Human Services Coordinator II | 4 |
| Rehabilitation Casework Tech | 117 |
| Processing Assistants | 101 |
| Total | 735 |

II. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE STATE AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND

Currently, DVRS has funded the following VR service positions:

| Job Title | Total positions |
|---|---|
| Rehabilitation Counselor I | 213 |
| Rehabilitation Counselor II | 98 |
| Rehabilitation Counselor in Charge | 59 |
| Rehabilitation Admin Counselor I | 3 |
| Rehabilitation Admin Counselor II | 14 |
| Rehabilitation Admin Counselor III | 14 |
| Vocational Evaluator II | 42 |
| Community Employment Program Specialist | 70 |
| Human Services Coordinator I | 0 |
| Human Services Coordinator II | 4 |
| Rehabilitation Casework Tech | 117 |
| Processing Assistants | 101 |
| Total | 735 |

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.

The total number of individuals served through the DVRS VR Program has not increased in the past several years and an increase in funded positions is not expected. The number of positions is not expected to change. At this time, DVRS projects the number of positions as follows:

| Job Title | Total positions |
|---|---|
| Rehabilitation Counselor I | 213 |
| Rehabilitation Counselor II | 98 |
| Rehabilitation Counselor in Charge | 59 |
| Rehabilitation Admin Counselor I | 3 |
| Rehabilitation Admin Counselor II | 14 |
| Rehabilitation Admin Counselor III | 14 |
| Vocational Evaluator II | 42 |
| Community Employment Program Specialist | 70 |
| Human Services Coordinator I | 0 |
| Human Services Coordinator II | 4 |
| Rehabilitation Casework Tech | 117 |
| Processing Assistants | 101 |
| Total | 735 |

B. PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

I. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM;

DVRS works closely with all of North Carolina's Rehabilitation Counseling university programs of study through advisory board participation, internships, and partnerships in conferences and training events. Institutions of higher education in NC that are preparing VR professionals include:

**NC A&T University**:

- Mental Health Counseling - Rehabilitation Master's Program; Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)
- Rehabilitation Counseling & Rehabilitation Counselor Education;
- Certificate in Rehabilitation Counseling & Behavioral Addictions;
- Certificate in Rehabilitation Psychology & Behavioral Medicine; and
- Certificate in Vocational Evaluation & Work Adjustment.

**Winston Salem State University**: Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling with program focus specialization offered in Deaf & Hard of Hearing, Rural Transition, Vocational Evaluation, Rural Vocational Rehabilitation, and Clinical Mental Health.

***University of NC at Chapel Hill***: Master of Science in Clinical Rehabilitation & Mental Health Counseling.

***East Carolina University***: Master of Science in Rehabilitation & Career Counseling; Certificate in Rehabilitation Counseling; Certificate in Vocational Evaluation; Certificate in Substance Abuse Counseling; and Certificate in Military & Trauma Counseling.

II. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND

***NC A&T State University***:

- Mental Health Counseling - Rehabilitation Master's Program, 35 students 2021 (27 students 2022)
- Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Rehabilitation Counseling & Rehabilitation Counselor Education, 28 students
- Certificate in Rehabilitation Counseling & Behavioral Addictions, 20 students
- Certificate in Vocational Evaluation & Work Adjustment, 0 students

***Winston Salem State University:***

- Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling, 48 students
- Bachelor of Science in Rehabilitation Studies, 35 students

***UNC at Chapel Hill***:

- Master of Science Clinical Rehabilitation & Mental Health Counseling: 54 students

***East Carolina University***:

- Master of Science Rehabilitation & Career Counseling, 33 students
- Master of Science Clinical Counseling, unknown
- Certificate in Rehabilitation Counseling, unknown
- Certificate in Vocational Evaluation, unknown
- Certificate in Substance Abuse Counseling, unknown
- Certificate in Military & Trauma Counseling: unknown

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.

***NC A&T State University:***

- Mental Health Counseling - Rehabilitation Master's Program, 8 graduates (1 hired DVRS)
- Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Rehabilitation Counseling & Rehabilitation Counselor Education, 7 graduates
- Certificate in Rehabilitation Counseling & Behavioral Addictions, 13 graduates (of these, 7 were in the Rehabilitation Counseling Master's Program)

- Certificate in Vocational Evaluation & Work Adjustment, 0

***Winston Salem State University***:

- Master of Science Rehabilitation Counseling: 12 graduates
- Bachelor of Science in Rehabilitation Studies, 18 students

***UNC at Chapel Hill:***

- Master of Science Clinical Rehabilitation & Mental Health Counseling: 21 graduates

***East Carolina University***:

- Master of Science Rehabilitation & Career Counseling: 8 graduates
- Master of Science Clinical Counseling: unknown
- Certificate in Rehabilitation Counseling: unknown
- Certificate in Vocational Evaluation: unknown
- Certificate in Substance Abuse Counseling: unknown
- Certificate in Military & Trauma Counseling: unknown

2. PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

DVRS coordinates an unpaid internship program through our Professional Development & Training section with the support of management, Human Resources, and counselors across the state. Because North Carolina has the benefit of several Universities with Rehabilitation Counseling programs, many of which also receive RSA grant funds for student scholarships, we have many students seeking internships with our agency. This is an important recruitment tool for us. Many of our interns have been from the two Historically Black Universities in our state; NC Agricultural & Technical (A&T) State University and Winston-Salem State University (WSSU). We also work with several additional colleges, universities both in and out-of-state that have master's programs in Rehabilitation Counseling or closely related degrees.

The Professional Development & Training section improved and streamlined our processes for working with students, universities and DVRS offices in 2018 to ensure effective communication and support. We have continued to refine and communicate our processes to agency staff, students and Universities through training opportunities, quarterly meetings with University personnel (our NC University Collaborative), and well-designed materials, including a Practicum/Internship Users Guide which provides the forms necessary to ensure timely processing of the student application, an easy to follow flow-chart, and clearly defined responsibilities for all involved: the Rehabilitation Education Specialist, the student, the university coordinator, the unit office and lead office assistant, and the site supervisor. The Professional Development & Training section's Rehabilitation Education Specialists act as the liaison and coordinator for all these parties. This has greatly enhanced our success in this area. Training is regularly provided on the processes and opportunities to recruit qualified rehabilitation counselors to our agency via webinar and during our Statewide Managers Meetings.

During the school year **2020-21**, we provided internships and practicums for **30 students from 11 Universities and colleges**. We provided a total of 9,618 hours of training; 8,548 hours for internship students and 1,070 hours for practicum students.

- East Carolina University – 5 students
- Winston-Salem State University – 5 students

- UNC-Chapel Hill – 9 students
- University of Mount Olive – 1 student
- West Virginia University – 1 student
- Elizabeth City State University – 2 students
- NC A&T – 3 students
- Capella University - 1 student
- University of Wisconsin at Madison - 1 student
- Mid-Atlantic Christian University - 1 student
- University of South Carolina - 1 student

During the fall semester of the school year **2021-22**, we have thus far provided internships and practicums for **22 students from 7 Universities and colleges**. These students received a total of 6,118 hours of training; 5,168 hours for internship students and 950 hours for practicum students.

Universities we worked with during this period included:

- Winston-Salem State University – 14 students
- East Carolina University – 2 students
- Florida State University – 2 students
- Elizabeth City State University – 1 student
- University of South Carolina - 1 student
- Carteret Community College – 1 student
- Capella University - 1 student

We also have MOU's with the following Universities but did not serve any interns from these schools during this timeframe:

- State University of New York at Buffalo, NY
- Thomas University, GA
- Texas Tech University, TX
- University of Mount Olive, NC
- Lenoir-Rhyne University, NC
- Western Piedmont Community College, NC
- University of the Southwest, NM
- Wingate University, NC
- The George Washington University, Washington DC
- University of Oklahoma, OK

DVRS personnel work closely with the University Rehabilitation Counseling programs and staff. We participate in their advisory boards, support their submission for grants and the creation of new programs, collaborate to deliver training at conferences and agency-wide training events, and provide presentations for their students when requested. In 2020 and 2021 we worked with the staff of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to provide virtual *Coffee & Chat* events for students to talk with VR agency staff about opportunities for employment. career fairs and events. This has been extremely successful.

In 2021, DVRS and DSB agency directors began a **University Collaborative** quarterly meeting, inviting all NC Universities with VR graduate programs, all Universities that have had interns with us or a MOU in place for internships, as well as other Universities nation-wide that have VR graduate programs in place. The goals and purpose of these meetings is to collaborate with universities to provide information regarding internships, how to apply for positions, provide information on VR career fairs, and answer any questions they or their students may have about VR. We also seek information from the university staff as to what their students are looking for when applying for positions, where they are going after graduation, and barriers that create difficulty recruiting new graduates. Both in-state and out of state Universities have been represented in these meetings and this appears to be an effective way to build relationships and connections between VR and University staff and students. The Collaborative will continue to meet in the coming year.

**Preparing Future Leaders**

To assist with both retention and filling vacant leadership positions, the Professional Development & Training section developed and launched a *pre*-leadership training program, graduating two cohorts since 2019. This program, called **STEP UP** (*Supervisory Training Essentials for People Unlocking Potential*), is a year-long training series designed to help develop, prepare and retain high-performing and high-potential staff for possible leadership opportunities within DVRS. The program seeks to allow participants to explore their own interests, abilities and potential for agency leadership positions while developing basic supervisory skills and knowledge to enhance their leadership skills and potential. The core components of the program include organizational operations and workflow; leadership styles and competencies; communication skills and strategies; human resource management and development; accountability and resolving conflict; and building image, teams and community. Employees participated in a competitive application process for acceptance into this program, which entailed essays, references and interviews.

Eighteen participants completed the STEP UP program in 2019 (39% from minority backgrounds), and 16 graduated in 2021 (50% from minority backgrounds). Delivering this training program during the pandemic was challenging, but we were able to modify our curriculum to utilize virtual platforms to deliver the sessions.

We have been following the progress of the STEP UP program graduates, and as of this writing, 67% (12) participants from the 2019 program have accepted internal promotional opportunities; 6% (3) obtained a lateral/upward change in positions, 11% (2) left the agency for external promotional opportunities, and only 1 individual (5%) has not yet been promoted. The 2021 graduating class has had 4 individuals (22%) obtain internal promotional opportunities; 1 person left for an external promotional opportunity (5%) and 66% (12) have not yet been promoted. The retention rate of these groups is much greater than our agency staffing (17% vacancy rate as of this writing). The program has been extremely successful in its goals of employee retention and filling vacant leadership positions with individuals who are prepared to lead. This series is enthusiastically supported by managers at all levels of the organization. We are unable to provide this series in 2022 due to the roll out of a new agency-wide case management system (ENCORE), which will require significant training and support from the training team. We plan to offer STEP UP again in 2023.

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 the DVRS 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.

## 3. PERSONNEL STANDARDS

### 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

While DVRS modeled the counselor personnel standard after the CRCC, the Division 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. Although the mandate has been lifted, DHHS has not at this time changed its policies regarding minimum requirements for the VR counselor position but has explored using the minimum credentialing standard as a preferred recruiting standard for positions that are in locations particularly difficult to recruit for. This is allowable as per the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. 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.

The VR program 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.

### B. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, TO ENSURE THAT THE PERSONNEL HAVE A 21ST CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLVING LABOR FORCE AND THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

DVRS has established and maintained minimum educational required above those required under WIOA to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities. Specifically, DVRS modeled the

counselor personnel standard from the CRCC and initiated its own comprehensive standard with more specific listing of degrees that it will accept.

Since 2008, the requirement for a DVRS Rehabilitation Counselor hire include:

- Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a closely related field such as Counseling, Social Work, Psychology, Special Education, Communication Disorders, Human Services from an accredited college or university and current certification as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor or Licensed Professional Counselor ; or
- Current enrollment in a qualifying master's degree program with graduation prior to the date of hire.

All employees in the Rehabilitation Counselor I and Rehabilitation Counselor II roles meet the above requirements. The successful completion of their graduate-level academic curriculum in addition to their counseling certification or license ensures their 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities. DVRS may, however, hire employees in a trainee status if they do not yet meet the minimum education requirements. As a trainee, these individuals work in a supportive role, rather than as a counselor, until they attain the necessary requirements. If the trainee does not meet the specified requirements or are not progressing at an acceptable rate, the employee is separated during their probationary status period.

## 4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

### 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

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:

DVRS provides a comprehensive system of staff development for VR professionals and paraprofessionals, particularly with respect to service delivery, specific disabilities, assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, transition services, rehabilitation technology, employee engagement, supervisory skills and leadership development. This includes training provided by the DVRS Professional Development & Training team's Rehabilitation Education Specialists as well as Rehabilitation Program Specialists, Assistive Technology Specialists, and Quality Development Specialists. We also financially support and encourage attendance in collaborative training events, leadership training programs and statewide conferences. Agency staff may also participate in training offered through the NC Department of Health and Human Services as well as the NC Office of State Human Resources, much of which is at no cost.

Agency training sessions are conducted through customized instructor-led sessions and online learning experiences. Continuing education units are provided in the form of CRC credit for all internal training programs that qualify. Conference attendance is encouraged and supported, including registration and reimbursement for travel and per diem. In addition, the Professional Development & Training section also provides training, facilitation and team building to small groups, offices and sections upon request and as feasible.

A total of 90 virtual training events were provided by the Professional Development & Training section during this timeframe. This represents a significant increase from the 37 training events provided last fiscal year. Fifty-four of these events were webinars or virtual classes. In addition,

31 asynchronous e-Learning courses were developed and launched. The total number of CRCC pre-approved training hours for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors was 255.75, with 2.5 hours in Ethics.

A total of 8,522 training events were completed by employees this program year. Compared to the previous year, we achieved 2,054 *more* training completions. This year's increase in participants is directly related to our Professional Development & Training section's increased ability to create and deliver virtual training events to meet the needs of agency staff during the pandemic.

The following is a list of conferences, classroom and online training that we provided and/or supported this year.

**Virtual Conferences (5 conferences)**

- NC Foundation for Alcohol & Drug Studies (NCFADS) Winter School
- NC Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (NCARF) Spring Conference
- Vocational Evaluation & Career Assessment Professionals (VECAP) Conference
- Vocational Evaluation & Work Adjustment Association (VEWAA) Fall Conference
- DVR Statewide Manager's Meeting

**Webinars & Virtual Classroom Sessions (54 sessions)**

- STEP UP 2020-21 Virtual Leadership Development Program *(22 sessions)*
- Independent Living / CAP Joint Training *(4 sessions)*
- Independent Living / NCHFA DPP Portal Training *(3 sessions)*
- NC DHHS Vaccination Plan Information Sessions *(5 sessions)*
- A Passport to University Internships
- DVR Townhall Meetings *(3 sessions)*
- Computer Vision Syndrome: Breathe Through It *(2 sessions)*
- Independent Living Collaboration & Partnering with MFP Demonstration Project
- Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP) Training: Hiring Individuals with Abilities
- Social Security Disability Benefits: A Virtual Work Incentives Information Summit *(2 sessions)*
- Windmills Module-a-Month *(3 sessions)*
- Y-TAC: Securing Resources and Connecting Across Systems *(3 sessions)*
- IPS 101 for VR
- Substance Abuse in the Deaf Community
- Adapting & Thriving Through Change *(2 sessions)*

**E-Learning Classes (31 Courses)**

- Accessibility in Microsoft Word *(w/NCATP)*
- Adapting Your Leadership Style

- Assertiveness Skills
- Creating Accessible Microsoft Word Forms *(w/NCATP)*
- Critical Thinking Skills Applied
- Delegating for Growth
- Developing Positive Relationships at Work
- Diversity Awareness
- How to Load External Training to the LMS
- How to Make Yourself Indispensable
- How to Manage your Emotions
- Introduction to Google Meet
- Managing Up
- Meetings: How to Make Them More Efficient & Effective
- Motivating Employees to Be Their Best
- Navigating Difficult Conversations
- Procurement Card Training *(w/Purchasing Section)*
- Productive Work Habits
- Put it in Writing
- QPR Gatekeeper Training for Suicide Prevention *(purchased)*
- Solid Business Writing
- Supervisor Communication Skills
- Taking Initiative
- The Golden Rule: How to Create a Respectful Workplace
- Timeliness of Comprehensive Assessment *(w/Policy Team)*
- Timeliness of Eligibility Determination *(w/Policy Team)*
- Train-the-Trainer: A Practical Guide to Classroom Facilitation
- Using the NCcareers Website *(w/Planning & Evaluation Team)*
- Virtual Event Instructions
- Women & Leadership

The Professional Development & Training section staff also provided a total of **39-small group** facilitated events this year requested by offices and sections across the state. Topics included: *ADA Review; Appreciation at Work; Casework Support Staff Training; Computer Vision Syndrome; Dealing with Change; Disability Awareness; Diversity Awareness; Emotional Intelligence; Employee Engagement; Ethics at Home, Work & Social Medial; Leading Remote Teams; Managing On-Boarding; Office 365 Training; PBIS Training; Policy Review; Productive Work Habits; Teambuilding; Team Skills; The Golden Rule; and Training Tips & Tools.*

In addition to the above, individuals can request to attend local training events and conferences upon approval of their manager and utilizing office administrative funding. This is not tracked by the Professional Development & Training section.

**Assistive Technology**

As noted above, we collaborated with the NC Assistive Technology Program (NCATP) to develop and launch two online courses this year: *Accessibility in Microsoft Word* and *Creating Accessible Microsoft Word Forms*. The Assistive Technology Expo is also a yearly event that our staff are encouraged to attend. This conference is managed in its entirety by NCATP and is a free conference. Registration for this event was not needed and therefore not tracked by the Professional Development & Training section.

**Leadership Training**

Several leadership training programs provided by the NC Office of State Human Resources are supported and encouraged. The Professional Development & Training section compiled a guide to these training sessions to increase awareness and attendance. Individuals can register on their own with manager approval for the no-cost leadership training outlined below. Two higher-level management training programs require multiple approvals as there is a cost associated with these training programs and requires more time involvement.

**Equal Employment Opportunity & Diversity Fundamentals (EEODF)**

This is a required training for all supervisors and managers and is assigned upon promotion. The curriculum provides leaders with applicable information to help them manage teams more effectively while promoting diversity and inclusion. This is a no-cost program.

**Leading at All Levels for Supervisors (LAAL-S)**

This series is designed for frontline and new supervisors and includes four individually scheduled classes, including Supervisory Foundations, Coaching for Supervisors, Leading Teams for Supervisors, and Managing Work for Supervisors. These classes are provided at no cost.

**STEP UP** (see section 2)

**Advanced Skills for Managers (ASM)**

This multi-session training program is delivered only to those in managerial roles and focuses on leadership best practices to develop high performing employees, teams and programs. This cost-program is also a pre-requisite course for the Certified Public Manager program, described next. *Ten DVRS managers completed this program during 2020-2021.*

**Certified Public Manager Program® (CPM)**

This 14-month curriculum is an in-depth, comprehensive, competency-based and nationally certified development program for middle managers. Extensive effort is spent helping participants assess their current performance, identify appropriate improvements and commit to implementing meaningful behavior change. To support our CPM participants during the beginning of their program, Executive Leadership members meet once with the participants to provide guidance and encouragement for their project assignment, and then again at the end of their program to learn about their project findings and results. This additional assistance has further encouraged individual leadership development and trust in agency management to provide support.

This cost-program involves a selective application process. *Three managers completed the program in 2020 and six managers are currently participating in the 2021 program to graduate in 2022*. Applications for the 2022 program will soon be available and managers will be encouraged to apply.

**New Employee Training**

New employees receive both mandatory and optional training opportunities, primarily in the form on e-Learning asynchronous courses, and includes:

- DHHS-DSB/DVRS Annual SSA Contract Training (yearly)
- DHHS HIPAA training; (yearly)
- NCVIP Employee Performance Management training curriculums;
- New Employee Orientation: Forms/Benefits
- NC Client Assistance Program: Bridge Over Barriers
- Voter Registration
- NC State Government Safe Practices for the Pandemic Worksite training
- DHHS Active Shooter in the Workplace training; (yearly)
- Unconscious Bias Series
- QPR Gatekeeper Training for Suicide Prevention
- IT Cyber Security (bi-monthly)
- Preventing Workplace Harassment
- Bloodborne Pathogen Awareness Training
- How to Prevent Slips, Trips & Falls Safety Training

**Mentoring New Employees**

In 2016 a Peer Advisory Leader (PAL) Mentoring Program was developed and implemented through the Professional Development & Training section to assist new employees with knowledge and understanding of the agency's mission and goals, and to aid in employee retention. This program continues today, and new employees are paired with a more experienced peer mentor located in a different office for a period of six-months to assist in the employee's successful adjustment to their new position. PAL mentors are provided training at the beginning of their commitment and participate in monthly check-in phone-calls to ensure that the mentoring relationships are going smoothly. This fiscal year saw an increase from 33 to 42 new PAL Mentor relationships developed with new hires across the state.

**ENCORE Case Management System**

In 2018-19 DVRS & DSB began the search for a new electronic case management system to replace the current BEAM system. The new case management solution was purchased in late 2019 from Geographic Solutions, Inc. (GSI). Their virtual one-stop solution is a commercial-off-the-shelf case management software product that is being heavily customized to meet our needs. The planning, design and building phases of the solution has continued throughout 2020 and 2021. Recently we began user testing in preparation for the implementation, training and deployment of the system in 2022. Extensive agency-wide training efforts are expected to take place throughout 2022, and possibly into 2023. Training will entail a combination e-Learning options, webinars, classroom sessions, pre-& post-session assignments, training materials, job aids, resources and in-office support.

**Future Training Focus**

While ENCORE will dominate our training efforts during 2022 – 2023, we will continue to provide training and training support for our Independent Living program; our Assistive Technology program; our University Internship program; our PAL Mentor program; QPR Gatekeeper Training for Suicide Prevention for all new employees; IPS training; Leadership training; Train-the-Trainer to support leaders in using virtual platforms for both internal and external training; e-Learning course development; in-state VR-related conferences; priority needs and small group training as feasible.

B. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO DESIGNATED STATE UNIT PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS.

DVRS leaders and staff acquire and disseminate information, including knowledge from research and other sources, through conferences and trainings as described in the preceding sections, and through regularly scheduled meetings, instructor led training, webinars and e-Learning courses, reports, email distribution, and through posted information on our SharePoint intranet site, which includes directories, policy, reports, forms, training materials, and links to other information sources. Information is also shared at collaborative meetings among staff and leaders across the state. At the 2020 Statewide Manager's Meeting previously listed, information was on Department and Division updates; Diversity & Inclusion; Fireside Chats with Executive Leaders; Strategic Initiatives; ENCORE Case Management Project Updates; Human Resources Updates; Employee Assistance Program & Work/Live Resources; WIOA Report Requirements & Agency Performance; Program, Policy, Planning & Evaluation Report; Worker's Compensation; Safety at Work & PPE; IT Updates; Pre-Employment Transition Services Update; Employment Services & program Development Report; SSA Work Incentives/Benefits Report; and the Leader's Role in Creating Mindfulness in the Workplace. DVRS also retains subject matter experts who serve as statewide program specialists in the areas of medical consultation, deaf and hard of hearing; mental illness and substance abuse; developmental disabilities and brain injury; transition-age youth, business relations; community rehabilitation programs; assistive technology and rehabilitation engineering. Domain-specific knowledge is shared by the program specialists with regional and local office staff at meetings, webinars, reports, presentations, and conferences.

5. PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS

DVRS 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.

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, including American Sign Language, must be qualified and trained with demonstrated proficiency in both English and the native language of the client. The Department of Health and Human Services has a contract with the Language Line in which assists the department in meeting the needs of foreign language interpretation and information requests through the phone. DVR can take advantage of this service and utilizes the translation services of these Foreign Language Interpreters via the phone where Spanish as well as many other languages are available. All fundamental VR and IL forms are available in Spanish for individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). Information on how to access the Language

Line and LEP materials is in our internal SharePoint website. The DVRS public website is also in Spanish for the section regarding VR Services to Consumers.

During federal fiscal year 2020-21, DVRS employed 13 counselors with caseloads specifically serving deaf and hard of hearing individuals. There were also 11 technicians, 3 Business Relations Representatives, 1 Program Specialist, and 1 Assistive Technology consultant with experience working with the deaf and hard of hearing who support the counselors and consumers being served. Approximately 15 interpreting agencies and over 82 independent licensed interpreters' contract with the Division and are paid out of this budget.

## 6. COORDINATION OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

North Carolina's Secondary Education and Transition Services team consisting of members from DVRS, NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) representatives, university representatives and parents 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 in 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 was to replicate the state planning process at the local level to facilitate training and teambuilding for the local school systems and cooperative VR offices that attended. This collaboration centered on building capacity for participating local community level transition teams to implement student-focused transition planning through interagency collaboration. 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 initiative that began in 2011 continues today, and several transition training and collaborative events were held in SFY 16-17. VR hosted a two-day 2016 NC DVR & DSB Joint Transition Counselors Conference in February 2016, which was attended by 165 state VR and DSB employees, and 69 local education agencies (LEA's) and community partners. This conference agenda offered plenary sessions on WIOA & PET, Workforce Development for Youth, a State-of-the-State report on transition and Creating Opportunity for Transition-Aged Youth with Disabilities. Concurrent sessions were available on topics including Career & Technical Education for Special Populations, Innovations in Adult Basic Education, Career Pathways and Community College, Disability Advocacy, Budgeting and Counseling, Asset Building and the ABLE Act, Evaluation Tools for Transition-Aged Youth, Internship Innovations, College STAR, MH/DD/SAS Services and Managed Care, and

Juvenile Diversion. Six additional one-day sessions, the NCDVR-NCDPI 2017 Joint Regional Transition trainings, were co-hosted with the NCDPI and held in a variety of locations across the state between February and April 2016. Prior to these Joint Regional Transition trainings, 4 one-hour webinars were also provided as a two-part series to familiarize staff with transition services. The NCDVR-NCDPI 2017 Joint Regional Transition Trainings accommodated more than 445 attendees, and the training agenda covered PETS & 511 Overview, PETS Resource Mapping, PETS & Transition Flow of Services, and Action Planning. In addition, agency staff participated in the yearly NC Division on Career Development and Transition conferences, and the NC

Exceptional Children's Conferences. The State planning team has a continuous goal to include other LEAs in additional summits, conferences and training for 2018.

## J. STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

### 1. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE REHABILITATION NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, PARTICULARLY THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF THOSE:

#### A. WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

Individuals with most significant disabilities (MSD) are defined as those whose physical or mental impairments require interventions or permanent accommodations that cannot be easily achieved to mitigate their limitations in three or more functional capacities regarding employment, such as communication, interpersonal skills, mobility, self-care, self-direction, work skills, and work tolerance. For the disabling condition to meet the definition of "most significant," such individuals must either require multiple core VR services for a minimum of nine months to complete their vocational rehabilitation program or require personal assistance services, rehabilitation technology, or extended services for their employment.

In program year 2020-21, Individuals with MSD accounted for 9,812 (34%) of 29,053 eligible DVRS VR consumers served.

Within the MSD population, 3,972 (41%) were individuals whose primary disability was an intellectual disability; 4,601 (47%) were individuals whose primary disability was a psychosocial disability, such as mental illness or substance abuse; 1,132 (12%) had a physical impairment as their primary disability; and 107 (1%) had sensory impairment, such as vision or hearing loss, as their primary disability.

Individuals with MSD ranged in age from 13 to 77, with 24 as the median age and 30 as the average age. Of the 9,812 eligible VR consumers with MSD, 5,054 (52%) were transition age youth, younger than 25; 3,947(40%) were ages 25 to 54; and 811 (8%) were age 55 or older.

The MSD population included 3,887 (40%) females and 5,101 (52%) individuals of minority backgrounds, with Black or African American accounting for 4,418 (87%) of minorities with MSD, those of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity accounting for 517 (10%), and individuals of Asian, Native American or American Indian, or Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander races accounting for 3% combined.

The services provided most for this population in PY 2018-19, as an indication of their rehabilitation service needs, were assessment and evaluation services, which were provided to 11,960 individuals with MSD (89.4%); supported employment services, which were provided to 2,950 (22.1%); job placement assistance, mostly through a community rehabilitation program, which was provided to 2,941 (22%); diagnosis and treatment of impairments, which was provided to 2,865 (21.4%); job search assistance, mainly by VR agency staff, which was provided to 2,187 (16.4%); counseling and guidance, which was provided to 1,756 (13.1%); transportation which was provided to 1,632 (12.2%); short term job supports, mostly as work adjustment job coaching, which was provided to 1,574 (11.8%); and maintenance, which was provided to 1,291(9.7%). Other services provided are listed in table J.1.

Table J.1. Services provided for Individuals with MSD, PY 2018-19

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of MSD population served |
|---|---|---|

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of MSD population served |
|---|---|---|
| Assessment | 11,960 | 89.4% |
| Supported Employment Services | | 22.1% |
| Job Placement Assistance | 2,941 | 22.0% |
| Diagnosis and Treatment of Impairments | 2,865 | 21.4% |
| Job Search Assistance | 2,187 | 16.4% |
| Counseling and Guidance | 1,756 | 13.1% |
| Transportation | 1,632 | 12.2% |
| Short Term Job Supports | 1,574 | 11.8% |
| Maintenance | 1,291 | 9.7% |
| Job Readiness Training | 794 | 5.9% |
| Literacy Training | 597 | 4.5% |
| Benefits Counseling | 456 | 3.4% |
| Information and Referral Services | 304 | 2.3% |
| Vocational Training | 272 | 2.0% |
| Rehabilitation Technology | 212 | 1.6% |
| Miscellaneous Training | 172 | 1.3% |
| Community College | 171 | 1.3% |
| On-the-Job Training | 166 | 1.2% |
| University Training | 141 | 1.1% |
| Customized Employment Services | 141 | 1.1% |
| Disability Related Skills Training | 127 | 0.9% |
| Interpreter Services | 92 | 0.7% |
| Customized Training | 35 | 0.3% |
| Personal Assistance Services | 26 | 0.2% |
| Graduate School Training | 17 | 0.1% |
| Reader Services | 10 | 0.1% |
| Extended Services | 8 | 0.1% |
| Technical Assistance | < 5 | < 0.1% |
| Apprenticeship Training | < 5 | < 0.1% |

In a survey of 671 rehabilitation professionals responses as to the needs of individuals with most significant disabilities were provided by 83.3% (n = 559) of the survey participants. Of the valid responses, 38.8% reported transportation; 25% reported CRP services, such as short-term job coaching, supported employment, and extended services; 8.1% wrote that more business engagement and employer services were needed; 7.7% responded that more maintenance and financial support was needed. A smaller percentage (< 5%) listed the following VR service needs: counseling and guidance, including benefits and financial literacy counseling, job search and job placement assistance, training services, and increased agency capacity and collaboration with other agencies and programs.

B. WHO ARE MINORITIES;

Individuals who are of a minority race or ethnicity accounted for 52.8% (n = 22,836) of 43,255 eligible DVRS VR consumers served in PY 2018-19.

Within this population 31.2% (n = 7,124) were individuals with MSD; 60.7% (n = 13,866) were individuals with significant disabilities; and 8.1% (n = 1,846) did not have significant disabilities.

Regarding their primary disability, 0.4% (n = 93) had blindness or a visual impairment; 3.6% (n = 826) were deaf, hearing impaired or deaf-blind; 13.8% (n = 3,146) had a mobility, dexterity, or other orthopedic impairment; 12% (n = 2,155) had another type of physical impairment related to a medical condition; 35.2% (n = 8,030) had a cognitive impairment; and 8,000 (35%) had a psychosocial or other mental impairment.

Individuals of minority backgrounds ranged in age from 13 to 82, with 35 as the average and 32 as the median age. Of the 22,836 eligible VR consumers of minority backgrounds, 37.1% (n = 8,467) were transition age youth, younger than 25; 46.6% (n = 10,645) were ages 25 to 54; and 16.3% (n = 3,724) were ages 55 and older.

About 47.1% the individuals of minority backgrounds were female (n = 12,075).

The minority backgrounds of this population included 87.4% (n = 19,965) who were Black or African American; 10.8% (n = 2,475) who were Hispanic or Latino; 3.1% (n = 706) who were American Indian or Alaskan Native; 1.6% (n = 371) who were Asian; and 0.6% (n = 144) who were Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

The services provided most for this population in PY 2018-19 as an indication of their rehabilitation service needs, were assessment and evaluation services, which were provided to 20,437 individuals with MSD (89.8%); diagnosis and treatment of impairments, which was provided to 5,684 (25%); job search assistance, mainly by VR agency staff, which was provided to 4,789 (21.1%); job placement assistance, mostly through a community rehabilitation program, which was provided to 4,458 (19.6%); transportation which was provided to 3,234 (14.2%); short term job supports, mostly as work adjustment job coaching, which was provided to 3,086 (13.6%); counseling and guidance, which was provided to 2,962 (13%); maintenance, which was provided to 2,569 (11.3%); and supported employment services, which were provided to 1,842 (8.1%). Other services provided are listed in table J.2.

Table J.2. Services provided for Individuals of Minority Backgrounds, PY 2018-19

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of minority population served |
|---|---|---|
| Assessment | 20,437 | 89.5% |
| Diagnosis and Treatment of | 5,684 | 24.9% |

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of minority population served |
|---|---|---|
| Impairments | | |
| Job Search Assistance | 4,789 | 21.0% |
| Job Placement Assistance | 4,458 | 19.5% |
| Transportation | 3,234 | 14.2% |
| Short Term Job Supports | 3,086 | 13.5% |
| Counseling and Guidance | 2,962 | 13.0% |
| Maintenance | 2,569 | 11.2% |
| Supported Employment Services | 1,842 | 8.1% |
| Job Readiness Training | 1,278 | 5.6% |
| Vocational Training | 847 | 3.7% |
| Benefits Counseling | 768 | 3.4% |
| Literacy Training | 663 | 2.9% |
| Information and Referral Services | 617 | 2.7% |
| University Training | 521 | 2.3% |
| Community College | 490 | 2.1% |
| Rehabilitation Technology | 427 | 1.9% |
| Interpreter Services | 360 | 1.6% |
| Miscellaneous Training | 306 | 1.3% |
| On-the-Job Training | 298 | 1.3% |
| Disability Related Skills Training | 126 | 0.6% |
| Customized Employment Services | 90 | 0.4% |
| Graduate School Training | 59 | 0.3% |
| Customized Training | 37 | 0.2% |
| Reader Services | 24 | 0.1% |
| Extended Services | 16 | 0.1% |
| Personal Assistance Services | 7 | < 0.1% |
| Technical Assistance | < 5 | < 0.1% |
| Apprenticeship Training | < 5 | < 0.1% |

From FFY 2017-2019 in a telephone survey of 1,740 VR clients of minority race or ethnicity who were unemployed, regarding their satisfaction with the VR program and barriers to

employment, 59.8% reported they needed additional help with their job search; 49% said they needed additional VR services; 47.4% said they had medical problems that prevented them from working; 28% said they didn't have transportation; 23.6% said they weren't ready to work; 19.7% said they felt discriminated against because of their disability; 17.4% said there weren't any jobs available that they wanted; 17.3% said they feared losing their disability or healthcare benefits; and 6% said they didn't have childcare.

C. WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;

There is no regulatory definition for individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program. The federal guidance for establishing this category is that it can be defined from a comparison of the demographics of individuals served by the VR program with those of the population of individuals with disabilities residing in the state or from the results of a survey or key informant interviews.

The demographics of the population of the 43,255 eligible individuals served by the DSB VR program in PY 2018-19 are as follows:

Minority race and ethnicity: 52.8% (n = 22,836) were of a minority race or ethnicity, the distribution of which is described in the previous section.

Gender: 45.4% (n = 19,638) were female.

Age at the start of the program year: The age range was from 13 to 92. The average age was 35 and the median age was 31. 38.4% (n = 16,624) were transition-age youth younger than 25; 46.5% (n = 20,110) were adults ages 25 to 54; and 15.1% (n = 6,521) were adults ages 55 and older.

Significance of disability: 30.9% (n = 13,372) were individuals with MSD; 59.2% (n = 25,627) were individuals with a significant disability; and 9.8% (n = 4,256) were individuals whose disability was not significant.

Primary impairment: 0.3% (n = 151) had blindness or a visual impairment; 4% (n = 1,733) were deaf, hearing impaired, or deaf-blind; 14.2% (n = 1,526) had a mobility, dexterity, or other orthopedic impairment; 10.1% (n = 4,353) had a physical impairment other than orthopedic; 31% (n = 13,402) had a cognitive impairment; and 40.4% (n = 17,486) had a psychosocial or other mental impairment.

Comorbidity: 49.3%(n = 21,305) had a secondary disability, of which 0.4% (n = 95) had blindness or a visual impairment; 0.5% (n = 99) were deaf, hearing impaired, or deaf-blind; 7.3% (n = 1,526) had a mobility, dexterity, or other orthopedic impairment; 12.1% (n = 2,582) had a physical impairment other than orthopedic; 29.3% (n = 6,239) had a cognitive impairment; and 50.3% (n = 10,725) had a psychosocial or other mental impairment.

In a survey of 671 rehabilitation professionals specific populations of underserved individuals with disabilities were identified in 83.8% (n = 562) of the responses. These groups included people living in rural areas (17.1%); individuals with mental illness (13.2%); students with disabilities (10%); people without transportation (9.6%); homeless (8.5%); ethnic minorities, including people with cultural or language barriers (8.2%); individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing (5%); individuals with significant or most significant disabilities (4.8%); autism (4.4%) and fewer than 4% reported physical disabilities, ex-offenders, substance abuse, adults, elderly, TBI, uninsured, and veterans. Responses on the needs of these populations varied, although transportation was mentioned in 27.4% of the valid responses. Other frequently reported needs included training programs, affordable housing, healthcare and mental health services, and outreach, community and employer awareness and education to increase employment opportunities.

D. WHO HAVE BEEN SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND

Over half the individuals served by DVRS are also served through other components of the workforce development system. Over a 10-year period, from PY 2008-09 to PY 2017-18, DVRS served 190,639 unique individuals, as reported to the NC Common Follow-up System, of which, at some point during the 10-year period, 58.8% (n = 112,189) had also received services through NCWorks Career Centers under the Title I Adult, Youth, or Dislocated Worker programs or Title III, Wagner-Peyser, including NCWorks Online.

In a survey of Workforce Development Board Directors from the Kerr-Tar, Western Piedmont, Capital Area, and Charlotte Works Workforce Development Board regions, as key informants, the rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness and visual disabilities were identified as follows: More collaboration between VR and the Talent Employment Solutions Team at Career Centers when DVRS has determined that people are job ready; employment related service needs should be better advertised and success stories broadcasted to a wider audience; workforce partners have to do a better job of telling their story; individuals with disabilities, especially, need to know they can offer valuable skills to the workforce; individuals with disabilities struggle in some cases with an employer's lack of assistive technology or don't know how to request accommodations; individuals with disabilities may need to know how to answer interview questions concerning their abilities; other needs included job search assistance, including resumé preparation, employability workshops, advocacy training, assessments, interpreting services, psychological services, counseling services, and medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes

E. WHO ARE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING, AS APPROPRIATE, THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES OR OTHER TRANSITION SERVICES.

Transition age youth, ages 14-24, comprise 41.4% (n = 20,784) of the 50,198 total individuals served by DVRS in PY 2018-19, including potentially eligible students with disabilities and individuals who applied for VR services but had not been determined eligible by the end of the program year. Within this youth population, 13,593 (65.4%) of the 20,784 transition-age youth were ages 14-21 at the start of the program year and were identified as students with disabilities at either application to the VR program or the start date of their pre-employment transition services, of which 2,567 (18.9%) were potentially eligible for VR services but had not applied.

About 80% of transition age youth served in PY 2018-19 had applied and were determined eligible for VR services (n = 16,623). Within this population, 40.6% (n = 6,754) were individuals with MSD, 50.4% (n = 8,381) had significant disabilities, and 9% (n =1,488) did not have significant disabilities; 37.1% (n = 6,160) were female and 50.7% (n = 8,427) were of a minority race or ethnicity, of which and 7.5% (n = 1,240) of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.

The services provided most for transition-age youth in PY 2018-19 as an indication of their rehabilitation service needs are listed in table J.3.

Table J.3. VR Services provided for Transition-age Youth, PY 2018-19

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of transition-age youth population served |
|---|---|---|
| Assessment | 16,357 | 98.4% |
| Job Placement Assistance | 2,793 | 16.8% |
| Job Search Assistance | 2,282 | 13.7% |

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of transition-age youth population served |
|---|---|---|
| Counseling and Guidance | 2,157 | 13.0% |
| Diagnosis and Treatment | 2,066 | 12.4% |
| Short Term Job Supports | 1,969 | 11.8% |
| Supported Employment Services | 1,542 | 9.3% |
| Job Readiness Training | 1,395 | 8.4% |
| Literacy Training | 1,377 | 8.3% |
| Maintenance | 1,161 | 7.0% |
| Transportation | 1,003 | 6.0% |
| University Training | 655 | 3.9% |
| Information and Referral Services | 436 | 2.6% |
| Vocational Training | 413 | 2.5% |
| Community College | 410 | 2.5% |
| Miscellaneous Training | 309 | 1.9% |
| On The Job Training | 275 | 1.7% |
| Benefits Counseling | 243 | 1.5% |
| Rehabilitation Technology | 175 | 1.1% |
| Disability Related Skills Training | 169 | 1.0% |
| Interpreter Services | 158 | 1.0% |
| Customized Employment Services | 134 | 0.8% |
| Customized Training | 91 | 0.5% |
| Graduate School Training | 53 | 0.3% |
| Reader Services | 30 | 0.2% |
| Personal Assistance Services | 24 | 0.1% |

In a survey of rehabilitation professionals 70% (n = 470) of 671 survey participants identified one or more needs for transition-age youth. The need most frequently identified was job readiness training which was mentioned in 204 (43.4%) of the responses; 18% reported communication; 17% identified a need for transportation; and 15% identified a need for more job opportunities. Other themes regarding client needs included training, transition services, pre-employment transition services, social development, more VR in schools, family support, SSI/SSDI, and assistive technology.

A long-term follow-up study completed in 2019 found that, from a cohort of students that graduated high school in North Carolina, those with disabilities earned 21% less than their peers without disabilities, but that differences in higher education attainment accounted for half of the wage gap between those with and without disabilities. The findings were that higher

education leads a high-paying careers, and that those with disabilities tend to increase their earnings they attain a post-secondary credential. This suggests a need to promote post-secondary training towards credential attainment and measurable skill gains among youth and students with disabilities.

### 2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE; AND

The Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) directly provide or facilitate the provision of one or more VR 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 the fiscal year with over 135 CRPs across the state and more than 7,800 VR participants received services from a CRP, of which approximately 39% received supported employment (SE) services. Of those provided CRP services that year, 2,804 achieved their employment objectives in the same year, including 1,110 individuals that were placed in employment in an integrated setting with supports, while many others continued to progress towards employment.

The CRPs have representation on a Steering Committee that includes agency staff 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 the VR program, the 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. Needs for improving and expanding CRPs identified by the steering committee include 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; 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; and 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.

### 3. 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

Transition age youth, ages 14-24, comprise 41.4% (n = 20,784) of the 50,198 total individuals served by DVRS in PY 2018-19, including potentially eligible students with disabilities and individuals who applied for VR services but had not been determined eligible by the end of the program year. Within this youth population, 13,593 (65.4%) of the 20,784 transition-age youth were ages 14-21 at the start of the program year and were identified as students with

disabilities at either application to the VR program or the start date of their pre-employment transition services, of which 2,567 (18.9%) were potentially eligible for VR services but had not applied.

About 80% of transition age youth served in PY 2018-19 had applied and were determined eligible for VR services (n = 16,623). Within this population, 40.6% (n = 6,754) were individuals with MSD, 50.4% (n = 8,381) had significant disabilities, and 9% (n =1,488) did not have significant disabilities; 37.1% (n = 6,160) were female and 50.7% (n = 8,427) were of a minority race or ethnicity, of which  and 7.5% (n = 1,240) of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.

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| Short Term Job Supports | 1,969 | 11.8% |
| Supported Employment Services | 1,542 | 9.3% |
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| Literacy Training | 1,377 | 8.3% |
| Maintenance | 1,161 | 7.0% |
| Transportation | 1,003 | 6.0% |
| University Training | 655 | 3.9% |
| Information and Referral Services | 436 | 2.6% |
| Vocational Training | 413 | 2.5% |
| Community College | 410 | 2.5% |
| Miscellaneous Training | 309 | 1.9% |
| On The Job Training | 275 | 1.7% |
| Benefits Counseling | 243 | 1.5% |
| Rehabilitation Technology | 175 | 1.1% |
| Disability Related Skills Training | 169 | 1.0% |
| Interpreter Services | 158 | 1.0% |
| Customized Employment Services | 134 | 0.8% |

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of transition-age youth population served |
|---|---|---|
| Customized Training | 91 | 0.5% |
| Graduate School Training | 53 | 0.3% |
| Reader Services | 30 | 0.2% |
| Personal Assistance Services | 24 | 0.1% |

In a survey of rehabilitation professionals 70% (n = 470) of 671 survey participants identified one or more needs for transition-age youth. The need most frequently identified was job readiness training, which was mentioned in 204 (43.4%) of the responses; 18% reported communication; 17% identified a need for transportation; and 15% identified a need for more job opportunities. Other themes regarding client needs included training, transition services, pre-employment transition services, social development, more VR in schools, family support, SSI/SSDI, and assistive technology.

For details on coordination with education officials, please refer to section C.5.d.

## K. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

### 1. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE STATE WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES

According to the 2019 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium, there are an estimated 1.3 million North Carolinians with a disability, of which 681,000 are ages 18-64, of which 441,000 are both ages 18-64 and unemployed. DVRS projects an average of 41,000 individuals with a disability who have been determined eligible for VR services will have an active VR case in each of the program years from 2020 through 2023. Of this population, DVRS projects 33,000 will receive services under under an individualized plan for employment. These estimates include: (a) cases where purchased services are provided in accordance with the consumer's individualized plan for employment; (b) cases where purchased services are 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 services are provided in-house by agency staff or as a comparable service or benefit.

### 2. THE NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL RECEIVE SERVICES UNDER:

#### A. THE VR PROGRAM;

Of this annual average population of 41,000 individuals eligible for VR services, DVRS projects 33,000 (80.5%) will be served under individualized plan for employment for FY 2022 and 2023.

#### B. THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM; AND

In FFY 2018-19, VR program expenditures for supported employment services totaled over $6.2 million for 1,554 individuals at an average cost of $4,000 per case. DVRS projects average payments of $4,000 for 1,550 individuals with most significant disabilities each FFY 2020 through 2024, for a total of $6.2 million annually in supported employment services payments from Title I Part B (basic support grant).

#### C. EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION.

DVRS does not expect to implement an order of selection process during federal fiscal years 2020-2024. Services will be available both years for all client service categories.

### 3. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR VR SERVICES, BUT ARE NOT RECEIVING SUCH SERVICES DUE TO AN ORDER OF SELECTION; AND

The DVRS VR Program is not currently under an order of selection and does not expect to be during federal fiscal years 2020-2024.

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.

For federal fiscal years 2020-2023, DVRS projects average annual total program expenditures of approximately $132.5 million to serve approximately 41,000 individuals, at an average of $2,735 per individual served.

## L. STATE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

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

The following goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by DVRS and the State Rehabilitation Council:

Priority: Competitive integrated employment

Goal: Increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, underserved populations, and individuals with additional barriers to employment.

Priority: Youth and students with disabilities

Goal: Increase opportunities for training and employment services for youth with disabilities.

Goal: Increase the provision of pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

Priority: Business engagement

Goal: Increase partnerships with businesses and government agencies to develop or expand work experiences, internships, and employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities.

Priority: Capacity building

Goal: Increase internal capacity and develop the program infrastructure needed to improve service delivery for VR participants and employers.

Goal: Increase collaboration with WIOA core and required program partners to integrate and expand services for individuals with disabilities.

2. IDENTIFY THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

Priority: Competitive integrated employment

Goal: Increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, underserved populations, and individuals with additional barriers to employment.

Priority: Youth and students with disabilities

Goal: Increase opportunities for training and employment services for youth with disabilities.

Goal: Increase the provision of pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

Priority: Business engagement

Goal: Increase partnerships with businesses and government agencies to develop or expand work experiences, internships, and employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities.

Priority: Capacity building

Goal: Increase internal capacity and develop the program infrastructure needed to improve service delivery for VR participants and employers.

Goal: Increase collaboration with WIOA core and required program partners to integrate and expand services for individuals with disabilities.

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;

The goals and priorities were developed following an analysis of the most recent comprehensive statewide assessment survey and review of administrative data.

B. THE STATE'S PERFORMANCE UNDER THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES OF SECTION 116 OF WIOA; AND

The following performance and accountability measures were calculated for DVRS:

| | PY 2018 | PY 2019 | PY 2020 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Measurable Skills Gain Rate | 35.4% | 36.0% | 29.9% |
| Employment Rate 2nd Quarter after Exit | 61.6% | 44.8% | 45.0% |
| Median Earnings 2nd Quarter after Exit | $2,845 | $2,763 | $2,857 |
| Employment Rate 4th Quarter after Exit | N/A | 35.6% | 34.0% |
| Credential Attainment Rate | N/A | 20.9% | 26.2% |

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.

The goals and priorities were developed to improve the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, especially with regard to improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, increasing the provision of pre-employment transition services to youth, building internal agency capacity and collaboration with WIOA partner programs, and increasing business engagement. In December, 2019 the Division received the draft report from the 2018 Monitoring site visit during July 30-August 1. This information was reviewed by the State

Rehabilitation Council and agency leadership and the results of the report were referenced when updated goals and priorities were developed in addition to a corrective action plan addressing areas requiring additional attention.

## M. ORDER OF SELECTION

### 1. WHETHER THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL IMPLEMENT AND ORDER OF SELECTION. IF SO, DESCRIBE:

#### A. THE ORDER TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR SERVICES

The North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation 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.

#### B. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER

The North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation 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, therefore this section is not applicable.

#### C. THE SERVICE AND OUTCOME GOALS

The North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation 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, therefore this section is not applicable.

#### D. TIME WITHIN WHICH THESE GOALS MAY BE ACHIEVED FOR INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY WITHIN THE ORDER; AND

The North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation 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, therefore this section is not applicable.

#### E. HOW INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

The North Carolina Vocational Rehabilitation 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, therefore this section is not applicable.

### 2. 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 Vocational Rehabilitation 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, therefore this section is not applicable.

## 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

Title VI, Part B funds for 2021 were $220,815. However, DVRS forecasts annual expenditures of approximately $7 million for supported employment services that will be provided through the Title I basic support grant. DVRS estimates that 1,550 individuals will receive supported employment services each program year.

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

As incorporated into its policies concerning supported employment services, DVRS first provides ongoing support as appropriate for supported employment. Ongoing support includes services needed to support and maintain the individual in SE based on a determination by the DVRS counselor of the individual's needs as specified in an IPE. Supported employment is provided from the time of job placement until the individual exits the VR program.

At the time of transition to extended services from an extended services provider, DVRS ensures through its contracts, agreements, and policies that extended services are provided by a state agency, a private non-profit organization, through natural supports or any other appropriate resource other than VR, after the individual has made the transition from the state VR support. Extended services begin when: (a) the individual is employed, (b) intensive training is completed, and (c) stabilization on the job has occurred. Individuals may be served for as long as there is a reasonable expectation that an extended services source will be identified during the course of rehabilitation. DVRS will only contract with supported employment service providers that give written commitment that they will provide extended services compliant with Federal regulations. The provision of extended services to youth for a period not to exceed 4 years or until such time that the youth reaches the age of 25 is considered in the DVRS contract with supported employment providers. In no instance would DVRS establish a contractual relationship with a supported employment vendor who did not agree to the provision of sufficient extended services to youth throughout the lifetime of an individual's job. In accordance with § 363.4(a) and 34 CFR 361.5(c)(19)(v), NC DVRS will arrange to provide extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, if no other provider of extended services is identified.

Ongoing support provided during extended services must include a minimum of twice-monthly monitoring at the work site to assess job stability unless under special circumstances, especially at the request of the individual, the IPE provides for off-site monitoring and based upon that assessment, the coordination or provision of specific services at or away from the work site, that are needed to maintain employment stability. If off-site monitoring is determined to be appropriate, it must, at a minimum, consist of two face-to-face meetings with the client and one employer contact monthly. These activities apply to all supported employment clients and not only those whose services are provided through funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities.

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.

DVRS is collaborating with community rehabilitation programs, other agencies and organizations to provide extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities. Because DVRS will only utilize community rehabilitation programs that give written commitment that they will provide extended services compliant with Federal regulations as supported employment vendors, many of those community rehabilitation programs providing SE services also provide extended services under their service contract at no additional cost to DVRS when other resources for extended services are not available. The Request for Application (RFA) is one of the key tools DVRS utilizes for contract and program development, in which the entity submitting the application has completed much of the foundational work in leveraging and braiding resources from other public and private funds. And, through its continued participation on interagency committees and collaboration efforts, DVRS will continue to work with community rehabilitation programs, Local Management Entities/Managed Care Organizations (LME/MCOs), and other organizations

to leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.

## O. STATE'S STRATEGIES

### 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), other divisions and departments, and community rehabilitation programs in developing work opportunities for individuals with disabilities consistent with the Division's priority of competitive integrated employment and associated goals of helping VR participants achieve these employment opportunities, particularly for VR participants with most significant disabilities, underserved populations, and individuals with additional barriers to employment. The expansion of these partnerships is also consistent with the Division's priority of capacity building and the associated goal of developing the program infrastructure needed to improve service delivery for VR participants.

Regarding partnerships with community rehabilitation programs, the Division establishes and maintains and plans to continue contracts or agreements with over 120 private for profit and non-profit VR service providers that provide community-based assessments, vocational evaluations, job development, work adjustment training, and short- and long-term on-the-job supports. Specialized providers offer services for specific disabilities, such as the University of North Carolina's TEACCH® Autism program, and the Brain Injury Support Services program at Community Partnerships, Inc. Over 100 of these programs deliver services through 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 final goal of competitive, integrated employment. This system and its implementation were developed in collaboration with the community rehabilitation programs providers, which have stakeholder representation on a steering committee as well as various other opportunities to provide stakeholder input.

Consistent with the priority of youth and students with disabilities and associated goals of increasing opportunities for training and employment services for youth and the provision of pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities, the Division has established and plans to continue agreements with 90 of North Carolina's 115 school districts. Under these agreements, the local education agencies contribute funding towards 190 VR program positions, including VR counselors, business relations representatives, vocational evaluators and support staff such as casework assistants and casework technicians. Other strategies to expand and improve services for youth include expanded performance-based cooperative agreements with Project SEARCH™ sites and organizations that provide various pre-employment transition services.

Regarding the priority of business engagement, in addition to the priorities of competitive integrated employment and youth and students with disabilities, the VR program employs 70 business relations representatives, and has three regional specialists and one statewide program specialist who will continue to engage employers and expand opportunities for internships, on-the-job training, and employment for adults, students, and youth with disabilities.

Both of North Carolina's VR agencies are partnering in the development a customized off-the-shelf electronic case management system based on the Geographic Solutions, Inc. WIOA platform, which supports the state's Title I and Title III programs. The new system, ENCORE, will be implemented in phases, with functionality that will allow the public to self-register and inquire about services and, in the final phase, enable the Title IV program to exchange data with

the Title I and Title III programs. This effort furthers both goals for the VR program priority of capacity building. Under this priority, DVRS and DSB collaborated with the state's other education and workforce programs, including but not limited WIOA partners, to develop a new NCCareers caeer information system. NCCareers launched in 2020 and includes various tools for career exploration, labor market information, and links to other agencies and programs, including services for individuals with disabilities. A representative for DVRS and DSB serves as a voting member of the NCCareers steering committee and agency staff continue to participate in workgroups for content development and new system functionality.

## 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

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 with assessment processes. Presently within the state, these services are made available statewide by Rehabilitation Engineers, Assistive Technology Consultants, and other agency staff as well as 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 nineteen staff serving the state of North Carolina, which includes the Director, AT Information/ Referral /Funding Specialist, Intake Coordinator, Inventory Specialist, 1 AT Re-use Special Projects Assistant, 4 Speech Language Pathologists (SLP) and 8 Assistive

Technology Consultants. The 8 AT Consultants and 4 SLPs provide direct one-on-one services in the Assistive Technology Centers.

Since 2015 DVRS has progressively increased their collaborative efforts with NCATP and other Ability partners to provide assistive technologies and related services to farmers and farmworkers within the state. There have also been joint outreach efforts to Veterans with disabilities who may be interested in pursuing agriculturally-oriented occupations.

Additionally, the current interagency agreement between DVRS and education agencies, including the 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 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 area. The specific groups of considerable interest include: North Carolina Native Americans, Hispanic/Latino populations and 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, 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.

DVRS, in partnership with DSB, piloted a staff development initiative that will continue through the PY 2020-24 planning cycle: Project E3: Educate, Empower, and Employ. Project E3 includes intensive technical assistance to build program capacity for state VR programs, with a focus on improving engagement and successful outcomes of individuals with disabilities experiencing intergenerational poverty. In late 2017, Project E3 staff initiated in-person trainings and tools to increase VR participation in two economically disadvantaged North Carolina communities. The programmatic intervention included community-based participatory research to identify key issues and challenges, map existing resources, and confirm commitment from providers and other stakeholders. Subsequent intervention strategies included implementation of an in-reach/outreach strategy for youth SSI recipients, applicants, and their families regarding VR services; the alignment of work incentives benefits counseling with financial literacy and empowerment coaching; and staff development training in evidence-based employment practices, including motivational interviewing and trauma-informed care.

## 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 revised its state level memorandum of agreement with DPI upon issuance of the final federal regulations on Title IV of WIOA. The purpose of the agreement 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 agreement with DPI will also specify the manner in which pre-employment transition services 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 memorandum of agreement, 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 VR 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 for the Division to carry out the VR 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 and will continue to enhance programs and services to transition-aged youth with increased focus on students with disabilities and pre-employment transition services. New programs are intended to align the Division with federal requirements under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, namely pre-employment transition services, 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 DPI leadership, DVRS, 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. 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.

## 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 DVRS and DSB initiated that will launch during the PY 2020-2024 planning cycle is the migration to a Geographic Solutions case management system, which will facilitate data sharing across WIOA partners and improve case management and reporting.

## 6. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE STATE WITH RESPECT TO THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

In Spring 2022, DVRS and DSB will meet with RSA to establish negotiated rates for the performance accountability measures under section 116 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Expected levels of performance based on the Statistical Adjustment Model are consistent with actual agency performance with the exception of the Measurable Skills Gain rate, which was lower in PY 2020 and 2021 due to limited in-person training opportunities during the COVIDE pandemic. The Divisions acknowledge that to improve performance on other measures, such as median quarterly earnings, they must help consumers to prepare higher paying positions through credential attainment and measurable skills gains. DVRS and DSB are currently looking for ways to adjust programs, services, and support 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 is to increase the earning potential of individuals who have entrepreneurial skills 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.

In March 2017, DVRS and DSB jointly entered an intensive technical assistance agreement with WINTAC to receive technical assistance with implementation and performance enhancement in the areas of the provision of pre-employment transition services , Customized Employment and related services; Extend the provision of services to unreached youth with disabilities in Juvenile Development Centers; linking individual staff performance with corporately collected Common Performance Measures; and Improving systems integration with the NCWorks Career Centers across the state.

## 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 regarding: the availability and benefits of, and information on eligibility standards for VR 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 DVRS 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 VR 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 VR and NCWorks system is to continue to refine the processes and procedures for NCWorks Career Center staff to better determine which consumers with disabilities utilizing the centers should be referred to DVRS rather than being served through the NCWorks Career Centers. 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. DVRS 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 DES 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 VR 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 NCWorks Career Center and require the specialized services offered by the VR program. Specific arrangements and staffing patterns by VR 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 DSS, NCCCS, 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.

## 8. HOW THE AGENCY'S STRATEGIES WILL BE USED TO:

### A. ACHIEVE GOALS AND PRIORITIES BY THE STATE, CONSISTENT WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT;

The strategy of collaboration with community rehabilitation programs and other agencies and organizations to provide extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities applies to the priorities and their corresponding goals of competitive integrated employment; youth and students; business engagement; and capacity building to serve individuals with most significant disabilities. For adults and youth with most significant disabilities, this strategy addresses the goals of increasing competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes; increasing opportunities for training and employment services; expanding work experiences, internships, and employment opportunities; and increasing collaboration to integrate and expand services. This strategy is consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment, which identified supported employment services as one of the most needed services for adults and youth with most significant disabilities.

Continued and expanded collaboration through performance-based cooperative agreements with non-profit organizations also includes the provision of brain injury support services for individuals with brain injury and Project SEARCH™ and pre-employment transition services programs for youth and students with disabilities, consistent with the needs comprehensive needs assessment findings regarding individuals with most significant disabilities and students and youth with disabilities.

Strategies to increase outreach to minorities, regarding the needs assessment findings on services to individuals of minority backgrounds, also include identifying and coordinating with community groups and other resources at the local level. Managers and staff, including program specialists, reach out to organizations for the American Indian, Latino, African American, and Asian populations to help increase awareness of the availability of vocational rehabilitation services. These strategies support the priorities of *competitive integrated employment* and *youth and students with disabilities* as they relate to underserved populations and individuals with cultural barriers to employment.

Other strategies specific to the goals related to the priority of *youth and students with disabilities* include local Third-Party Cooperative Agreements (TCPA) through which local education

agency (LEA) resources are committed to fund VR support staff, in addition to outlining how VR and local school systems will collaborate to serve students with disabilities. DVRS also coordinates services for youth through the State Capacity Building Team for Transition, which has representation from state education and advocacy agencies to coordinate transition services for students to achieve better post-school outcomes.

Regarding the comprehensive needs assessment findings on the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs, other strategies include coordination through advisory committees comprised of supported employment, other community rehabilitation program providers along with Division staff. Regular meetings provide an effective venue identifying and updating the needs, goals, and priorities as they pertain to community rehabilitation programs.

B. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES; AND

Innovation and expansion funds were used as a partnership contribution to NCCareers.org, North Carolina's career information website application. A portion of innovation and expansion funding will be used in support of activities of the NC DVRS state rehabilitation council.

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.

The strategies listed in part (B) of this section specific to improving employment outcomes for individuals who have most significant disabilities and additional barriers to employment will be applied as strategies to 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. Strategies specific to overcoming identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with most significant disabilities in Supported Employment include continued collaboration with DMHDDSAS to (a) optimize coordination of services at the local service level to improve ease of service access for consumers requiring supported employment services; (b) expand implementation of the Individual Placement and Support Model of Supported Employment; (c) develop a funding mechanism that utilizes supported employment funds from VR, 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 (IPS) model of supported employment; (d) train VR field staff as well as Community Rehabilitation Program providers in the IPS Model of Supported Employment; (e) conduct fidelity reviews of providers who contract to provide the IPS Model of Supported Employment; and (f) increase the number of sites across the state to be a part of the IPS Model of Supported Employment.

P. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS

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

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.

| Measurable Objectives for Goal 1.1 | PY 18 | PY 19 | PY 20 |
|---|---|---|---|

| Measurable Objectives for Goal 1.1 | PY 18 | PY 19 | PY 20 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Objective 1.1.1. The number of persons achieving employment outcomes will equal or exceed the previous year. | 4,818 | 4,257 | 3,153 |
| Objective 1.1.2. The percentage of all individuals who have achieved an employment outcome after exiting the program having received services will equal or exceed 55.8%. | 45.5% | 45.4% | 42.3% |

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.

| Measurable Objective for Goal 1.2 | PY 18 | PY 19 | PY 20 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Objective 1.2.1. At least 75% of VR consumers who achieved competitive employment will be individuals with significant or most significant disabilities. | 89% | 90% | 92% |

Goal 1.3. Increase earnings for individuals exiting the VR program in employment.

| Measurable Objectives for Goal 1.3 | **PY 18** | **PY 19** | **PY 20** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 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%. | 40% | 42% | 43% |
| 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 | 58% | 58% | 60% |

| Measurable Objectives for Goal 1.3 | **PY 18** | **PY 19** | **PY 20** |
|---|---|---|---|
| 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%. | | | |

**Performance Assessment**

Objective 1.1.1. The number of individuals exiting VR in employment has decreased year-over-year since the implementation of the 2016-2020 Unified State Plan. This is due in large part to a smaller total VR caseload and the trend of fewer VR applicants was greatly exacerbated during the COVID pandemic.

Objective 1.1.2. The rehabilitation rate has averaged 44% for the past three years and has not met the former federal standard of 55.8% since PY 2014, the year when WIOA was enacted. Although the Division considers employment rate at case closure a meaningful measure of program success, the emphasis has been on the provision of quality services that help individuals leave the VR program with increased work opportunities, even if their case closes without an employment outcome. This is evidenced in the post-exit employment rate where, in PY 2018, 62% of exiters were employed in the second post-exit quarter, which declined to 44% in PY 20 due to the COVID pandemic. The VR program will continue help individuals increase their ability to find or maintain work post-exit and will evaluate the employment rate at the second and fourth post-exit quarter.

Objective 1.2.1. An increasing proportion of individuals exiting in employment have significant or most significant disabilities, from 89% in PY 2018 to 92% in PY 2020. This trend may be due in some part to historically low unemployment rates that provide increased opportunities for individuals whose disabilities are not significant impediments to employment. The VR program has expanded its contracts with community rehabilitation programs to provide services targeted to individuals with significant or most significant disabilities, including brain injury support services, community-based work adjustment, and individual placement and supports.

Objective 1.3.1. The VR program has yet to meet the former federal standard having VR exiters in competitive integrated employment earn at least 52% the state average hourly wage. The ratio for each of the past three years increased from 40% to 43%. The average hourly wage was $10.25 for VR exiters and $25.94 for the state in PY 2018. This increased in PY 2020 to $11.10 for VR exiters while decreasing to $25.84 for the state.

Objective 1.3.2. Although the VR program exceeded the former federal standard of 53% in each of the three past fiscal years for 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, the objective of at least 65% by 2019 was not achieved. In PY 2020, 2,351 (75%) of the 3,153 exiters with an employment outcome had their own income as their primary source of support and 472 (15%) were retention cases where the individual was employed at the time of application with their own earnings as their primary source. The 60% who were not retention cases increased self-sufficiency at the time of case closure to where their own earning were their primary source of income.

The VR program continues in its commitment to helping individuals with disabilities maintain and advance in employment during a period of historically low unemployment. Although the VR program is serving a larger proportion of individuals with significant or most significant

disabilities who depend on public assistance and family and friends for support, it maintains its commitment to helping such individuals work towards increasing their economic independence. The NC Division of VR Services has expanded its contracts with community rehabilitation programs for training and job supports. Placements through community rehabilitation programs account for approximately half of the VR clients who exited in employment. There has also been an added emphasis on the provision of vocational counseling and guidance, benefits counseling, rehabilitation services, and matching employers' workforce needs with the skillsets of VR consumers. The VR program has increased placements for on-the-job training and internships and expanded brain injury support services, community-based work adjustment, and individual placement and support (IPS) services. Other strategies employed to improve performance are summarized in more detail in the strategies section of the Unified State Plan.

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.

| Measurable Objectives for Goal 2.1 | PY 18 | PY 19 | PY 20 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 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. | 2,171 | 1,906 | 1,427 |
| 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 to 52%. | 43% | 42% | 39% |

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.

| Measurable Objectives for Goal 2.2 | PY 18 | PY 19 | PY 20 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 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. | 2,260 | 2,030 | 1,547 |
| Objective 2.2.2. Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program after | 49% | 47% | 44% |

| Measurable Objectives for Goal 2.2 | PY 18 | PY 19 | PY 20 |
|---|---|---|---|
| receiving services under and individualized plan for employment to 50%. | | | |

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.

| Measurable Objectives for Goal 2.3 | PY 18 | PY 19 | PY 20 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 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. | 2,439 | 2,201 | 1,634 |
| 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 to 55.8%. | 44% | 45% | 43% |

Goal 2.4. Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities who are ex-offenders exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

| Measurable Objectives for Goal 2.4 | PY 18 | PY 19 | PY 20 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Objective 2.4.1. The total number of individuals with disabilities who are ex-offenders exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year. | 1,431 | 1,188 | 835 |
| Objective 2.4.2. Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities who are ex-offenders exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment to 52%. | 40% | 39% | 36% |

**Performance Assessment**

Objectives for Goal 2.1: In PY 2020, individuals with mental illness and/or substance abuse disorders as either their primary, secondary, or other impediment to employment accounted for 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.

Objectives for Goal 2.2: Individuals with most significant disabilities have comprised an increasing proportion of the employment outcomes to 49% in PY 2020. Nearly 90% of these exiters are individuals with a cognitive or psychosocial disability. Over half are individuals of minority backgrounds, and 39% are transition-age youth at the time of exit. 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.

Objectives for Goal 2.3: For PY 2020, individuals of minority backgrounds accounted 52% of all employment outcomes. Success in this area is largely attributed to outreach in underserved areas and the application of a financial needs test for certain direct cost services. This allows the Division to provide these services to individuals, often of minority backgrounds who can least afford them.

Objectives for Goal 2.4: For PY 2020, 26% of individuals exiting the VR program in competitive integrated employment were ex-offenders. Individuals with arrest records and misdemeanor convictions account for about two-thirds of this population. Convicted felons accounted for about 10% of all employment outcomes. Success in this area is attributed to job placement and job search assistance, employer engagement, and partnerships with corrections agencies in transitioning such individuals on parole and probation into the workforce.

Priority 3: Increase Client Satisfaction

Goal 3. Increase client satisfaction with the VR program, their counselor, and other staff.

| Measurable Objectives for Goal 3 | **PY 18** | **PY 19** | **PY 20** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Objective 3.1. Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied that they were treated by VR staff with courtesy and respect. | 96% | 96% | 96% |
| Objective 3.2. Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied with the help they received from VR to decide on job choices. | 86% | 82% | 80% |
| Objective 3.3. Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied with VR identifying their service needs towards becoming employed. | 90% | 88% | 88% |
| Objective 3.4. Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied with the time it took to develop their | 88% | 88% | 86% |

| Measurable Objectives for Goal 3 | **PY 18** | **PY 19** | **PY 20** |
|---|---|---|---|
| individualized plan for employment. | | | |
| Objective 3.5. Increase the percent of clients who are, overall, satisfied with their experience with the VR program. | 88% | 87% | 86% |

**Performance Assessment**

For PY 2020, the percentages on the measures of customer satisfaction were 80% or above for all measures with overall satisfaction with the VR program at 86%. Approximately 96% of VR consumers were satisfied they were treated with courtesy and respect by program staff and from 86% to 88% were satisfied with staff identifying their vocational rehabilitation needs, the timeliness of their eligibility determination, and the development of their individualized plan for employment. During the COVID pandemic, VR offices remained open as staff adjusted practices for safety while maintaining high standards of customer service.

B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Regarding the objectives based on increases in the raw number of exiters with employment outcomes (i.e., Objectives 1.1.1., 2.1.1., 2.2.1., 2.3.1., and 2.4.1.), there has been decrease in DVRS applications and a smaller overall total caseload. This downward trend, which precedes WIOA, has been greatly exacerbated during the COVID pandemic. Applications declined year-over-year from 17,776 in PY 2018 to 11,045 in PY 2020, a decrease of 38%.

The challenges in meeting the objectives on increasing the rehabilitation rate for exiters, overall, and for specific populations (i.e., Objectives 1.1.2., 2.1.2., 2.2.2., 2.3.2., and 2.4.2.) include a high number of case closures due to the COVID pandemic where VR consumers dropped out of their program. During during the pandemic, especially during mandatory lockdown periods, many providers of VR purchased services had delays or cancellations. And many VR consumers had changed their personal priorities and no longer wished to continue with VR services or seek employment at that time.

Regarding Objective 1.3.1., to increase average hourly earnings for individuals who exit DVRS in competitive employment to 52% the state average, the challenges include differences in the populations. About a third of VR exiters with employment outcomes are transition age youth who most typically exit the DVRS in entry-level jobs. Nearly a fifth of exiters are individuals with the most significant disabilities who receive long-term vocational supports and have earnings that are closer to minimum wage. Additionally, nearly a third of exiters with employment outcomes are ex-offenders, including 10% that are convicted felons whose opportunities for higher wage employment may be limited by their offender status. DVRS will continue to sponsor and promote training for credential attainment and measurable skill gains and provide job search and placement assistances to help individuals with disabilities obtain and advance in higher paying jobs. However, it is important to note that wages among VR consumers have increased steadily and for PY 2020 were above $11/hour.

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

DVRS did not establish goals specific to the Title VI, Part B funds for the PY 2018 Unified State Plan update because, at the time the plan was submitted, North Carolina had not received any funds for FFY 2018 under Section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services. Although funds were delayed, the VR program since received $531,000 for FY 2018 and has since received from $525,000 to $536,000 each fiscal year since. The Title IV, Part B funds are integrated with funding from the Title I Basic Support grant and state matching funds to purchase an average of $6 million in supported employment services for over 1,500 individuals, not including assessment services. Each year, more than 800 individuals exit DVRS in competitive integrated employment with supports, which accounts for about 20% of all employment outcomes.

B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Individuals exiting DVRS in competitive integrated employments with supports accounted for nearly a fifth of the total employment outcomes in PY 2021. This success is largely attributed to an emphasis on serving individuals with the most significant disabilities and the expansion of community rehabilitation program services. However, one of the key challenges is in the implementation of the Individual Placement and Supports (IPS) model of supported employment. DVRS has made substantial progress in identifying individuals that would benefit from IPS and in working collaboratively with state and local partner agencies, as described in Section (f) of the General VR Portion of the Unified Plan.

3. THE VR PROGRAM'S PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

| | PY 2018 | PY 2019 | PY 2020 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Employment Rate 2nd Quarter after Exit | 61.6% | 44.8% | 45.0% |
| Median Earnings 2nd Quarter after Exit | $2,845 | $2,763 | $2,857 |
| Employment Rate 4th Quarter after Exit | N/A | 35.6% | 34.0% |
| Measurable Skills Gain Rate | 35.4% | 36.0% | 29.9% |
| Credential Attainment Rate | N/A | 20.9% | 26.2% |

4. HOW THE FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION (I&E) ACTIVITIES WERE UTILIZED

Innovation and expansion funds were applied towards infrastructure and cost-sharing for NCWorks Career Centers. The total amount from DVRS was allotted to the Workforce Development Boards based on the cost of services that can be allocated to DVRS clients served under an individualized plan for employment by the Title I and Title III programs. The infrastructure and cost-sharing agreement contributed to the support of the NCWorks Career Centers for the delivery of staff-assisted and independently accessed services, such as through NCWorks Online. Innovation and expansion funds were also applied in support of the NCCareers.org information portal, a collaborative across North Carolina's workforce and education programs to provide career and labor market information and tools to individuals as well as content specific to agencies and programs.

## Q. QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

### 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

DVRS in cooperation with the DMHDDSAS provided grant funding in 1985 to 6 service providers in North Carolina to implement supported employment services. In 1986, DVRS 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, DVRS' effort has grown to a statewide system of approximately 118 supported employment programs. An average of about 3,000 individuals receive supported employment services each year with more than half achieving 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. These services may be provided only to youth who are provided extended services by the VR agency and who have not exited the program.

### 2. THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES

Under federal regulations, the time-limited DVRS supported employment services to be provided are not to exceed 24 months funding unless the individualized plan for employment indicates that more than 24 months of services is necessary in order for the individual to achieve job stability prior to transition to extended services. The transition process from VR 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 VR services provided by the

Division and continues until the stabilization phase is completed (as per agreement between client and counselor) and the long-term support provider begins providing extended services.

Ongoing support provided during extended services must include a minimum of twice-monthly monitoring at the work site to assess job stability unless under special circumstances, especially at the request of the individual, the IPE provides for off-site monitoring and based upon that assessment, the coordination or provision of specific services at or away from the work site, that are needed to maintain employment stability. If off-site monitoring is determined to be appropriate, it must, at a minimum, consist of two face-to-face meetings with the client and one employer contact monthly. These activities apply to all supported employment clients and not only those whose services are provided through funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities.

DVRS will only contract with supported employment service providers that give written commitment that they will provide extended services compliant with Federal regulations. The provision of extended services to youth for a period not to exceed 4 years or until such time that the youth reaches the age of 25 is considered in the DVRS contract with supported employment providers. In no instance would DVRS establish a contractual relationship with a supported employment vendor who did not agree to the provision of sufficient extended services to youth throughout the lifetime of an individual's job. In accordance with § 363.4(a) and 34 CFR 361.5(c)(19)(v), DVRS will arrange to provide extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, if no other provider of extended services is identified.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL) CERTIFICATIONS

1. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE,) IS AUTHORIZED TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 (REHABILITATION ACT), AS AMENDED BY WIOA[14], AND ITS SUPPLEMENT UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT[15];

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

2. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES, THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY)[16] AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[17] , THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[18] , POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER SECTION 111 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services

3. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[19] , THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND

ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[20] , POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER TITLE VI ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

4. THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND/OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE REGARDING THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

5. THE STATE LEGALLY MAY CARRY OUT EACH PROVISION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

6. ALL PROVISIONS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT ARE CONSISTENT WITH STATE LAW.

7. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO RECEIVE, HOLD, AND DISBURSE FEDERAL FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Kathie B. Trotter

8. THE (ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND THE SUPPLEMENT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Director, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

9. THE AGENCY THAT SUBMITS THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT HAS ADOPTED OR OTHERWISE FORMALLY APPROVED THE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

FOOTNOTES

CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

| | |
|---|---|
| Signatory information | Director, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services |
| Name of Signatory | Kathie B. Trotter |
| Title of Signatory | Director, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services |
| Date Signed | February 27, 2020 |

ASSURANCES

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| 1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for | |

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. | |
| 2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140. | |
| 3. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: | |
| 3.a. The establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 3.b. The establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable (A or B must be selected): | |
| 3.b.(A) “is an independent State commission” (Yes/No) | No |
| 3.b.(B) “has established a State Rehabilitation Council” (Yes/No) | Yes |
| 3.c. Consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 3.d. The financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3) | |
| 3.e. The local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in | No |

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds (Yes/No) | |
| 3.f. The shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs (Yes/No) | No |
| 3.g. Statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? (Yes/No) See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan | No |
| 3.h. The descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 3.i. All required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 3.j. The requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 3.k. The compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 3.l. The reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities | |
| 3.m. The submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act | |

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| 4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will: | |
| 4.a. Comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4.b. Impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4.c. Provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (Yes/No) | Yes |
| 4.d. Determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4.e. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4.g. Provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4.h. Comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by section 101(a)(14)of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4.i. Meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State | |

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs | |
| 4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State, | |
| 4.j.i. Has developed and will implement, | |
| 4.j.i.I. Strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and | |
| 4.j.i.II. Strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and | |
| 4.j.ii. Has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25)) | |
| 5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement: | |
| 5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 5.c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act | |
| 6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program: | |
| 6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less | |

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 7. Provision of Supported Employment Services: | Yes |
| 7.a. The Designated State Agency Assures That it Will Provide Supported Employment Services as Defined in Section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 7.b. The designated State agency assures that: | |
| 7.b.i. The comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 7.b.ii. An individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act | |

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

| Performance Indicators | PY 2022 Expected Level | PY 2022 Negotiated Level | PY 2023 Expected Level | PY 2023 Negotiated Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employment (Second Quarter | 46.2% | 46.2% | 46.2% | 48.2% |

| Performance Indicators | PY 2022 Expected Level | PY 2022 Negotiated Level | PY 2023 Expected Level | PY 2023 Negotiated Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| After Exit) | | | | |
| Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit) | 35.5% | 36.0% | 35.5% | 38.0% |
| Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit) | $2,983 | $2,984 | $2,983 | $3,043 |
| Credential Attainment Rate | 26.4% | 27.0% | 26.4% | 28.0% |
| Measurable Skill Gains | 45.0% | 38.0% | 45.0% | 39.0% |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] |

*1*

*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

## PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (BLIND)

### A. INPUT OF STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

#### 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;

The NC Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) partners with the DSB State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) to develop and improve services for North Carolinians who are blind, visually impaired or deafblind. SRC members provided input regarding DSB's vocational rehabilitation program's development and revision of rules, policies and procedures; recommended goals and priorities; review and analysis of the consumer satisfaction report; comprehensive statewide needs assessment planning and the 2020 modification to the VR portion of the Unified State Plan. The goals and priorities in section (l) of the 2020-2023 plan were also developed in consultation with the DSB State Rehabilitation Council. Input was provided through calls and meetings with the Division's director and SRC chair and during quarterly meetings with the full council.

In PY 2019, the SRC made recommendations on the following:

Recommendation 1: Approve an updated definition of a current eye report in relation to eligibility and service provision. The update further clarified distinctions between what is needed for eligibility and service provision.

Recommendation 2: Approve an updated DSB Career and Training Center policy on eligibility for the SAVVY programs Youth in Transition and World of Work which were changed to be more inclusive of individuals with secondary disabilities and the description of nursing services was changed to wellness services.

Recommendation 3: Approve a new policy on Assistive Technology Instructor Vendors. The new policy was developed to expand available service options within a framework of consistent screening criteria for potential vendors and payment for approved vendors.

In PY 2020:

The SRC was informed of interim policy updates related to the pandemic which had to be quickly developed and constantly revised as needed. Their input was invited during this time of unprecedented and rapidly changing circumstances.

Recommendation 1: Upon reviewing data on outreach efforts, a contrast in numbers of efforts in different parts of the state was noted by the SRC. Therefore, the Division was directed to employ in strategies to engage underperforming parts of the state.

Recommendation 2: The SRC directed the Division to hold public forums the day before SRC meetings are held.

Highlights from the FFY 2021 survey results are below:

- Are you satisfied with your VR counselor and other VR program staff in terms of:
    - Treating you with courtesy and respect ……..…96%
    - The time it took to determine your eligibility for VR ……..91%
    - Timeliness of VR services provided under your plan for employment,
    - including job development and placement …….…….....91%
- Overall, are you satisfied with your experience with the VR program…….....86%
- Helping you decide on job choices ……..…77%
- Helping you find a job ……..…86%

Survey Information: The Division of Services for the Blind contracts with NC State University to complete the data collection for the consumer satisfaction survey for sixty consumers per quarter whose case has been become inactive. The prescribed questions are provided to the contractor who makes no less than six attempts to reach the consumer by telephone to conduct the satisfaction survey. The contractor provides an Excel spreadsheet of the raw data including un-coded text fields organized by the consumers' NC DSB ID number. A sample disposition of the following is provided:

- Number of consumers contacted
- Number of inaccurate phone numbers
- Number of no answers
- Number of consumers who refused an interview

An analysis of the data and report is completed by the NC DVRS Planning and Evaluation Unit that also supports the NC Division of Services for the Blind.

2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS; AND

**PY 2019 Recommendations and Agency Response:**

Recommendation 1: Continue the practice of holding SRC meetings in locations across the state to help facilitate listening forums with consumers and other stakeholders to obtain feedback regarding unmet needs and the effectiveness of and satisfaction with VR services.

Agency response: DSB agrees with and supports this recommendation. Recent SRC quarterly meetings were held in Charlotte, NC March 2019 and in Wilmington, NC June 2019 during which the SRC hosted and facilitated stakeholder engagement and listening forums.

Recommendation 2: Develop informative, educational materials with a unique, branded symbol specific to the Division of Services for the Blind for outreach to current and potential recipients of services, employers, referral sources and community partners.

Agency response: DSB agrees with and supports this recommendation. The branded symbol and a brochure have been created.

Recommendation 3: Change the name of DSB's center to better reflect the nature of the services provided and remove the medical model stigma of being referred to as the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind.

Agency response: DSB agrees with and supports this recommendation. This change was completed in April 2019.

Recommendation 4: Enhance assistive technology services and support for consumers.

Agency response: DSB agrees with this recommendation and has drafted the policy and procedures.

**PY 2020 Recommendations and agency response:**

Recommendation 1: Upon reviewing data on outreach efforts, a contrast in numbers of efforts in different parts of the state was noted by the SRC. Therefore, the Division was directed to employ in strategies to engage underperforming parts of the state.

Agency response: the Division held interactive training sessions on outreach which provided clarification on what qualifies as outreach as well as the staff reporting process in order to capture accomplishments. Five sessions were held via MS Teams which were scheduled regionally. Participants were also given an opportunity to participate in small, breakout rooms in order to brainstorm ways to engage in remote outreach efforts. Ideas were then shared with the full group. Reporting for the quarter following these efforts reflected an increase in outreach efforts across the state.

Recommendation 2: The SRC recommended for the Division to jointly hold public forums the day before SRC meetings.

Agency response: In June 2021, the first public forum was held via Zoom. Individuals were also able to participate by phone. American Sign Language interpreters were available. The event was well attended with strong participation from the public. Additional public forums were planned for PY 21.

3. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S EXPLANATIONS FOR REJECTING ANY OF THE COUNCIL'S INPUT OR RECOMMENDATIONS.

DSB did not reject any of the Council's input or recommendations.

B. REQUEST FOR WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS

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;

This requirement will not apply to the North Carolina VR Programs for the program years covered under the State Unified Plan.

2. THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL APPROVE EACH PROPOSED SERVICE BEFORE IT IS PUT INTO EFFECT; AND

This requirement will not apply to the North Carolina VR Programs for the program years covered under the State Unified Plan.

3. REQUIREMENTS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN WILL APPLY TO THE SERVICES APPROVED UNDER THE WAIVER.

This requirement will not apply to the North Carolina VR Programs for the program years covered under the State Unified Plan, as no waiver is requested.

C. COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS WITH AGENCIES NOT CARRYING OUT ACTIVITIES UNDER THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

1. FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL AGENCIES AND PROGRAMS;

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 deafblind citizens of North Carolina receive the most comprehensive and beneficial services and supports available to facilitate their vocational and independent living goals. DSB has a cooperative agreement with the 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.

Additionally, DSB has cooperative agreements that establish policies and procedures for information sharing, referrals and service coordination with other divisions within the NC Department of Health and Human Services including but not limited to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Division of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and the Division of Social Services. DSB has established an informational sharing agreement with the Division of Medical Assistance to facilitate the use of the Medicaid Management Information System for North Carolina to ensure all approved medical cost services provided by the division are at the appropriate pricing tiers. A cooperative agreement has also been established with the Social Security Administration to facilitate the receipt of Social Security benefits information for VR program applicants and participants.

Cooperative agreements have been established with the Eastern Band of Cherokee and Lumbee Tribal VR Programs in NC. The agreements specify how DSB and the Tribal VR Programs will jointly serve eligible individuals who have a disability of vision impairment or deafblindness to provide efficient and effective vocational rehabilitation services; to ensure that Tribal members with disabilities eligible for vocational rehabilitation services are offered informed choice of

program, services and service providers; to provide guidelines for information sharing when concurrent services are being provided; to facilitate cultural awareness and improve professional skills among staff; and to establish the working relationship between the Tribal VR Programs and DSB so that the individual programs and their consumers benefit from shared expertise, training, professional collaboration and the enhanced capabilities that will grow from this relationship. Additionally, the program directors for the Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs rotate membership on the SRC.

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, Consumer Advocacy and Advisory Committee, North Carolina Conference on Visual Impairment and Blindness (NCCVIB) and Envisioning Youth Empowerment (EYE). 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. As a PY 2020 update to the Plan, the SILC only has one DSU which is the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. DSB has a representative who participates in meetings and is involved in the development of the SPIL.

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.

2. STATE PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998;

The North Carolina Assistive Technology Program (NCATP) is a state and federally funded program that provides assistive technology services statewide to people of all ages and abilities. NCATP leads North Carolina's efforts to carry out the federal Assistive Technology Act of 2004 by providing device demonstration, short-term device loans, and reutilization of assistive technology. NCATP has nineteen staff serving the state of North Carolina, which includes the Director, AT Information/ Referral /Funding Specialist, Intake Coordinator, Inventory Specialist, 1 AT Re-use Special Projects Assistant, 4 Speech Language Pathologists (SLP) and 8 Assistive Technology Consultants. The 8 AT Consultants and 4 SLPs provide direct one-on-one services in the Assistive Technology Centers.

DSB collaborates with the NC Assistive Technology Program in joint planning, training and service provision to make best use of all rehabilitation technology resources available internal

and external to the NC Department of Health and Human Services. NCATP services are arranged for and provided to DSB consumers as needed. DSB also partners with NCATP as a sponsor of the Assistive Technology Expo that is held by NCATP annually.

### 3. PROGRAMS CARRIED OUT BY THE UNDER SECRETARY FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE;

While DSB does not currently have a formal cooperative agreement with the Department of Agriculture,we provide consultative services for the statewide AgrAbility Program and inform consumers of the program's availability and its resources and will provide consumers with assistance in accessing the services when desired.

### 4. NON-EDUCATIONAL AGENCIES SERVING OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH; AND

DSB will continue our efforts to expand our partnerships with noneducational agencies such as the CILs to serve out-of-school youth in addition to the other populations the organizations mutually serve. Consumers are referred by and to each entity and relevant information is shared. CILs allow 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.

DSB staff presently work with the CILs to coordinate services for specific individuals and also to address areas of broader systemic impact such as community education, disability awareness, and outreach services to various disability groups, including out-of-school youth.

### 5. STATE USE CONTRACTING PROGRAMS.

At this time, DSB does not directly engage in a formally established state use contracting program, where commodities or services determined to be of use to state agencies are purchased from community-based rehabilitation programs employing and training individuals with significant disabilities. State agencies are required to purchase commodities and services from state term contractors when available. Community-based rehabilitation programs employing and training individuals with significant disabilities can apply to the State of NC to become state term contract vendors which will enable DSB to utilize them for this purpose as needed.

## D. COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS

### 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

DSB’s policy 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. The policy establishes that the coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student’s needs, considering the student’s preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. Transition services are provided by the DSB program to students beginning at age 14.

DSB provides pre-employment transition services/activities (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities who are in educational settings and are 14-21 years of age that may be clients or potential clients of the agency. DSB policy states that pre-employment transition services provided to students must be followed up by appropriate documentation of the services rendered. DSB offers a wide variety of services to students with visual impairments or blindness in transition to the world of work. DSB offers a wide variety of services to students with visual impairments or blindness in transition to the world of work. Each eligible student served by the DSB VR program must have an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that is jointly developed with students/parents and a vocational rehabilitation counselor. The IPE must be developed and approved within 90 days after the student has been found eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

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;

A formal cooperative agreement exists with the NC Department of Public Instruction, which consists of 115 local education agencies (LEAs), 128 charter schools, 1 regional school and 2 education entities. The purpose of the agreement is to facilitate and coordinate the delivery of pre-employment transition services and other transition services as defined by WIOA and IDEA for students who are visually impaired, blind, or deafblind being served by LEAs and the schools who are of transition age (14 to 21) and who need VR services to become employed. The agreement identifies the duties and responsibilities of DSB and the LEAs and encourages local LEAs and schools to develop working relationships with vocational rehabilitation staff who cover their corresponding areas. Our mutual responsibilities include collaboration in the provision of pre-employment transition services, dispute resolution and the provision of:

- consultation and technical assistance (services, accommodations and assistive technology, requirements in Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act, etc.);
- joint educational/training opportunities;
- policy and practice alignment where possible;
- transition planning; and
- referral and outreach activities.

Additionally, DSB has separate agreements with nine LEAs and one regional school across the state. These agreements designate cost sharing of transition staff positions (vocational 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, Guilford County, New Hanover County, Onslow County, Pender County, Wake County Schools, Winston-Salem-Forsyth County Schools, and the Governor Morehead School for the Blind. While DSB's goal is that all eligible students will be served by specialized transition counselors through formal cooperative agreements with the schools, DPI and local LEA budgetary constraints have prevented expansion of cost sharing for transition positions and unfortunately, funding limitation in recent years caused school systems to terminate agreements.

Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;

Roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;

The Exceptional Children Division of the Department Public Instruction (DPI) and the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) have the primary responsibilities to ensure that the provisions set forth in the cooperative agreement are carried out. The intent of the agreement is to outline steps that will result in improved services to students with visual impairments resulting in improved educational opportunities, increased employment opportunities, and greater independence.

Formal cooperative agreements currently exist between some LEAs and the DSB to provide rehabilitation services, and particularly transition services, through specialized vocational rehabilitation counselors and business service representatives/community employment specialists. In other areas, the needs of students are addressed by the rehabilitation counselors who primarily serve adults in that geographic area. Cooperation between these two entities is essential to ensure compliance with state and federal laws and regulations, to minimize duplication of effort, and to maximize efficient use of the entities' resources to help individuals with visual impairments complete their education and become employed.

Cooperative agreements developed between the DSB and LEAs should enable students with visual impairments to access rehabilitation services that had not previously been available or readily available to them from the LEA. Transition services provided under rehabilitation plans must not be services normally provided by the LEAs and determined necessary for the provision of a free and appropriate public education if they were not applicants or consumers of the state agency.

The terms of the DPI/DSB cooperative agreement include the following:

1. Consultation and technical assistance

DSB will provide consultation and technical assistance services through its state and local staff. DSB staff members will assist DPI and LEAs serving students with disabilities in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including pre--employment transition services and other vocational rehabilitation services. As such:

1.

    a. Consultation and technical assistance may be provided through in -person meetings or through other means, such as conference calls, webinars, or video conferences.

    b. DSB will provide educational and training opportunities to DPI staff to ensure understanding of pre-employment transition services and other transition services and the roles and responsibilities of DSB, DPI and the LEAs in the provision of those services.

    c. DSB and DPI will provide joint educational and training opportunities to LEAs, including teachers and administrators, to ensure they are informed of their roles and responsibilities under both IDEA and WIOA. Educational and training opportunities will include providing technical assistance on an as-needed basis.

    d. DSB and DPI shall meet annually to address systems, policy, practice and funding issues that facilitate or negatively impact the transition of students with disabilities from school to work or post-secondary education.

e. DSB and DPI shall, to the extent feasible, align policy and practices at the state and local level to facilitate the seamless transition of students with disabilities from school to work or post-secondary education.

f. DSB and DPI shall designate individuals to represent the agencies and act as liaisons to facilitate the joint efforts of the two agencies.

g. DSB and DPI designated liaisons, when requested by local s ta ff, shall provide consultation on determining responsibility in instances where services required by a student may be both a special education or related service under IDEA or a VR service under WIOA.

h. DPI shall provide technical assistance to local education agencies to assure access for students with disabilities in appropriate Career and Technical Education Programs based on recommendations of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team.

2. Transition Planning

The parties shall engage in systems-level transition planning for students with disabilities to facilitate the development and implementation of the individualized education programs under 614(d) of the IDEA. The parties acknowledge that while student- level transition planning is the responsibility of staff under the employ and authority of DVRS and DSB, transition planning at the student-level may only be promoted by DPI through policy-making, consultation, professional development, and technical assistance to LEAs. Furthermore, the parties acknowledge that the framework for student-level transition planning shall be outlined in local third-party agreements. As such:

1. DSB and DPI agree to cooperate and work jointly in providing/promoting transition planning for students with disabilities.

2. DSB and DPI shall assist LEAs in planning for/promoting the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including pre-employment transition services.

3. DSB and DPI agree to work collaboratively to promote/assist students with disabilities in the development and completion of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) required under the IDEA and the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) required under WIOA.

4. DSB will coordinate with the LEAs on the development of students' IEPs and IPEs through third-party agreements. DPI shall promote and support the development of such agreements.

5. DSB and DPI shall communicate/encourage communication regarding students' IEP and IPE goals and needed transition services as soon as possible after the IEP and IPE are developed.

6. DSB and DPI shall foster innovation in transition program design and service delivery strategies between the local DVRS and DSB offices and the LEAs.

7. DSB and DPI shall support local involvement in the planning and activities of area workforce boards as well as partnerships with local employers to promote programs and services for students and youth with disabilities.

8. DSB and DPI shall provide consultation to assure access to and programming for students with disabilities in career and technical education, work-based learning, career assessment, career decision-making training, and career counseling as determined by the local transition planning teams.

1. Pre-Employment Transition Services:

    a. Section 113(a)(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, as well as final §361.48(a)(2), requires DSB, in collaboration with the LEAs, to provide or arrange for the provision of pre-employment transition services required activities. DSB shall make these services available to all students with disabilities who need them.

    b. DPI will support and facilitate collaboration between DSB and the LEAs in providing any or all the following five pre-employment transition services required activities to students with disabilities:

1. Instruction in self-advocacy and peer mentoring
2. Work based learning experiences
3. Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary educational programs at institutions of higher education
4. Workplace readiness training
5. Job exploration counseling

B. TRANSITION PLANNING BY PERSONNEL OF THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND EDUCATIONAL AGENCY THAT FACILITATES THE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THEIR INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS;

The interagency agreement between DSB and the state educational agency establishes a collaborative approach to transition planning for students with disabilities. DSB counselors and responsible state educational agency staff consult to ensure that the transitional elements of the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) are incorporated in the student's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). DSB counselors make every effort to participate with the students, parents and state educational agency staff in planning meetings pertaining to IEP development. Transition programs, services and resources available through the VR program is shared to enable the student to make inform choices regarding their VR program and to ensure relevant services and supports from the IEP are considered and included and the IPE is reviewed on an annual basis at a minimum.

C. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, INCLUDING FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OF EACH AGENCY, INCLUDING PROVISIONS FOR DETERMINING STATE LEAD AGENCIES AND QUALIFIED PERSONNEL RESPONSIBLE FOR TRANSITION SERVICES;

1. Roles and Responsibilities

    a. DSB shall administer all aspects of the state vocational rehabilitation program 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 le benefits.

    b. DPI shall assist LEAs in the planning, development, and implementation of transition services to students with disabilities to become college, career, and community ready.

DSB shall assume responsibility, within the limit at ion of resources, for the cost of services included in the student's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), according to the established DHHS policies and fee schedule.

DSB shall report annually the total amount of stat e-appropriated monies expended for rehabilitation services for students with disabilities. The report should be made available annually to DPI within 60 days of the end of the state fiscal year.

DPI shall provide access to annual report data on students served through CTED and ECO.

DPI shall support the sharing of diagnostic information of students with disabilities for the purpose of accessing vocational rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services, so long as sharing is in compliance with the requirements of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act and other legal requirements relating to student privacy rights.

DPI shall support practices for LEAs to secure psychological, vocational, and educational assessments, according to state and local policies, for students suspected of needing assessments.

Coordination responsibilities of each agency that promote the coordination, timely and appropriate delivery of transition services (IDEA).

The parties will use the various community media to promote public information and understanding of each program and its various functions.

The parties will promote a system to ensure that appropriate referrals are made with consent of parent/guardian or majority age student to each party.

The parties will emphasize the maximum utilization of comparable benefits defined, as services that are provided or paid for, in whole or in part, by other federal, state, or local public resources, which are available to the student.

Criteria related to subminimum wage requirements in Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act.

DPI shall provide consultation to DSB on the development and implementation of documentation processes used by DSB and the LEA to carry out requirements under Section 511.

DPI and DSB shall provide consultation and training to LEAs and local DVRS and DSB staff on means for documenting completion of the actions described in 34 CFR 397.20 and 34 CFR 397.30 and processes for transmitting documentation consistent with confidentiality requirements under the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act and IDEA.

DPI shall support, promote, and emphasize the restriction, found in 34 CFR 397.31, that prohibits state and local educational agencies from contracting with entities for the purpose of operating a program for a youth under which work is compensated at a subminimum wage.

DSB and DPI shall collaborate to inform LEA and local DVRS and DSB staff of the requirement to provide youth with disabilities, aged 14-24, who are known to be seeking sub-minimum wage employment pre-employment transition services and/or IDEA transition services and referral to the VR program.

Procedures for resolving interagency disputes including procedures for LEAs to initiate the process to receive reimbursement or regarding implementation of the agreement. (IDEA)

The parties will utilize best efforts to resolve any dispute that may arise in the provision of services outlined in this agreement and will collaborate to achieve the best possible outcome for students with disabilities.

When there are real or perceived overlaps in the responsibilities for special education or other related services under IDEA and VR services under the Rehab Act, DSB and DPI shall support and advise local staff in considering the following factors to determine the responsible party:

whether the service is customary to the party from whom the service is requested (if customary, the party should provide);

the primary objective of the service/support (educational or vocational);

the impacts of delaying service provision;

agency-specific policies or limitations around the provision of the service (e.g., maximum purchase rates, selection of providers);

eligibility of student under part B of IDEA;

length of time to exit from school in terms of ongoing need for and replacement frequency of service or equipment (e.g., if equipment is needed, will the lifespan of the equipment be contained to the student's time within the secondary educational setting or extend to the transition from school to post-school activities?); and/or

the need for transferability of skills and practice with service/equipment to be prepared for post-school IPE participation (e.g., will the student need time to practice using equipment or receiving a specific transition service to facilitate transition to post-school services/outcome as planned on the IPE without delay or interruption? If so, this may warrant VR funding of the equipment or service.)

Data Sharing

The parties to this agreement do not anticipate the exchange of data containing personal identifying information. Information exchange shall be limited to non-confidential information or information that has been de-identified. In the event confidential information will be shared between the parties; the parties will enter into a separate data sharing agreement to cover the exchange of information.

DSB shall provide data to the Exceptional Children Division about the number of school age students served by the state VR agency, by disability, age, types of services provided and post-school employment outcome.

In its discretion, DPI shall provide appropriate data to Vocational Rehabilitation about students needing services.

DPI shall provide the framework for the collection of exit data by school systems regarding students with disabilities transitioning from school to postschool activities.

DPI shall assist local school administrative units in the planning, development, collection of data, and implementation of transition services for students with disabilities.

The terms of the DSB cooperative agreement with the separate nine LEAs and one regional school system are as follows.

The Division agrees to:

1.1 Finance the program in the same manner as other functions of the Division using state and federal matching funds, as required under Title I of the Federal Vocational Rehabilitation Act. Financing the rehabilitation program shall be on annual budget basis to insure continuity of operations. To receive federal matching funds, the Division must provide state funds equal to the State's share of planned expenditures as specified in the Federal Act.

1.2 Agrees to provide a program of vocational rehabilitation services to eligible individuals referred by the contractor and to other individuals found eligible for services.

1.3 Provide to all potentially eligible visually impaired students, between the ages of 14 to 21 years of age pre-employment transition services with the collaboration of the Contractor. pre-

employment transition services are, job exploration counseling, work-based teaming experiences, counseling on opportunities for enrollment incomprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy.

1.4 Provide to the Division staff assigned to the program effective and appropriate supervision of the vocational rehabilitation activities.

1.5 Provide administration and consultative support to the contractor in the area of its program responsibilities.

1.6 Share statistical and fiscal reports with the contractor regarding the vocational rehabilitation program, as deemed necessary to open communication and good administration practices, and that are mutually agreed upon by both parties being necessary.

1.7 Provide federal funding in the amount of 78.7 percent of the agreed-upon annual budget depending on the availability of federal funds and the program arrangements.

1.8 Provide, within the limitation of resources, case service funds necessary to the delivery of vocational rehabilitation services.

1.9 Determine, through its professional counseling staff, all decisions affecting an individual's eligibility for services and the nature and scope of rehabilitation services to be provided must be made by the Division and cannot be delegated.

1.10 Provide information deemed appropriate by the contractor regarding eligibility requirements and descriptions of rules, regulations, and policies governing the program.

1.11 Assign one rehabilitation counselor and a community employment specialist to the school system and will maintain an active caseload at all assigned schools. Rehabilitation staff will visit the assigned schools on a scheduled routine basis to receive referrals and to transact other matter necessary to effectively administer the rehabilitation program.

1.12 Contact referred students at the earliest possible time to initiate the process of providing rehabilitation services; however, prior to completing the application for vocational rehabilitation services, parent or guardian permission is required for services to minor. Appropriate feedback will be furnished to the referral source.

1.13 Use existing assessment data when appropriate. When necessary, supplementary assessments will be procured.

1.14 Complete a comprehensive evaluation 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.

1.15 Share consumer specific information with appropriate school personnel upon a duly executed Consent for Release of Confidential Information as specified in 34 CFR 361.38.

1.16 Lunsford Act. Provider also acknowledges that G.S. § 14-208.18 prohibits anyone required to register as a sex offender under Article 27A of Chapter 14 of the General Statutes from knowingly being on the premises of any school. Provider shall conduct or arrange to have conducted, at its own expense, sexual offender registry checks on each of its owners, employees, agents, service providers and independent contractors ("Service providers") who will engage in any service on or delivery of goods to school system property or at a school system sponsored event, except checks shall not be required for individuals who are solely delivering or picking up equipment, materials, or supplies at: (1) the administrative office or loading dock of a school; (2) non-school sites; (3) schools closed for renovation; or (4)school construction sites. The checks shall include at a minimum check of the State Sex Offender and Public Protection Registration Program, the State Sexually Violent Predator Registration Program, and the

National Sex Offender Registry ("the Registries"). For provider's convenience only, all of the required registry checks may be completed at no cost by accessing the United States Department of Justice Sex Offender public website at http://w\vw.nsovw.sov/. Provider shall provide certification on the Sexual Offender Registry Check Certification Form (Attachment A) that the registry checks were conducted on each of its service personnel providing services or delivering goods under this agreement prior to the commencement of such services or the delivery of such goods. Provider shall conduct a current initial check of the registries. The sex offender registry checks shall be conducted within 30 days of provider's execution of the agreement and prior to performing any services on school system property. In addition, provider agrees to conduct the registry checks and provide a supplemental certification form before any additional service providers are used to deliver goods or provide services pursuant to this agreement. Provider further agrees to conduct annual registry checks of all service providers and provide annual certifications at each anniversary date of this agreement. Provider shall not assign any individual to deliver goods or provide services pursuant to this agreement if said individual appears on any of the listed registries. Provider agrees that it will maintain all records and documents necessary to demonstrate that it has conducted a thorough check of the registries as to each service provider and agrees to provide such records and documents to the school system upon request. Provider specifically acknowledges that the school system retains the right to audit these records to ensure compliance with this section at any time in the school system's sole discretion. Failure to comply with the terms of this provision shall be deemed a material breach of the agreement.

1.17 Criminal Background Checks. Provider shall conduct criminal record and background checks on all service providers who will perform services pursuant to this agreement on school system property or at school system events. The criminal background checks shall be conducted within 30 days of provider's execution of the agreement and prior to performing any services on school system property. Provider shall provide the results of said checks to school system within five (5) business days of receipt and shall not assign any service providers to provide services under the agreement if said worker has been convicted of or pled no contest to (1) any felony; (2) any crime, whether misdemeanor or felony, involving violence, illegal drugs, theft, child abuse, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, or personal impropriety of a sexual nature with regard to any other person; or (3) any other crime or conduct reasonably indicating that the service providers poses a threat to the safety or well-being of a school system's students, personnel, or property. In addition, provider shall obtain all authorizations necessary for school system to conduct additional criminal record and background checks at its sole expense at any time during the term of this agreement. If school system chooses to exercise this right, provider shall, within five (5) business days of a school system's request, provide the full name, date of birth, and state of residency for the past 10 years for all service providers providing services under the agreement, along with any other information reasonably requested by school system for purposes of performing criminal record and background checks. Without modifying or waiving any of a provider's obligations under this provision, the school system reserves the right to prohibit any service providers from providing services under this agreement if the school system determines, in its sole discretion, that said service providers have not undergone a criminal record and background check in accordance with this provision or if the results of such criminal record and background check reasonably indicate that the said service providers may pose a threat to the safety or well-being of students, school personnel, or others.

The contractor agrees to:

2.1 Contribute annually a specified sum as the state's share of matching funds which reflect the amount of participation toward providing a program of service. Any contribution of funds shall be made available for expenditure at the sole discretion of the Division. 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 DHHS/DVRS and DSB. The

Divisions will maintain such 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. The specific items of each annual budget will be determined jointly and agreed to by the parties prior to the beginning of each fiscal year. The contribution of an invoice by the Division to the contractor will contribute to the Division an annual cash amount of X percent of the school systems total share of the agreed upon annual budget. The local percent match funds are to consist totally of non-federal funds which have not or will not be used to match federal funds other than Federal Vocational Rehabilitation funds used in this program.

2.2 The contractor shall provide adequate office space that is accessible to staff and individuals with disabilities, private for individual counseling, and environmentally comfortable, with conditions that are conducive to confidentiality and counseling. Any and all equipment purchased under this memorandum of agreement will remain the property of the Division.

2.3 Provide maintenance of assigned accommodations, appropriate utilities, and basic telephone services.

2.4 Provide all individuals determined eligible for vocational rehabilitation services with these services that are its legal and traditional responsibility without cost to the Division.

2.5 Assist in securing and sharing diagnostic information of mutual clientele for the purpose of vocational rehabilitation services and will provide, as appropriate, psychological, vocational, and educational assessments for students suspected of needing assessments so long as sharing is in compliance with the requirements of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act and other legal requirements relating to student privacy rights.

2.6 Develop, in cooperation with the Division, a system to ensure that appropriate referrals are obtained by the Division.

## D. PROCEDURES FOR OUTREACH TO AND IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WHO NEED TRANSITION SERVICES.

The DPI/DSB cooperative agreement includes procedures for *Outreach and Identification of Students with Disabilities* as follows:

DPI shall in form LEAs of services available from DSB and promote referrals for students with disabilities who may or may not be receiving special education and are in need of pre-employment transition services and/or YR transition services, including the development of an IPE.

The determination of eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services is the sole responsibility of DSB and cannot be delegated. DSB shall review the required documentation of students with disabilities who have been referred by the LEA to determine eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services. The student must require vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for, secure, retain, regain, or advance in employment.

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. DSB VR counselors participate in school systems' transition fairs as invited in order to meet potentially eligible students and to educate schools, students and parents on DSB services.

DSB has hired and trained pre-employment transition services associates who are equipped to target potentially eligible students ages 14-21 years of age that may require pre-employment transition services. They are instructed to contact parents and teachers to assess need and desire for services, provide pre-employment transition services directly and document all

activities regarding service provision. If desired, this position can also refer students to a VR counselor so that they can then apply for a full program of VR services leading to competitive integrated employment. There are seven pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) associates positions statewide.

DSB reaches out to various county school systems to assure that they are aware of DSB services. 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 deafblind. 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.

## 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.

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 ten (non-profit) 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 six 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 six 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 also contracts with some nonprofit agencies for the provision of pre-employment transition services. These contracts are procured through a *Request for Applications* (RFA) process in conjunction with the NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. There is a team that reviews each proposal to ensure that the application meets the required criteria. The team also performs contract negotiations with each provider. The RFA requires that the agency propose delivery of at least two of the five pre-employment transition services. DSB currently has nine unique contracts in place.

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 the contract.

## F. ARRANGEMENTS AND COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

DSB arranges for the provision of supported employment services for individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth, as identified in the response for Description (e) — Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations. The division utilizes an outcome-based method of purchasing supported employment services from private nonprofit community rehabilitation programs (CRP) for eligible individuals who are determined to have the most significant disabilities 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 CARF, 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 with incentives throughout the entire supported employment process. The five milestones are: (1) Assessment and Planning; (2) Job Development; (3) Job Placement; (4) Stabilization; and (5) Successful Employment. Incentives are provided 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 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. DSB continues to contract for extended services and currently has agreements with CRPs to provide this important service.

DSB is a member of and collaborates with the North Carolina Association for Persons Supporting Employment First NC (NCAPSE). NC DSB funded internships, job placement, and job training services for two consumers' participation in NC Project SEARCH™ programs. The scope of DSB's supported and extended employment services requires coordination and collaboration with employers, families, other agencies/organizations and natural supports. These working relationships are often developed with DSB without the establishment of formal cooperative agreements.

## G. COORDINATION WITH EMPLOYERS

### 1. VR SERVICES; AND

DSB will continue to network with employers statewide to provide mutually beneficial services and supports utilizing the dual-customer approach. Services will primarily be provided by vocational rehabilitation counselors and business services representatives/community employment specialists. Staff will be intentional in their efforts to build relationships with employers to learn the nature of their businesses, the educational background and skill sets required of employees and the employers' recruitment needs. DSB will offer services to employers including information regarding the division, disability awareness and sensitivity training, educational information about the American with Disabilities and Workforce Investment and Opportunity Acts, incentives for hiring individuals who have disabilities, work-site assessment services and information on job modifications/accommodations and assistive technology. Employers will be encouraged to partner with DSB to create opportunities for job placement, on-the-job training, internships, work experiences, and supported/customized employment placements for clients. Staff will also provide information regarding benefits to employers that hire individuals with disabilities and assistance in retaining employees who have disabilities.

The principle that individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, can achieve high quality competitive integrated employment, when provided the necessary services and support, is incorporated throughout the Workforce Innovations Opportunity Act. Employment in businesses owned by community rehabilitation providers, group settings, affirmative industries, social enterprises, and other forms of non-traditional work settings will be evaluated by DSB on a case-by-case basis. The evaluation review process will be initiated whenever one or more of the following competitive integrated employment criteria are in question:

- purpose of the business;
- competitive wages;
- integrated location; or
- opportunities for advancement.

DSB will continue to invest in providing training for staff regarding evidence-based best practices pertaining to business engagement. Efforts will be made to create a database to assist us in measuring and tracking our effectiveness in serving employers. Additionally, DSB will develop branded outreach materials to market our services to employers and we will increase participation in local chambers of commerce and business leadership networks to help build stronger relationships with business partners.

### 2. TRANSITION SERVICES, INCLUDING PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES, FOR STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES.

DSB transition and vocational rehabilitation counselors and community employment specialists work directly with employers to develop relationships and build opportunities for consumers. Employers partner with DSB to create opportunities for job placement, on-the-job training,

internships, work experiences, and supported/customized employment placements for clients. Further, DSB will continue to work with employers, educators, and DVRS to create opportunities for pre-employment transition services including ProjectSEARCH. Transition staff implemented virtual informational interviews with our students and young adults to increase their knowledge about a vocation and guide them in exploring career paths. For example, informational interviews were set up with a crime scene investigator, a business owner, a director of finance, a massage therapist, an aerospace engineer, and a broadcast radio/voice-over professional to name a few. Such interactive and meaningful experiences helped shape the students' understanding of the world of work and connected them to real-life professionals. During the North Carolina Summer Adapting to Blindness Vital to Visual Impaired Youth program at the Career and Training Center, three entrepreneurs were asked to present information on their journey with entrepreneurship to the youth. The youth were given the opportunity to learn and ask questions the presenters to expand their knowledge on entrepreneurship.

## H. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION

### 1. THE STATE MEDICAID PLAN UNDER TITLE XIX OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ACT;

In a combined effort with the NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS), the Controller's Office, and Information Technology Services, DSB has established an informational sharing agreement with the Division of Medical Assistance to utilize the NCTracks Medicaid Management Information System for North Carolina. This system helps the division ensure all approved medical cost services are authorized at the appropriate pricing tiers and up to date. DSB and DVRS also have an agreement with the Social Security Administration allowing for the sharing of information on an as needed basis only to assist with presumption of eligibility and provision of services to those with verified disabilities. This information is available in our electronic case management system and every VR staff person that has access to such information must annually complete training pertaining to the Social Security agreement and the confidentiality protocols.

### 2. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING SERVICES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES; AND

DSB serves individuals who have multiple disabilities and collaborates with the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities, DVRS, Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services to help us better understand all disabilities and to provide the most comprehensive, holistic services and to maximize the use of comparable benefits and available resources for eligible clients.

### 3. THE STATE AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES.

NCDHHS, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services is the state agency responsible for providing mental health services. DSB collaborates with this agency to better understand all disabilities and to provide the most comprehensive, holistic services and to maximize the use of comparable benefits and available resources for eligible clients.

## I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT; DATA SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

### 1. SYSTEM ON PERSONNEL AND PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

#### A. QUALIFIED PERSONNEL NEEDS

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;

DSB utilizes a state human resource and payroll system called BEACON which stands for building enterprise access for North Carolina's core operating needs. Reports on staff positions and vacancies are generated from this system. The table below includes the number of personnel employed and needed in the provision of VR services broken down by personnel category. In total, the ratio of VR counselors to eligible individuals served (2,871) by the DSB VR program during PY 2018-2019 was 96/1.

II. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE STATE AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND

| Job Title | Total Positions |
|---|---|
| Rehabilitation Counselor I | 21 |
| Rehabilitation Counselor II | 9 |
| Rehabilitation Counselor in Charge | 5 |
| Rehabilitation Services Manager I | 2 |
| Rehabilitation Services Manager II | 4 |
| Vocational Evaluator II | 1 |
| Community Employment Specialist | 14 |
| Rehabilitation Casework Tech | 2 |
| Total | 58 |

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.

There was a slight increase this PY in the total number of eligible individuals served through DSB's VR program. While efforts continue to identify individuals who are visually impaired, blind or deafblind who can benefit from services, including students and youth with disabilities, is not expected that additional FTEs will be granted and funded. It is therefore expected that the projected number of positions will remain the same as noted above during the period covered by this Unified State Plan. Retaining vocational rehabilitation counselors has been more challenging than recruiting them. Most counselors who have left the agency have indicated the reason is to pursue employment with federal and private organizations largely due to being offered higher salaries. Among senior management and area supervisors, DSB has two staff members with more than 25 years of service. We have received workforce transition planning training and will continue to work with the human resources department in developing our plan to ensure that we maintain qualified personnel to deliver VR services.

PY 2020 updates: One VR Counselor is currently eligible to retire and one VR supervisor will be eligible to retire within two years. The Division is anticipating adding an FTE to its VR staffing who will assume the role of a work incentives counselor in 2022. The work incentives counselor will enable the program to provide an additional service to address consumer concerns about the impact of entering the workforce, returning to work or advancing in employment with while assessing their social security benefits.

## B. PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT

### I. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM;

DSB has on-going relationships 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). AT&T State and the WSSU programs are historically black universities and were established with the assistance of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) grant and school funding. Stipends and financial aid assistance are offered to candidates in these programs. 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's degree in rehabilitation studies, and coursework continues. The master's degree program in rehabilitation studies is designed in coordination with the undergraduate program to encourage these graduates to pursue a master's degree. North Carolina A&T State University has used the structure in existing master's degree programs in guidance and counseling to build the rehabilitation counseling master's 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. The following is a list of institutions by program type that currently offer professional training programs for preparing VR professionals:

**NC A&T University**: Mental Health Counseling - Rehabilitation Program Master's program; Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Rehabilitation Counseling & Rehabilitation Counselor Education; Certificate in Rehabilitation Counseling & Behavioral Addictions; Certificate in Rehabilitation Psychology & Behavioral Medicine; and Certificate in Vocational Evaluation & Work Adjustment;

**Winston- Salem State University:** Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling with program focus specialization offered in Deaf & Hard of Hearing, Rural Transition, Vocational Evaluation, as well as Public VR;

**University of NC at Chapel Hill:** Master of Science in Clinical Rehabilitation & Mental Health Counseling;

**East Carolina University**: Master of Science in Rehabilitation & Career Counseling; Certificate in Rehabilitation Counseling; Certificate in Vocational Evaluation; Certificate in Substance Abuse Counseling; and Certificate in Military & Trauma Counseling.

### II. THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND

**NC A&T University**

- Mental Health Counseling - Rehabilitation Program Master's program: 28 students
- Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Rehabilitation Counseling & Rehabilitation Counselor Education: 28 students
- Certificate Rehabilitation Counseling & Behavioral Addictions: 10 students
- Certificate in Rehabilitation Psychology & Behavioral Medicine: 1 student
- Certificate in Vocational Evaluation & Work Adjustment: 0 students

**Winston- Salem State University**

- Master of Science in Rehabilitation: 38 students

**UNC at Chapel Hill**

- Master of Science in Clinical Rehabilitation & Mental Health Counseling: 47 students

**East Carolina University**

- Master of Science in Rehabilitation & Career Counseling: 44 students
- Certificate in Rehabilitation Counseling: 14 students
- Certificate in Vocational Evaluation: 17 students
- Certificate in Substance Abuse Counseling: 32 students
- Certificate in Military & Trauma Counseling: 31 students

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.

**NC A&T University:**

- Mental Health Counseling - Rehabilitation Program Master's program, 5 graduates (1 hired between DVRS and DSB)
- Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Rehabilitation Counseling & Rehabilitation Counselor Education, 7 graduates
- Certificate Rehabilitation Counseling & Behavioral Addictions, 5 graduates
- Certificate in Rehabilitation Psychology & Behavioral Medicine, unknown
- Certificate in Vocational Evaluation & Work Adjustment: unknown

**Winston Salem State University:**

- Master of Science in Rehabilitation: 9 graduates

**UNC at Chapel Hill:**

- Master of Science in Clinical Rehabilitation & Mental Health Counseling: 21 graduates

**East Carolina University:**

- Master of Science in Rehabilitation & Career Counseling: 5 graduates
- Certificate in Rehabilitation Counseling: 1 graduate
- Certificate in Vocational Evaluation: 4 graduates
- Certificate in Substance Abuse Counseling: 6 graduates
- Certificate in Military & Trauma Counseling: 8 graduates

2. PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

The Division of the Services for the Blind (DSB) employs the following strategies to ensure that the agency's projected need for qualified staff are met:

Currently, 100 percent of VR program 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 offers 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, visually impaired or deafblind and the vocational rehabilitation process. Providing these experiences also strengthens the pool of candidates for employment with DSB. Nationwide recruitment is done by posting positions in NeoGov, an internet human resources application provider for government agencies which has expanded our applicant pool. A section on DSB's website labeled *Career Opportunities,* links browsers to NeoGov listings. Available positions for rehabilitation counselors and orientation and mobility specialists are sent to local colleges to help recruit graduating students for job opportunities. Positions are often posted on LinkedIn and the Academy of Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Programs website. Some positions are shared with CSAVR and NCSAB membership to assist with recruiting. North Carolina recently became the 37th state in the nation to commit to Employment First (EF) for individuals with disabilities. Employment First focuses on the importance of competitive, integrated employment as truly the first choice for individuals with disabilities. By adopting the EF mindset, state agencies are committed to be intentional about addressing barriers to competitive employment and assessing the success of our efforts in increasing the numbers of individuals with disabilities employed by state agencies. On an annual basis, DSB conducts a workforce analysis of its representation of persons with disabilities, of persons of different races and ethnic groups and other demographics 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 as an equal opportunity employer.

Among senior management and area supervisors, DSB has 2 staff members with more than 25 years of service and one vacancy. We have received workforce transition planning training from HR and will continue to work with them in developing our plan. DSB utilizes NC DHHS leadership training as a point of entrance for pre-supervisory training. DSB conducts leadership/pre-supervisory training to begin to identify staff interested in management opportunities. This effort has led to several staff promotions over the past year.

PY 2020 updates: As previously stated, we have one VR supervisor who will be eligible to retire in two years. DSB has been working with HR to reassess the Division's organizational structure and is in the process of making changes to the management and leadership team to better meet our needs.

All rehabilitation counselors are required to complete developmental training in casework requirements and documentation during their first year of employment. The chiefs of rehabilitation and the area and district rehabilitation supervisors provide this training in small groups to directly address agency policies and procedures for professional casework practices. During rehabilitation counselors' first year of employment, their work is closely monitored and reviewed with most actions requiring supervisory approval. After one year of employment, rehabilitation counselors who meet certain standards may request promotion to independent counselor status, rehabilitation counselor II. Evaluation procedures for this status 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 the 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 designed to increase knowledge regarding working with individuals who have significant vision loss. There are also other training opportunities available for VR

counselors throughout the year to enhance their skill levels in working with clients and related parties.

Training efforts through staff development are on-going throughout the year for VR staff. In 2018, the following trainings were provided to VR staff:

**Vocational Rehabilitation**

| Training Activity | Targeted Attendees |
|---|---|
| New Employee-related training (NEST, NELVT, etc.) | New employees (approximately 40 annually) |
| NRTC Improving Business Development Skills | VRC/BSR/CES/Supervisors/Program Specialists. |
| Best Practices for New Counselors | New VRC's (approximately 5-10) |
| Supervisor / SERT training | All Program Chiefs / Supervisors - 7 (VR Program) |
| NCCVIB | 30 VR staff attending |
| NCETA Conference | VRC / BSR /CES – 8 employees attending |
| NCRA Conference | 15 VRC |
| NCATP Training | 15 staff (AT & VR) |
| NCWorks Partnership Conference | 20 staff |
| Annual In-Service (BEAM / ENCORE) position-related training | VRC / TRC; BSR / CES; AT; DB Specialists; PA |
| Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor Training | University of Arkansas Currents; Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation |
| Supervisory / Leadership Development | ASM; LAAL; National Conferences; Facilitating Career Development (CSAVR, NCSAB, ADA Coord, NCAPSE) |
| Facilitating Career Development | NC Commerce |
| RCB Trainings | CPR; On Course; Annual In-Service; Specialized AT training: 1-Touch, etc. |
| Misc. Conferences | SERID, NC Beach Conference, Substance Use Conference, HKNC Training, International Orientation & Mobility Online Symposium, Network of Americas Conference |

DSB utilizes NC DHHS leadership training as a point of entrance for pre-supervisory training. Additionally, three staff who were in counselor-in-charge positions participated in the Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor Academy offered through the Center for Continuing Education of Rehabilitation through the University of Washington and Arkansas Currents in 2018. One of the participants has since been promoted to an area supervisor position. DSB also conducts leadership/pre-supervisory training to begin to identify staff interested in management opportunities. This effort has led to several staff promotions over the past year as well.

PY 2020 Updates: the following trainings were provided to VR staff remotely.

| Training Activity | Targeted Attendees |
|---|---|
| New Employee Sensitivity Training (NEST) | All new division staff |
| New Employee Low Vision Training | All new division staff |
| NCWorks Partnership Conference | VR staff |
| Best Practices for New VR Counselors | New VR Counselors |
| VR Training on WIOA, policies, self-care, client relations | VR Counselors |
| CSAVR Conference, fall and spring | VR Administrators |
| Annual Supervisor's Training (communication, respect in the workplace) | All division supervisors |
| Hadley Training | All Division staff |
| SOMA Southeastern Orientation & Mobility Association | Certified Orientation and Mobility staff who serve VR consumers |
| ATIA (Assistive Technology Industry Association) | AT staff who serve VR consumers |
| NET Summit | VR staff |
| NCCVIB (the North Carolina Conference on Visual Impairment and Blindness) | Division staff |
| Deafblind 101 Ethics | All VR staff and Deafblind Specialists |
| SSA and Confidentiality Statement Annual Training | All division staff |
| Assistive Technology Annual Training | Division Assistive Technology Consultants and Instructors, DSB Career and Training Center AT Instructors |
| Deafblind Specialists Annual Training | Division Deafblind Specialists |

3. PERSONNEL STANDARDS

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

As of December 21, 2009, all employees in the rehabilitation counselor role have met the CSPD mandate. Although the mandate has been lifted, DHHS 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.

The average number of qualified applicants referred for vocational rehabilitation counselor vacancies between October 1, 2017 and September 30, 2018 was 12 and for the time period of October 1, 2018 and September 30, 2019, the average was 9.4 reflecting that recruitment for rehabilitation counselor I and rehabilitation counselor II positions has not been as challenging as in previous years. For PY 2020, the average rehab counselor vacancy rate was 9% or 4 vacancies. DSB's current minimum education and experience requirements for vocational rehabilitation counselors and trainees are as follows:

**Minimum Education and Experience for vocational rehabilitation counselors -**

Master's degree in rehabilitation counseling from an appropriately accredited institution; or a master's degree in a related human services field from an appropriately accredited institution; or current certification as a certified rehabilitation counselor by the Commission of Rehabilitation Counselor Certification.

**Minimum Education and Experience for vocational rehabilitation counselor trainees -**

Bachelor's degree in rehabilitation counseling or a related human services field from an appropriately accredited institution. An employee in the progression is eligible to be placed in the full class of rehabilitation counselor upon completion of a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. The three-year progression may be extended as needed for an employee who is making satisfactory progress toward the attainment of the master's degree.

Between 2016 and 2018, four employees were enrolled in rehabilitation counseling programs as RSA scholars. Two of them had to complete this coursework to meet the minimum educational requirements for employment. These employees were enrolled at Auburn University and Winston-Salem State University. One of these employees was recently promoted to a counselor-in-charge position. The two other DSB employees, who were not vocational rehabilitation counselors at the time of enrollment, also became RSA scholars in rehabilitation counseling programs; one at Auburn and one at Winston-Salem State University. They have successfully completed their rehabilitation counseling programs.

PY 2020 Update: One (1) DSB Community Employment Specialist was an RSA scholar through Auburn University and graduated in August 2021.

B. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, TO ENSURE THAT THE PERSONNEL HAVE A 21ST CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLVING LABOR FORCE AND THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

As of December 21, 2009, all employees in the rehabilitation counselor role have met the CSPD mandate. Although the mandate has been lifted, DHHS 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.

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PY 2020 Update: One (1) DSB Community Employment Specialist was an RSA scholar through Auburn University and graduated in August 2021.

**Efforts to ensure personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities**

DSB staff are actively involved in monitoring employment trends and adapting service methods to enable the clients we serve to be successful in today's market. Staff are engaged in strategic collaboration and partnerships with organizations such as Ablr, NSITE, and Carolina Fintech to provide training for consumers in high demand occupations to create additional avenues to competitive integrated employment. Amazon is one company that is currently dominating the labor market and consequently, DSB staff have collaborated and partnered with Amazon to assist them with fulfilling their need for employees. DSB staff have provided multiple services to consumers along with sensitivity training for employees that included information on orientation and mobility and sighted guide techniques. As a result of these efforts, several DSB consumers have obtained employment in many of the Amazon warehouses across the state.

Self-employment is an increasing trend, in part due to the rise of the gig economy. DSB is in the process of working with the DVRS to revise our self-employment policy because we feel this process should be achievable and better accommodate our consumers with meeting their goals of self-employment. Once policy is updated, DSB staff will be provided guidance and training on the changes made. An innovative program for Pre-ETS clients was created for our Career and Training Center's Summer Adapting to Blindness in Learning Environment (SAVVY) program. An opportunity for participants in the SAVVY Youth in Transition program to learn about

entrepreneurship and explore what it would mean for them to be an entrepreneur was developed.

Effective use of assistive technology is an essential part of success in many careers in today's labor market. Assistive technology is constantly evolving, which requires DSB staff to stay abreast of changes to effectively serve its consumers. This year, training was provided to staff on advanced iPad accessibility features including voice over commands and gestures, app switcher, magnifier, zoom controller, and spoken content; Zoom Text customization including a camera with ZT, touch screen with ZT, and multiple monitors; AT for multiple disabilities such as Natural Point with smart navigation mouse using head movements to navigate, Eye Gaze, and Smart Pen; and NCATP resources. DSB also implemented a new policy and procedure for hiring AT instructor vendors to expand the network of individuals available to provide instruction to our consumers.

The importance of soft skills training for DSB's consumers is something that is very significant in a forever-changing labor market. DSB staff were educated about a unique five-day virtual interactive event, the Blind & Socially Savvy, which was implemented for our Pre-ETS students statewide. This innovative soft skills development and leadership training program focused on coaching the use of social cues and body language, mingling/networking skills, learning protocols for asking for and refusing help in public spaces, and navigating low expectations. The students also participated in informational interviews and virtual tours. The transition staff implemented virtual informational interviews with students and young adults served by DSB to increase their knowledge about a vocation and guide them in exploring career paths. Informational interviews were set up with a crime scene investigator, a business owner, a director of finance, a massage therapist, an aerospace engineer, and a broadcast radio/voice-over professional to name a few. Such interactive and meaningful experiences helped shape the students' understanding of the world of work and connected them to real-life professionals.

## 4. STAFF DEVELOPMENT

### 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

DSB has had at least one employee each year enrolled in the Career Development Facilitator training offered by the NCWorks Training Center since 2016. Facilitating Career Development (FCD), formerly titled Career Development Facilitator (CDF), is comprised of 120 hours of coursework and provides individuals with the relevant skills and knowledge needed to assist others in planning careers and obtaining meaningful work. The FCD course uses the National Career Development Association's (NCDA) curriculum, designed to standardize the knowledge and experience of individuals who work in a career development setting. This course has value for both front-line personnel and program administrators who provide or manage career development services.

As of 2017, in coordination with the Office of State Human Resources, several DSB employees have completed coursework in the *Leading at all Levels* curriculums for individual contributors and supervisors. Additionally, during the 2017 calendar year, 15 employees participated in and received three-year certificates in Mental Health First Aid.

DSB provided several mandatory trainings focused on WIOA and pre-employment transition services for rehabilitation counselors, supervisors, specialists, business service representatives and community employment specialists, including introductions to the changes in definitions, policies and reporting requirements. Beginning in May 2017, DSB became one of four states to participate in training and research from the National Research and Training Center on

Blindness and Visual Impairment (NRTC) "Improving Business Development Skills." As a participating state, case carrying VR counselors responded to quarterly surveys pertaining to their business development activities. In February 2018, staff from the NRTC and an external trainer from a state with documented success in the dual customer approach to business development provided an intensive three-day training for rehabilitation counselors, supervisors, job development staff and deafblind specialists. Following the training, rehabilitation counselors continued completing quarterly surveys for approximately nine months as part of the research project. Additionally, the NRTC provided technical assistance to DSB administration.

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. Because of these requests, training has been provided in an array of training events with relevant curriculum and skills acquisition experiences. DSB has participated in intensive training sessions this year, including attendance at the annual NCWorks Partnership Conference and annual business engagement training for specific HR placement and community employment specialists. Other job development trainings staff participated in include Windmills training and *Improving Business Development Skills* training.

DSB staff also participated in the following training: Administrative Professionals Certificate Training; Assistive Technology; 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 DeafBlind 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; Pre-Supervisory Training; Professional and Personal Development; Rehabilitation Center and Evaluation Unit Annual Training; Teaching Financial Literacy; Workplace Violence Prevention. 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 who participate in approved training provided by the division. The agency also has the authority to grant Continuing Educational Units (CEU) by the Academy of Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Programs (ACVREP). DSB staff are also routinely alerted to and complete other on-line training events provided by sponsors such as, WINTAC, NCWorks and the ADA National Network.

PY 2020 Updates:

Career Development Facilitator training by the NCWorks Training Center is no longer offered.

Trainings provided which were specific to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement or rehabilitation technology:

| Training Activity | Targeted Attendees |
|---|---|
| New Employee Sensitivity Training (NEST) | All new division staff |
| New Employee Low Vision Training | All new division staff |
| NCWorks Partnership Conference | VR staff |
| Best Practices for New VR Counselors | New VR Counselors |
| VR Training on WIOA, policies, self-care, client | VR Counselors |

| Training Activity | Targeted Attendees |
|---|---|
| relations | |
| CSAVR and NCSAB Conferences, fall and spring | VR Administrators |
| Hadley Updates Training | All Division staff |
| SOMA Southeastern Orientation & Mobility Association | Certified Orientation and Mobility staff who serve VR consumers |
| ATIA (Assistive Technology Industry Association) | AT staff who serve VR consumers |
| NET Summit | VR staff |
| NCCVIB (the North Carolina Conference on Visual Impairment and Blindness) | Division staff |
| Deafblind 101 Ethics | All VR staff and Deafblind Specialists |
| Assistive Technology Annual Training | Division Assistive Technology Consultants and Instructors, DSB Career and Training Center AT Instructors |
| Deafblind Specialists Annual Training | Division Deafblind Specialists |

B. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO DESIGNATED STATE UNIT PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS.

DSB requires professional skills in rehabilitation counseling, blind rehabilitation, customer service and business relationship development to enhance client employment opportunities. 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 assists in the provision of comprehensive training on these subjects to all newly hired VRCs and VR program staff responsible for job development and placement. Follow-up training and one-on-one coaching is available to staff not meeting performance objectives. The extensive information, resources and technical assistance available from the various technical assistance centers and demonstration projects is also disseminated to DSB VR staff. DSB staff have benefited from technical assistance, research and resource information and in-person and webinar trainings provided by WINTAC regarding pre-employment transition services, customized employment, integrated resource team/community academy development, increased integration of DSB into the workforce development system, business engagement and transition to the common performance outcome measures.

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 VR 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 formats and can be checked out from the library by any staff member across the state. Equipment is also purchased and maintained to enhance training programs, presentations, and small group work.

## 5. PERSONNEL TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL COMMUNICATION NEEDS

DSB has personnel and utilizes interpreters or translators to communicate in the native/preferred language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

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. Computer workstations equipped with assistive technology are also available for consumer use within each district office. DSB has placed the policy and procedures manual on DSB's website. The website currently contains information about all 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 five 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 DHHS resources. A list of qualified sign-language interpreters is maintained in each office, and these can be hired as required to enhance communication. Language interpreters are sought and hired to facilitate communication with individuals for whom English is not their primary language.

## 6. COORDINATION OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

DSB works with the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to ensure all students who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind have access to VR services while attending public school. DSB has nine memorandums of agreements with school systems to provide transition programs for their students. These programs work with students, the school staff, and the parents or guardians as the student transitions from school to work and continues working with them until they achieve their employment goals. The specialized programs are in the following school systems: Brunswick County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, Cumberland County, Guilford County, New Hanover County, Onslow County, Pender County, Wake County Schools, Winston-Salem-Forsyth 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.

PY 2020 Update: Pender County has elected to not renew their PY 2021 memorandum of agreement as they reported having no students with visual impairments requiring DSB services.

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 VR 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 VR 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.

PY 2020 Updates: Despite having to operate under confinements of a global pandemic, the Transition Program offered plenty of exciting opportunities for students to engage, explore, and connect. Engaging the youth with career professionals and employers continued to be a valuable activity for all involved. Field-based Transition staff implemented virtual informational interviews with our students and young adults to increase their knowledge about a specific vocation based on the client's interests. These interviews assisted the student with exploring a specific career path. For example, across the state counselors set up informational interviews with a crime scene investigator, a business owner, a director of finance, a massage therapist, an aerospace engineer, and a broadcast radio/voice-over professional to name a few. Such interactive and meaningful experiences helped shape the students' understanding of the world of work and connected them to real-life professionals. The staff worked hard to provide interactive activities, utilizing outside resources and speakers in addition to DSB specialists. The training enabled the students to increase their ability to self-advocate, explore careers, build workplace readiness skills as well as receive information on training and educational opportunities after high school. It also provided a great platform for students to meet and socialize which helped reduce feelings of isolation that have escalated during the pandemic. DSB, in partnership with DVRS, continued to solicit Pre-ETS contracts for the delivery of a range of Pre-ETS required services throughout the state. Seven active contracts were available and DSB added a unique program targeting students with secondary disabilities utilizing music as a tool to engage and deliver Pre-ETS services. Additionally, a contract was developed to bring Blind and Socially Savvy Program to our state with the first program scheduled remotely in August 2021. Blind and Socially Savvy Program is an innovative soft skills development and leadership training program that focuses on coaching the use of social cues and body language, mingling/networking skills, learning protocols for asking for and refusing help in public spaces, and navigating low expectations. The students will also participate in informational interviews and virtual tours.

The Transition staff was creative in providing several virtual youth group trainings. These included:

- Getting Ready to Move Beyond High School - Summer Youth Transition Program – 2021,
- Mini Center: Pre-ETS-Career Exploration & Postsecondary Training, Virtual Transition Summer Program
- Virtual Monthly Job Club Meetings for Youth.

The DSB Career and Training Center quickly adapted the planned in-person SAVVY program to a remote program. Staff were taught Zoom for Government to use for SAVVY and quickly adapted curriculums for remote instruction. Instruction kits were developed and mailed to participants in order to engage in hands-on activities. Participant's technology needs were assessed ahead of time and loaner devices were provided when needed so everyone who wanted to participate remotely could. Training on Zoom for Gov was provided for participants and their parents or guardians two weeks before SAVVY began as many people were just beginning to use these technologies at that time.

Many staff stepped out of their usual roles to assist as needed by instructing participants on loaner devices or by assisting instructors who required additional help due to using a virtual platform.

SAVVY 2020 had 16 participants and was held for the usual four-week time frame but with shortened hours per day. The theme was "Envision the Possibilities". Youth-in-Transition classes were taught on an alternating basis providing students the opportunity to experience Assistive Technology, Orientation & Mobility, Techniques of Daily Living & Cooking Skills, and Education & Braille. College Prep participants utilized Zoom for Gov, Blackboard Course sites and Google Drive. They learned, studied, submitted assignments and engaged in topics related to college success readiness with the Center College Prep Instructor and an intern who is visually impaired and had recently graduated from UNC-Charlotte. Two teens participated in the remote World of Work program. They attended workshops to help prepare for work by learning about general work expectations, telework job expectations, time management, appropriate behaviors, and skills specific to their interests in technology. Both participants worked remotely with DSB Assistive Technology Instructors (ATI's). All participants were provided workshops and activities on many topics including self-advocacy, physical and emotional wellbeing, healthy interpersonal reactions and had opportunities to participate with recreational therapy and engage in less structured peer social interactions.

## J. STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT

### 1. PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE REHABILITATION NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES RESIDING WITHIN THE STATE, PARTICULARLY THE VR SERVICES NEEDS OF THOSE:

#### A. WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, INCLUDING THEIR NEED FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

Individuals with most significant disabilities (MSD) are defined as those whose physical or mental impairments require interventions or permanent accommodations that cannot be easily achieved to mitigate their limitations in three or more functional capacities regarding employment, such as communication, interpersonal skills, mobility, self-care, self-direction, work skills, and work tolerance. For the disabling condition to meet the definition of "most significant," such individuals must either require multiple core VR services for a minimum of nine months to complete their vocational rehabilitation program or require personal assistance services, rehabilitation technology, or extended services for their employment.

In program year 2020-21, Individuals with MSD accounted for 692 (30%) of 2,330 eligible DSB VR consumers served.

Within this population, 312 (45%) were individuals whose primary disability was blindness, 353 (51%) were individuals with other visual impairments as their primary disability, 20 (3%) had deaf-blindness as their primary disability, and 7 (1%) had another type of disability as their primary impediment to employment.

Individuals with MSD ranged in age from 13 to 81, with 38 as both the median and average age. Of the 692 eligible VR consumers with MSD, 201 (29%) were transition age youth, younger than 25; 336 (49%) were ages 25 to 54; and 155 (22%) were age 55 or older.

About 52% the individuals with MSD were female (n = 361) and 51% were individuals of minority backgrounds (n = 353), with Black or African American accounting for 43% and Hispanic or Latino accounting for 6%.

The services provided most for this population in PY 2020-21, as an indication of their rehabilitation service needs, were counseling and guidance, which was provided to 184 individuals (26.6%); assessment and evaluation services, which were provided to 139 individuals (20.1%); training of any type, which was provided to 104 individuals (15.0%); rehabilitation technology, which was provided to 68 individuals (9.8%), diagnosis and treatment of impairments, which was provided to 55 individuals (7.9%); and information and referrals services, which were provided to 50 individuals (7.2%). Other services provided are listed in table J.1.

Table J.1. Services provided for Individuals with MSD, PY 2020-21

| **Service Type** | **Number of clients that received the service** | **Percent of MSD population served** |
|---|---|---|
| Counseling and guidance | 184 | 26.6% |
| Assessment and evaluation services | 139 | 20.1% |
| Training of any type listed: | 104 | 15.0% |
| Graduate school academic training | 12 | 1.7% |
| Job readiness training | 26 | 3.8% |
| University academic training | 23 | 3.3% |
| Community college academic training | 23 | 3.3% |
| Miscellaneous training | 5 | 0.7% |
| Vocational training | 5 | 0.7% |
| Customized training | 2 | 0.3% |
| On the job training | 2 | 0.3% |
| Disability related skills training | 34 | 4.9% |
| Literacy training | 3 | 0.4% |
| Rehabilitation technology | 68 | 9.8% |
| Diagnosis and treatment of | 55 | 7.9% |

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of MSD population served |
|---|---|---|
| impairments | | |
| Information and referral services | 50 | 7.2% |
| Job search assistance | 31 | 4.5% |
| Job placement assistance | 27 | 3.9% |
| Maintenance | 23 | 3.3% |
| Transportation | 20 | 2.9% |
| Supported employment | 15 | 2.2% |
| Short term job supports | 3 | 0.4% |
| Interpreter services | 7 | 1.0% |
| Benefits counseling | 4 | 0.6% |
| Technical assistance services | 4 | 0.6% |
| Reader services | 1 | 0.1% |
| Other services not listed above | 14 | 2.0% |

In a survey of 671 rehabilitation professionals, responses as to the needs of individuals with most significant disabilities were provided by 296 survey participants. Of the valid responses, 77 (26.1%) reported a need for rehabilitation technology and adaptive devices; 57 (19.3%) reported transportation; 55 (18.6%) reported a need related to employer training assistance; 43 (14.6%) reported a need for job readiness related training; and 25 (8.5%) reported a need for additional staff training, such as at CRPs or the DVRS VR program. Other needs included advocacy services, interpreters, CRP assistance, and improvements to the overall service delivery system.

B. WHO ARE MINORITIES;

Individuals who are of a minority race or ethnicity accounted for 1,292 (55%) of 2,330 eligible DSB VR consumers served in PY 2020-21.

Within this population 353 (27%) were individuals with MSD; 790 (61%) were individuals with significant disabilities; and 148 (12%) did not have significant disabilities.

Regarding their disability, 446 (35%) had blindness as their primary impairment; 811 (63%) had a visual impairment other than blindness; 19 (1.5%) were deafblind; and 16 (1.2%) had a disability other than vision as their primary impediment to employment.

Individuals of minority backgrounds ranged in age from 13 to 78, with 43 as the average age. Of the 1,292 eligible VR consumers of minority backgrounds, 234 (18%) were transition age youth, younger than 25; 684 (53%) were ages 25 to 54; and 374 (29%) were age 55 or older.

About 54 percent of the individuals with minority backgrounds were female (n = 701).

The minority backgrounds of this population included 1,087 (84%) who were Black or African American; 149 (12%) who were Hispanic or Latino; 55 (4%) who were American Indian or Alaskan Native; 30 (2%) who were Asian; and 13 (1%) who were Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander.

The services provided most for this population in PY 2020-21, as an indication of their rehabilitation service needs, were counseling and guidance, which was provided to 262 individuals (20%); assessment and evaluation services, which were provided to 237 individuals (18%); training service of any type, which was provided to 135 individuals (10%); diagnosis and treatment of impairments, which was provided to 133 individuals (10%); rehabilitation technology, which was provided to 116 individuals (9%), and information and referral services, which were provided to 56 individuals (4%). Other services provided are listed in table J.2.

Table J.2. Services provided for Individuals of Minority Backgrounds, PY 2020-21

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of minority population served |
|---|---|---|
| Counseling and guidance | 262 | 20.3% |
| Assessment and evaluation services | 237 | 18.3% |
| Training, any | 135 | 10.4% |
| Community college academic training | 22 | 1.7% |
| University academic training | 37 | 2.9% |
| Graduate school academic training | 25 | 1.9% |
| Vocational training | 8 | 0.6% |
| Job readiness training | 20 | 1.5% |
| Disability related skills training | 47 | 3.6% |
| On the job training | 5 | 0.4% |
| Literacy training | 3 | 0.2% |
| Miscellaneous training | 10 | 0.8% |
| Diagnosis and treatment of impairments | 133 | 10.3% |
| Rehabilitation technology | 116 | 9.0% |
| Information and referral services | 56 | 4.3% |
| Job placement assistance | 55 | 4.3% |
| Job search assistance | 47 | 3.6% |
| Maintenance | 51 | 3.9% |
| Transportation | 39 | 3.0% |
| Supported employment | 8 | 0.6% |
| Short term job supports | 5 | 0.4% |
| Interpreter services | 8 | 0.6% |

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of minority population served |
|---|---|---|
| Technical assistance services | 4 | 0.3% |
| Benefits counseling | 3 | 0.2% |
| Customized training | 2 | 0.2% |
| Other services not listed | 20 | 1.5% |

C. WHO HAVE BEEN UNSERVED OR UNDERSERVED BY THE VR PROGRAM;

There is no regulatory definition for individuals who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program. The federal guidance for establishing this category is that it can be defined from a comparison of the demographics of individuals served by the VR program with those of the population of individuals with disabilities residing in the state or from the results of a survey or key informant interviews.

The demographics of the population of the 2,332 eligible individuals served by the DSB VR program in PY 2020-21 are as follows:

Minority race and ethnicity: 1,292 (55%) were of a minority race or ethnicity, the distribution of which is described in the previous section.

Gender: 1,215 (52%) were female.

Age at the start of the program year: The age range was from 13 to 81. The average age was 42 and the median age was 45. 516 (22%) were transition-age youth younger than 25; 1,128 (48%) were adults ages 25 to 54 ; and 688 (29%) were adults ages 55 and older.

Significance of disability: 692 (30%) were individuals with MSD; 1,352 (58%) were individuals with a significant disability; and 288 (12%) were individuals whose disability was not significant.

Primary impairment: 770 (33%) with blindness; 1,492 (54%) with another visual impairment; 37 (1.6%) with deaf-blindness or hearing impaired; 26 (1.4%) had another disability as the primary impairment and blindness or a visual impairment was secondary.

Comorbidity: 1,276 (55%) had a secondary disability, of which 920 (72%) had a physical impairment; 137 (11%) had a psychosocial or other mental impairment; 88 (7%) had a cognitive impairment such as an intellectual or learning disability; 62 (5%) had deafness or hearing-loss; and the remaining 5% had blindness or a visual impairment as the secondary disability.

In a survey of 671 rehabilitation professionals, specific populations of underserved individuals with blindness or other visual impairments were identified in 33 of the responses. These groups included people living in rural areas (17 responses); individuals with comorbidity, including deaf-blind and people with intellectual disabilities (5 responses); individuals on SSI or SSDI (3 responses); and there was one mention each of people who are completely blind; individuals with cataracts; individuals of low-income; ex-offenders; immigrants; minorities; individuals who are homeless; youth; and seniors. The most commonly mentioned or barrier to employment was transportation, mainly for individuals living in rural areas. Benefits counseling was thought to be a need for individuals receiving SSI or SSDI. Individuals with multiple disabilities were thought to require more assistive technology, including communication devices for individuals who are deafblind or also have intellectual disabilities. For this population, there was also a need for various type of training for service providers, employers and clients. Capacity building and workforce partnerships was a theme across all groups,

especially regarding the need for more services, outreach, and employment opportunities in rural areas and a more general need for employer education and community awareness.

### D. WHO HAVE BEEN SERVED THROUGH OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM; AND

Over half the individuals served by the DSB VR program are also served through other components of the workforce development system. Over a 10-year period, from PY 2009-10 to PY 2019-20, the DSB VR program served 9,672 unique individuals, as reported to the NC Common Follow-up System, of which, at some point during the 10-year period, 4,656 (48%) had also received services through NCWorks Career Centers under the Title I Adult, Youth, or Dislocated Worker programs or Title III, Wagner-Peyser and 730 (7.5%) had received Title IV General Vocational Rehabilitation through DVRS.

In a survey of Workforce Development Board Directors from the Kerr-Tar, Western Piedmont, Capital Area, and Charlotte Works Workforce Development Board regions, as key informants, the rehabilitation needs of individuals with blindness and visual disabilities were identified as follows: assistive technology, including Zoom and other adaptive software, braille signage, transportation assistance, and work-based learning opportunities.

### E. WHO ARE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES, INCLUDING, AS APPROPRIATE, THEIR NEED FOR PRE-EMPLOYMENT TRANSITION SERVICES OR OTHER TRANSITION SERVICES.

Transition age youth, younger than 25, comprise 22% (n = 516) of the 2,332 total individuals served by the DSB VR program in PY 2020, including potentially eligible students with disabilities and individuals who applied for VR services but had not been determined eligible by the end of the program year. Within this youth population, 208 (40%) of the 516 transition-age youth were ages 14-21 at the start of the program year and were identified as students with disabilities. There was only one potentially eligible student with disability provided pre-employment transition services who had not applied for VR services. Of the 516 eligible transition-age youth, 264 (51%) were female.

Of the 516 that had been determined eligible for VR services, 201 (39%) were individuals with MSD, 279 (54%) had significant disabilities, and 35 (7%) did not have significant disabilities. Within this group, 200 (39%) had blindness as their primary disability, 299 (58%) had another visual impairment, 13 (2.5%) were deafblind, and 4 (< 1%) had another type of disability as their primary impairment.

The services provided most for transition-age youth in PY 2020-21, as an indication of their rehabilitation service needs, were counseling and guidance, which was provided to 174 individuals (33.7%); training of any kind, which was provided to 139 individuals (26.9%); information and referral services, which were provided to 78 individuals (15.1%); and assessment and evaluation services, which were provided to 73 individuals (14.1%). Other services provided are listed in table J.3.

Table J.3. VR Services provided for Transition-age Youth, PY 2020-21

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of transition-age youth population served |
|---|---|---|
| Counseling and guidance | 174 | 33.7% |
| Training, any | 139 | 26.9% |
| Community college academic training | 26 | 5.0% |

| Service Type | Number of clients that received the service | Percent of transition-age youth population served |
|---|---|---|
| University academic training | 77 | 14.9% |
| Graduate school academic training | 16 | 3.1% |
| Disability related skills training | 20 | 3.9% |
| Job readiness training | 18 | 3.5% |
| Vocational training | 7 | 1.4% |
| Customized training | 1 | 0.2% |
| On the job training | 1 | 0.2% |
| Miscellaneous training | 7 | 1.4% |
| Information and referral services | 78 | 15.1% |
| Assessment and evaluation services | 73 | 14.1% |
| Rehabilitation technology | 45 | 8.7% |
| Maintenance | 40 | 7.8% |
| Job placement assistance | 21 | 4.1% |
| Job search assistance | 21 | 4.1% |
| Diagnosis and treatment of impairments | 9 | 1.7% |
| Transportation | 7 | 1.4% |
| Interpreter services | 6 | 1.2% |
| Supported employment | 4 | 0.8% |
| Short term job supports | 3 | 0.6% |
| Technical assistance | 2 | 0.4% |
| Benefits counseling | 1 | 0.2% |
| Other services not listed | 9 | 1.7% |

Within the population of 221 total students with disabilities, ages 14-21, 70 (31.7%) were provided pre-employment transition services during the program year: 33 (14.9%) were provided work readiness training; 40 (18.1%) were provided job exploration counseling; 14 (6.3%) were provided a work-based learning experience; 26 (11.8%) were provided counseling on postsecondary enrollment opportunities; and 25 (11.3%) were provided self-advocacy training.

The number of students provided pre-employment transition services during the program year (n = 221) approximates the number of students in secondary education with a visual impairment, including blindness and deaf-blindness, identified by the *North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's April 2017 Child Count by Grade and Disability* (n = 240),

however, the American Community Survey Five-year Public Use Microdata Sample for 2012-2016 estimated 8,700 students, ages 14-21, in secondary or postsecondary education that have "serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses." Although this is a self-reported survey estimate subject to a margin of error, the difference suggests there many potentially eligible students in North Carolina, beyond those identified under IDEA, that may benefit from pre-employment transition services.

In a survey of rehabilitation professionals, 179 (26.7%) of 671 survey participants identified one or more needs for transition-age youth. The need most frequently identified was job training, which was mentioned in 47 (26.3%) of the responses; 40 (22.3%) responded that the needs of individuals with visual disabilities were largely the same as youth with disabilities, in general, and included pre-employment transition services, such as job readiness training and work-based learning experiences; 21 (11.7%) identified a need for assistive technology; and 16 (8.9%) identified a need for transportation. Other themes regarding client needs included employment opportunities; improved communication among service providers; training for service providers and employers on accommodations and communication; and family supports.

### 2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE; AND

The Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) directly provide or facilitate the provision of VR services, such as community-based assessments, job development, training, and job coaching for short-term job supports and supported employment services. In PY 2018-19, of DSB eligible VR clients served, 27 (< 1%) were provided short-term job supports and 40 (1.4%) were provided supported employment services. This small population mostly includes individuals with significant or most significant disabilities and comorbidity of a cognitive or psychosocial impairment.

In a survey of rehabilitation professionals, 465 (69.2%) of 671 identified one or more needs with regard to establishing, developing, or improving CRPs in North Carolina. These needs, however, were not specific to services for individuals with visual impairments, but addressed the need for CRPs, in general. The most frequently identified need was staff training, which was mentioned in 220 (47.3%) of the responses; shortages in some areas, especially rural counties, which was mentioned in 128 (27.5%) of the responses; and communication among providers, including between CRPs and state agencies, which was mentioned in 123 (26.5%) of the responses. Other themes, more specific to individuals with visual impairments, included training for CRP staff on how to better serve the DSB population and the use of assistive technology, especially for individuals who are blind or deafblind.

PY 2020 Updates: Three newly approved CRP's were added in PY 2020. With these additions, DSB now has 48 CRP's approved as vendors for services which represents a 6.25% increase in available CRP's. These new vendors were targeted to render services in underserved areas. Efforts continue to identify CRP's to ensure equal access to services throughout the state.

### 3. 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

Within the population of 221 total students with disabilities, ages 14-21, 70 (31.7%) were provided pre-employment transition services during the program year: 33 (14.9%) were provided work readiness training; 40 (18.1%) were provided job exploration counseling; 14 (6.3%) were provided a work-based learning experience; 26 (11.8%) were provided counseling on postsecondary enrollment opportunities; and 25 (11.3%) were provided self-advocacy training.

The number of students provided pre-employment transition services during the program year (n = 221) approximates the number of students in secondary education with a visual impairment, including blindness and deaf-blindness, identified by the *North Carolina Department of Public Instruction's April 2017 Child Count by Grade and Disability* (n = 240), however, the American Community Survey Five-year Public Use Microdata Sample for 2012-2016 estimated 8,700 students, ages 14-21, in secondary or postsecondary education that have "serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses." Although this is a self-reported survey estimate subject to a margin of error, the difference suggests there many potentially eligible students in North Carolina, beyond those identified under IDEA, that may benefit from pre-employment transition services.

In a survey of rehabilitation professionals, 179 (26.7%) of 671 survey participants identified one or more needs for transition-age youth. The need most frequently identified was job training, which was mentioned in 47 (26.3%) of the responses; 40 (22.3%) responded that the needs of individuals with visual disabilities were largely the same as youth with disabilities, in general, and included pre-employment transition services, such as job readiness training and work-based learning experiences; 21 (11.7%) identified a need for assistive technology; and 16 (8.9%) identified a need for transportation. Other themes regarding client needs included employment opportunities; improved communication among service providers; training for service providers and employers on accommodations and communication; and family supports.

For additional information, please refer to Description (d)(1) and (2) – Coordination with Education Officials

## K. ANNUAL ESTIMATES

### 1. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS IN THE STATE WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR SERVICES

According to the 2019 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium, there are an estimated 257,000 North Carolinians with a vision disability, representing 2.5% of the state population. DSB 's VR program projects an average of 2,900 individuals with a visual disability who have been determined eligible for DSB VR services, exclusive of pre-employment transition services, will be in-service with the VR-blind program in each of the program years, 2020 through 2023. This estimate includes (a) cases where purchased services are provided in accordance with the consumer's individualized plan for employment; (b) cases where purchased services are 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 services are provided in-house by agency staff or as a comparable service or benefit.

### 2. THE NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO WILL RECEIVE SERVICES UNDER:

#### A. THE VR PROGRAM;

The VR Program;

Of this annual average population of 2,900 individuals eligible for VR services, the DSB's VR-program projects 2,750 (95%) will be served under individualized plan for employment.

#### B. THE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM; AND

DSB expects to provide supported employment services to approximately 40 individuals annually.

#### C. EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY, IF UNDER AN ORDER OF SELECTION.

The DSB VR program is not currently under an order of selection and does not expect to implement an order of selection during program years 2020-2023.

3. THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR VR SERVICES, BUT ARE NOT RECEIVING SUCH SERVICES DUE TO AN ORDER OF SELECTION; AND

Not applicable. The DSB VR program is not currently under an order of selection and does not expect to implement an order of selection during Program Years 2020-2023.

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.

For federal fiscal years 2020-2021, the DSB VR program expects total program expenditures of approximately $21.5 million to provide services for 2,900 individuals eligible for VR services, with an average annual per client cost of $7,434.

L. STATE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

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

The goals and priorities presented within this plan were jointly developed by and agreed to by the DSB and its State Rehabilitation Council.

2. IDENTIFY THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES IN CARRYING OUT THE VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

**Priority:Competitive integrated employment**

**Goal:** Increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with visual disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, underserved populations, and individuals with additional barriers to employment.

**Goal:** Increase opportunities for training and employment services for adults with visual disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, and underserved populations.

**Priority:Youth and students with disabilities**

**Goal:** Increase opportunities for training and employment services for youth with visual disabilities.

**Goal:** Increase the provision of pre-employment transition services for students with visual disabilities.

**Priority: Business engagement**

**Goal:** Build stronger relationships and partnerships with businesses and government agencies to develop or expand work experiences, internships, and employment opportunities for adults and youth who are blind, visually impaired or deafblind.

**Priority: Capacity building**

**Goal:** Increase internal capacity and develop the program infrastructure needed to improve service delivery for VR participants and employers.

**Goal:** Increase collaboration with core WIOA and required program partners and community stakeholders to integrate and expand services for individuals with visual disabilities.

**Priority: Supported Employment**

**Goal:** Increase outreach to identify individuals who are most significantly disabled and require supported employment services to achieve a successful competitive integrated employment outcome, including outreach to consumers who reside in rural areas who may also be underserved.

**Goal:** Provide supported employment training for new counselors.

**Goal:** Continue efforts to identify and expand the number of community rehabilitation program providers focusing on areas across that state that have limited resources.

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;

The goals and priorities were developed following an analysis of the most recent comprehensive statewide assessment survey and review of administrative data.

B. THE STATE'S PERFORMANCE UNDER THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES OF SECTION 116 OF WIOA; AND

The goals and priorities were developed to improve the state's performance under the performance and accountability measures.

| Performance Measure: | PY 2018 | PY 2019 | PY 2020 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Employment Rate 2nd Quarter After Exit | 60.7% | 61.9% | 34.4% |
| Median Earnings 2nd Quarter After Exit | $4,930 | $4,434 | $5,257 |
| Employment Rate 4th Quarter After Exit | N/A | 55.8% | 42.4% |
| Measurable Skill Gains Rate | 18.2% | 34.4% | 37.4% |
| Credential Attainment Rate | N/A | 28.6% | 31.8% |

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.

The goals and priorities were developed with input from the SRC to improve the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, especially with regard to improving employment outcomes for individuals with visual disabilities, increasing the provision of pre-employment transition services to youth, building internal agency capacity and collaboration with WIOA partner programs, and increasing business engagement.

M. ORDER OF SELECTION

1. WHETHER THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WILL IMPLEMENT AND ORDER OF SELECTION. IF SO, DESCRIBE:

A. THE ORDER TO BE FOLLOWED IN SELECTING ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS TO BE PROVIDED VR SERVICES

The DSB VR program does not expect to implement an order of selection during Program Years 2020-2023.

B. THE JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ORDER

The DSB VR program does not expect to implement an order of selection during Program Years 2020-2023.

C. THE SERVICE AND OUTCOME GOALS

The DSB VR program does not expect to implement an order of selection during Program Years 2020-2023.

D. TIME WITHIN WHICH THESE GOALS MAY BE ACHIEVED FOR INDIVIDUALS IN EACH PRIORITY CATEGORY WITHIN THE ORDER; AND

The DSB VR program does not expect to implement an order of selection during Program Years 2020-2023.

E. HOW INDIVIDUALS WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES ARE SELECTED FOR SERVICES BEFORE ALL OTHER INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

The DSB VR program does not expect to implement an order of selection during Program Years 2020-2023.

2. 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 DSB VR program does not expect to implement an order of selection during Program Years 2020-2023.

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

DSB provides supported employment services for individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities under the age of 25, who require supported employment services following the achievement of a supported employment outcome. These services can be provided for youth for up to four years. DSB's supported employment grant funds are used to supplement funds provided under the State VR Services Program for supported employment services. These funds are used to provide supported employment services for up to 24 months and to supplement other VR services necessary to help individuals with the most significant disabilities find work in the integrated labor market.

1. DSB staff have increased collaboration with the NC Department of Public Instruction to build a better relationship and enhance services to the students. The two agencies meet monthly to discuss joint opportunities, issues, and to conduct strategic planning including developing combined trainings for staff.

2. DSB staff is working with the NC Department of Public Instruction to provide a training on DSB services for Exceptional Children Directors across the state to assist with increasing referrals and identifying those youth who may need supported employment services to meet their goal of employment.

3. DSB continues to make outreach and community awareness presentations regarding available resources for Pre-ETS students and youth with visual impairments and blindness a priority. A Pre-ETS Program flyer and a Transition Program flyer in English and Spanish were developed to enhance such efforts.

4. DSB has hired and trained Pre-Employment Transition Services Associates who are equipped to target potentially eligible students ages 14-21 years of age who may require pre-employment transition services. They are instructed to contact parents and teachers to assess need and desire for services, provide pre-employment transition services directly and document all activities regarding service provision. If desired, this position can also refer students to a VR counselor so they may apply for a full program of VR services leading to competitive integrated employment.

5. DSB will continue to conduct outreach to increase the number/percentage of eligible individuals served who are most significantly disabled and require supported employment services to achieve a successful competitive integrated employment outcome, including outreach to consumers who reside in rural areas who may also be underserved.

6. DSB will continue to provide vocational rehabilitation counselors with supported employment training to help them identify and refer individuals with the most significant disabilities for supported employment services.

7. The DSB program specialist for supported employment services will continue efforts to identify and expand the number of community rehabilitation program providers focusing on areas across that state which have limited resources.

8. DSB will continue to provide sensitivity and awareness training for community rehabilitation program staff and supported employment service providers pertaining to working with individuals who are blind or have visual impairments.

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

As incorporated into its policies concerning supported employment services, the DSB VR program first provides on-going support as appropriate for supported employment. Ongoing support includes services: (a) needed to support and maintain the individual in SE that are (b) based on a determination by the VR counselor of the individual's (including youth with most significant disabilities) needs as specified in an IPE; and (c) furnished from the time of job placement until transition to extended services, except as provided in post-employment status and, following transition, by one or more extended service providers throughout the individual's term of employment in a particular job placement or multiple placements, if those placements are provided under a program of transitional employment.

At the time of transition to extended services from an extended services provider, the VR program ensures through its contracts, agreements, and policies that extended services are provided by a state agency, a private nonprofit organization, through natural supports or any other appropriate resource other than VR, after the individual has made the transition from the state VR support. Extended services begin when (a) the individual is employed, (b) intensive training is completed, and (c) stabilization on the job has occurred. Individuals may be served for as long as there is a reasonable expectation that an extended services source will be identified during the course of rehabilitation. The DSB VR Program will only contract with supported employment service providers that give written commitment that they will provide extended services compliant with Federal regulations.

Ongoing support provided during extended services must include a minimum of twice-monthly monitoring at the work site to assess job stability unless under special circumstances, especially at the request of the individual, the IPE provides for off-site monitoring and based upon that assessment, the coordination or provision of specific services at or away from the work site, that are needed to maintain employment stability. If off-site monitoring is determined to be appropriate, it must, at a minimum, consist of two (2) face-to-face meetings with the client and

one employer contact monthly. These activities apply to all supported employment clients and not only those whose services are provided through funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities. Supported Employment services are also provided to youth with the most significant disabilities through Title 1 funds as well as through extended services, utilizing 100% state funds up to the 4-yr period or until such time the youth reaches the age of 25, whichever occurs first. Under this service provision, youth are provided with long-term job coaching services and follow-up in order for the increased potential of employment retention. Under Title I funds, youth are provided with community-based assessments, job development and placement along with job training/coaching in order to assist with employment stabilization and job continuum.

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.

The Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) VR program is collaborating with community rehabilitation programs and other agencies and organizations to provide extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities. Because the DSB VR program will only utilize community rehabilitation programs that give written commitment that they will provide extended services compliant with federal regulations as supported employment vendors, many of those community rehabilitation programs providing SE services also provide extended services under their service contract at no additional cost to the Division when other resources for extended services are not available. The *Request for Application* (RFA) is one of the key tools utilized for contract and program development, in which the entity submitting the application has completed much of the foundational work in leveraging and braiding resources from other public and private funds. And, through its continued participation on interagency committees and collaboration efforts, DSB will continue to work with community rehabilitation programs, and other organizations to leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.

O. STATE'S STRATEGIES

1. THE METHODS TO BE USED TO EXPAND AND IMPROVE SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

**Priority: Competitive integrated employment**

**Goal:** Increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with visual disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, underserved populations, and individuals with additional barriers to employment.

**Strategies:**

- Increase the use of work experiences, internships, apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities for consumers
- Assist consumers in exploring and developing opportunities for self-employment
- Increase the provision of soft-skills, independent living and assistive technology training for consumers
- Provide work incentives counseling for consumers who are seeking employment and receive Social Security benefits
- Continue to research and provide customized employment best practices and training for staff

- Provide training and resources for VR staff to enable them to develop better understanding and utilization of labor market information and tools to help consumers make informed decisions regarding vocational goals

**Goal:** Increase opportunities for training and employment services for adults with visual disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, and underserved populations.

**Strategies:**

- Increase sponsorship of vocational and academic training for adult consumers, particularly those who are minorities and underserved populations with most significant disabilities
- Expand assistive technology training resources for consumers

**Priority: Youth and students with disabilities**

**Goal:** Increase opportunities for training and employment services for youth with visual disabilities.

**Strategies:**

- Increase the provision of soft-skills, independent living and assistive technology training for consumers
- Research, identify and implement training and employment services models that have proven to be highly effective in helping youth with visual disabilities achieve positive vocational outcomes
- Increase the use of work experiences, internships, apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities

**Goal:** Increase the provision of pre-employment transition services for students with visual disabilities.

**Strategies:**

- Enhanced targeted outreach efforts to identify individuals who can benefit from pre-employment transition services
- Fill vacant pre-employment transition services associate positions to help identify potentially eligible students and increase the provision of pre-employment transition services
- Evaluate current pre-employment transition services delivery model to identify areas of improvement needed
- If warranted after the review, redesign and implement a pre-employment transition services delivery model that will better meet the needs of students with disabilities
- Continue to build relationships and partner with educational officials and educators to ensure mutual understanding of the opportunities WIOA provides for students with disabilities and the roles each partner plays in the provision of services
- Continue to collaborate with the school districts to maintain existing Third-Party Cooperative Agreements and seek opportunities to expand them across the state

**Priority: Business engagement**

**Goal:** Build stronger relationships and partnerships with businesses and government agencies to develop or expand work experiences, internships, and employment opportunities for adults and youth who are blind, visually impaired or deafblind.

**Strategies:**

- Develop branded outreach materials to market services to employers
- Increase staff participation in local chambers of commerce and business leadership networks to help build stronger relationships with business partners
- Increase the provision of business services for employers including disability-related in-service training, assistance with recruitment/pipeline development, assistance in identifying and providing services to retain employees with disabilities, assistive technology and information regarding financial incentives for hiring individuals who have disabilities
- Provide training for staff regarding evidence-based best practices pertaining to business engagement.

**Priority: Capacity building**

**Goal:** Increase internal capacity and develop the program infrastructure needed to improve service delivery for VR participants and employers.

**Strategies:**

- Research innovative and effective VR service delivery models.
- Reorganize the VR program staff structure as needed to improve service delivery for consumers and employers.
- Identify other division staff and resources that can be better utilized to support this effort.
- Provide staff training, equipment, materials and resources to facilitate more efficient and effective higher quality VR services.
- Collaborate with DPI, ECU and ECAC to provide staff training regarding deafblindness
- Collaborate with DPI, ECU and ECAC to provide staff training regarding Person-Centered Planning.

**Goal:** Increase collaboration with core WIOA and required program partners and community stakeholders to integrate and expand services for individuals with visual disabilities.

**Strategies:**

- Continue outreach efforts to inform and educate the partners and stakeholders about DSB and the needs of individuals who are blind, visually impaired or deafblind.
- Continue to promote DSB's presence in NCWorks Career Centers through regular visits and periodic meetings.
- Seek opportunities for division director and agency participation on the local workforce boards.
- Continue to work with WINTAC to complete integrated resource team/community academy training and implement this service delivery model that builds wrap-around services, including those provided by these partners, to meet the holistic and individualized needs of consumers seeking employment.

**Priority: Supported Employment**

**Goal:** Increase outreach to identify individuals who are most significantly disabled and require supported employment services to achieve a successful competitive integrated employment outcome including outreach to consumers who reside in rural areas who may also be underserved.

**Strategies:**

- Conduct more targeted outreach activities.
- Build and nurture business relationships with businesses and organizations that provide services and supports for individuals who will require supported or customized employment services to achieve competitive integrated employment to facilitate more referrals for VR services.

**Goal:** Provide supported employment training for new counselors.

**Strategies:**

- Provide training regarding the classification of most significantly disabled, impediments to employment, policies, procedures, and best practices pertaining to supported and customized employment, and available resources, i.e. community rehabilitation program providers, etc.

**Goal:** Continue efforts to identify and expand the number of community rehabilitation program providers focusing on areas across that state that have limited resources.

**Strategies:**

- Partner with existing or newly created community rehabilitation program providers who may have historically not provided services for individuals who have visual impairments to encourage and support the expansion of their services for consumers.
- Provide sensitivity and awareness training for community rehabilitation program staff and supported employment service providers pertaining to working with individuals who are blind or have visual impairments including exposure to assistive technology and adaptive devices.

## 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

Assessments of consumers' assistive technology needs and skills are conducted across the various stages in the rehabilitation process. Assistive technology is provided for individuals who require it to fully participate in training required in pursuit of their vocational goal and for employment. Assistive technology training is provided via individual and group instruction by agency staff and vendors. Individuals also benefit from the services and supports provided by the NC Assistive Technology Program which includes the use of loaner assistive technology and technology training.

## 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

As indicated in the most recent comprehensive statewide needs assessment, DSB appears to be achieving its goal of reaching and serving individuals with disabilities who are minorities. All DSB direct services staff are responsible for conducting outreach activities and this requirement

is included in their performance work plans. These activities are tracked and reported on a quarterly basis to the SRC. DSB will conduct more targeted outreach activities 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)

A formal cooperative agreement exists with the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI). The purpose of the agreement is to facilitate and coordinate the delivery of pre-employment transition services and other transition services as defined by WIOA and IDEA for students who are visually impaired, blind, or deafblind who need VR services to become employed. DPI informs local education agencies of services available from DSB and promotes referrals for students with disabilities who are in need of pre- employment transition services and/or VR transition services, including the development of an IPE. 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. DSB VR counselors participate in school systems' transition fairs as invited in order to meet potentially eligible students and to educate schools, students and parents on DSB services.

DSB's policy 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. The policy establishes that the coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, considering the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. DSB offers a wide variety of services to students with visual impairments or blindness in transition to the world of work. DSB provides transitional and supportive services that are not available through the local school systems.

DSB has hired and trained pre-employment transition services associates who are equipped to target potentially eligible students ages 14-21 years of age that may require pre-employment transition services. They are instructed to contact parents and teachers to assess need and desire for services, provide pre-employment transition services directly and document all activities regarding service provision. If desired, this position can also refer students to a VR counselor so that they can then apply for a full program of VR services leading to competitive integrated employment.

DSB staff understands the changing needs of our youth and the major impacts that the pandemic presented for all, we felt it was of great importance to create a platform for Young Adults who are involved with Division of Services for the Blind to connect and share resources while building a community. The Youth Empowerment Meeting takes place once a month and was implemented 6 months ago and has given our Youth a wonderful platform to connect and be heard. Self-advocacy issues are major parts of each meeting as well as sharing resources.

DSB continues to make outreach and community awareness of available resources for Pre-ETS students and youth with visual impairments and blindness continued to be a priority for DSB staff. A Pre-ETS Program flyer and a Transition Program flyer in English and Spanish were developed to enhance such efforts.

DSB Transition staff has engaged in countless collaborations with each other throughout the different offices/caseloads and started to work as a team to provide trainings for our Youth. For example, staff from two different district office have come together and provide group youth training such as Pre-ETS activities or establishing a virtual job club.

DSB staff have increased collaboration with NC Department of Public Instructions to increase collaboration and services to the students by establishing monthly meetings between DSB and DPI, planning combined trainings for staff as well as working on actions to increasing referrals for students to DSB VR.

## 5. IF APPLICABLE, PLANS FOR ESTABLISHING, DEVELOPING, OR IMPROVING COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE

Rehabilitation professionals who were surveyed during the recent comprehensive statewide needs assessment identified some general needs with regard to establishing, developing, or improving CRPs in North Carolina that were not specific to services for individuals with visual impairments. The needs identified included staff training, addressing the limited number of CRPs in the state especially in rural counties, and improving communication between providers and state agencies. Needs that were specific to individuals with visual impairments, included training for CRP staff on how to better serve the DSB population and the use of assistive technology. DSB will employ the following strategies to help address these needs.

- Partner with existing or newly created community rehabilitation program providers who may have historically not provided services for individuals who have visual impairments to encourage and support the expansion of their services for consumers

Provide sensitivity and awareness training for community rehabilitation program staff and supported employment service providers pertaining to working with individuals who are blind or have visual impairments including exposure to assistive technology and adaptive devices.

## 6. STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF THE STATE WITH RESPECT TO THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

DSB and DVRS are entering the baseline year for the performance accountability measures under section 116 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. The Divisions realize that to improve performance on the indicator concerning median quarterly earnings, they must help consumers to prepare for higher paying positions through credential attainment and measurable skills gains. DSB and DVRS are currently looking for ways to adjust programs, services, and support to accomplish this in a fiscally responsible manner. VR staff are encouraged to develop the full potential of the client by providing comprehensive assessments, equipment, and training. Individuals who receive an effective, comprehensive plan of services are much better positioned to reach their full potential in meaningful employment as well as to have better retention rates.

DSB has made it a priority to increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with visual disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, underserved populations, and individuals with additional barriers to employment. DSB is engaged in strategic collaborations and partnerships with organizations such as, ABLR, and Carolina Fintech to provide training for consumers in high demand occupations to create additional avenues to competitive integrated employment. Another strategy related to this goal is to increase the use of work experiences, internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training opportunities for consumers. DSB staff have attended numerous trainings to obtain a better understanding of the availability of apprenticeships in NC. A strategy implemented to help counselors obtain required data about consumer employment post exit is to assign support staff to assist with gathering this information. DSB also utilizes various sources of wage data to assist in this effort. DSB is also making a more concerted effort to provide consumers work incentives counseling. One staff member was recently given the opportunity to complete training and is

now a certified Community Partner Work Incentives Counselor and the state legislature has granted the division one FTE position to be allocated for a work incentives counselor. The Division of Services for the Blind also recognizes that the need for assistive technology instruction for people in North Carolina who are visually impaired, blind, or deafblind has grown significantly and is expected to continue to grow. The types of technologies available which enable this population to engage in the community more fully, educational, and vocational pursuits as well as to live more independently in their daily lives constantly increases. Due to the rapid pace of change with assistive technology, the Division may not always have the capacity with current staffing to meet this expanding need. Therefore, we have created a policy and procedures to utilize assistive technology instructor vendors to help fill gaps in available services. To ensure that we hire qualified vendors to provide assistive technology services, vendors are screened according to standard criteria per type of assistive technology to determine what levels of skill (beginner, intermediate, and advanced) they may be hired to teach on PC's, Mac, iOS mobile, Android, and Braille Technologies.

DSB has put emphasis on increasing the accuracy reporting of credential attainment and measurable skills gain by staff. Training of staff is a strategy that has been deployed to assist with meeting this goal. DSB provides a monthly training to all VR staff including counselors, support staff, and specialists to provide support and assistance with understanding how to report accurately all credential attainment and measurable skills gain. Also, an individualized training is scheduled each month for new VR staff to increase their knowledge of WIOA during the onboarding process. The annual work plan goals and tasks for VR Counselors, Transition Counselors and Community Employment Specialists are being revised for PY2022 to better reflect WIOA measures.

## 7. STRATEGIES FOR ASSISTING OTHER COMPONENTS OF THE STATEWIDE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM IN ASSISTING INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

DSB will continue to take advantage of the opportunities provided by WIOA to collaborate with partners within the statewide workforce development system. The following strategies will also be employed to strengthen the partnerships to assist individuals who have visual disabilities.

- Continue outreach efforts to inform and educate the partners and stakeholders about DSB and the needs of individuals who are blind, visually impaired or deafblind.
- Continue to support efforts to create and utilize methodology for receipt/exchange of electronic referrals, information and data.
- Promote equal, effective, and meaningful participation by individuals with disabilities receiving workforce development system services in all the 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.
- Collaborate with partners to identify 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).
- Continue to promote DSB's presence in NCWorks Career Centers through regular visits and periodic meetings with identified partners of the workforce development system.
- Seek opportunities for division director and agency participation on the local workforce boards.
- Continue to work with WINTAC to complete integrated resource team/community academy training and implement this service delivery model that builds wrap-around

services, including those provided by these partners, to meet the holistic and individualized needs of consumers seeking employment.

8. HOW THE AGENCY'S STRATEGIES WILL BE USED TO:

A. ACHIEVE GOALS AND PRIORITIES BY THE STATE, CONSISTENT WITH THE COMPREHENSIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT;

As indicated in the most recent comprehensive statewide needs assessment, DSB appears to be achieving its goal of reaching and serving individuals with disabilities who are minorities. All DSB direct services staff are responsible for conducting outreach activities and this requirement is included in their performance work plans. These activities are tracked and reported on a quarterly basis to the DSB State Rehabilitation Council and the Commission for the Blind. DSB will conduct more targeted outreach activities 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. This requirement will be added to the staff's work plan.

Rehabilitation professionals who were surveyed during the recent comprehensive statewide needs assessment identified some general needs with regard to establishing, developing, or improving CRP's in North Carolina. The results from this survey which were not specific to services for individuals with visual impairments included the need for CRP staff training, addressing the limited number of CRP's in the state available to the people we serve - especially in rural counties, and improving communication between providers and state agencies. Needs that were specific to individuals with visual impairments included training for CRP staff on how to better serve the DSB population and the use of assistive technology. DSB will employ the following strategies to help address the above: partner with existing or newly created community rehabilitation program providers who may have historically not provided services for individuals who have visual impairments to encourage and support the expansion of their services for consumers and provide sensitivity and awareness training for community rehabilitation program staff and supported employment service providers pertaining to working with individuals who are blind or have visual impairments including exposure to assistive technology and adaptive devices. During FFY 2020 – 2021, service agreements were developed with four additional community rehabilitation programs.

DSB will continue to take advantage of the opportunities provided by WIOA to collaborate with partners within the statewide workforce development system. The following strategies will also be deployed to strengthen the partnerships to assist individuals who have visual disabilities. DSB will continue outreach efforts to inform and educate the partners and stakeholders about DSB and the needs of individuals who are blind, visually impaired, or deafblind. DSB will make it a goal to promote equal, effective, and meaningful participation by individuals with disabilities receiving workforce development system services in all the 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. DSB will collaborate with partners to identify 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). DSB will continue to promote DSB's presence in NCWorks Career Centers through regular visits and periodic meetings with identified partners of the workforce development system. DSB will seek opportunities for division director and agency participation on the local workforce boards. DSB will continue to work with the technical assistance centers for guidance and support to complete integrated resource team/community academy training and implement this service delivery model that builds wrap-around services, including those provided by these partners, to meet the holistic and individualized needs of consumers seeking employment.

B. SUPPORT INNOVATION AND EXPANSION ACTIVITIES; AND

A perceived barrier for consumers who receive Social Security benefits and are interested in pursuing employment is the potential loss of these benefits. DSB recognized the need to obtain dedicated resources to provide work incentives counseling for consumers. This need was acknowledged and emphasized during DSB's participation in the RSA- funded technical assistance project "E3TC" Empower, Educate, Employ Targeted Communities. NC DSB and NC DVRS have jointly submitted an expansion budget request for work incentive counselor positions to serve consumers of both agencies and plan to utilize innovation and expansion funds to help accomplish this initiative during the period covered by this plan.

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.

- Continue to provide information in the preferred language and accessible format of individuals seeking services and participating in VR programs.
- Ensure program websites and electronic communications are accessible.
- Continue efforts to ensure agency offices, facilities and training provided and/or sponsored by the division are accessible to program participants.
- Promote equal, effective, and meaningful participation by individuals with disabilities receiving workforce development system services in all the 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.

P. EVALUATION AND REPORTS OF PROGRESS: VR AND SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT GOALS

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

**PY 2020 Updates:**

**Priority: Competitive integrated employment**

**Goal:** Increase competitive integrated employment opportunities and outcomes for individuals with visual disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, underserved populations, and individuals with additional barriers to employment.

**Strategies:**

- Increase the use of work experiences, internships, apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities for consumers
- Assist consumers in exploring and developing opportunities for self-employment
- Increase the provision of soft-skills, independent living and assistive technology training for consumers
- Provide work incentives counseling for consumers who are seeking employment and receive Social Security benefits
- Continue to research and provide customized employment best practices and training for staff

- Provide training and resources for VR staff to enable them to develop better understanding and utilization of labor market information and tools to help consumers make informed decisions regarding vocational goals

**Progress Evaluation**: In FFY 2021, DSB VR staff provided services to 645 consumers with most significant disabilities. DSB sponsored 24 work experiences for 20 different consumers. These experiences were in a variety of workplace settings. Consumers worked in various roles to learn skills ranging from case management, engineering, teaching techniques, customer service, media production, and basic workplace expectations. Community-based work adjustment services were provided to 70 consumers. Supported Employment Services were provided to 23 consumers. The average earnings/wages for consumers closed in competitive integrated employment was $14.78. In SFY 2021, 526 DSB clients were served by Assistive Technology field staff. At the DSB Career and Training Center, 40 individuals took technology classes and 15 received specialized technology-only training. A five-day virtual interactive event, Blind and Socially Savvy, was provided for students age 14-21 during FFY 2021. Blind and Socially Savvy is an innovative soft skills development and leadership training program specifically designed to meet the needs of blind and low-vision students. Employment related blindness topics are a special focus in this highly interactive program. Lastly, NC DSB's expansion budget request for a work incentive counselor position has been approved. Funds have been reserved for this innovation and expansion initiative.

**Goal:** Increase opportunities for training and employment services for adults with visual disabilities, particularly those with most significant disabilities, and underserved populations.

**Strategies:**

- Increase sponsorship of vocational and academic training for adult consumers, particularly those who are minorities and underserved populations with most significant disabilities
- Expand assistive technology training resources for consumers

**Progress Evaluation:** In FFY 2021, DSB sponsored various trainings for 547 consumers, including post-secondary training and vocational training. Of the 547 consumers, 278 consumers were minorities. The Measurable Skill Gains Rate for PY 2020 in Q4: 25.7% which was a slight decrease from what was reported in PY2019 Q4: 28.0%. In SFY 2021, 526 DSB clients were served by Assistive Technology field staff. At the DSB Career and Training Center, 40 individuals took technology classes and 15 received specialized technology-only training.

**Priority: Youth and students with disabilities**

**Goal:** Increase opportunities for training and employment services for youth with visual disabilities.

**Strategies:**

- Increase the provision of soft-skills, independent living and assistive technology training for consumers
- Research, identify and implement training and employment services models that have proven to be highly effective in helping youth with visual disabilities achieve positive vocational outcomes
- Increase the use of work experiences, internships, apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities

**Progress Evaluation:** During FFY 2021, 542 students ages 14-24 were served by DSB's transition program. Additionally, the Blind and Socially Savvy program was provided for

students age 14-21 during FFY 2021. This is a soft skills development and leadership training program specifically designed to meet the needs of blind and low-vision students.

**Goal:** Increase the provision of pre-employment transition services for students with visual disabilities.

**Strategies:**

- Enhanced targeted outreach efforts to identify individuals who can benefit from pre-employment transition services
- Fill vacant pre-employment transition services associate positions to help identify potentially eligible students and increase the provision of pre-employment transition services
- Evaluate current pre-employment transition services delivery model to identify areas of improvement needed
- If warranted after the review, redesign and implement a pre-employment transition services delivery model that will better meet the needs of students with disabilities
- Continue to build relationships and partner with educational officials and educators to ensure mutual understanding of the opportunities WIOA provides for students with disabilities and the roles each partner plays in the provision of services
- Continue to collaborate with the school districts to maintain existing Third-Party Cooperative Agreements and seek opportunities to expand them across the state

**Progress Evaluation:** Outreach and community awareness of available resources for Pre-ETS students and youth with visual impairments and blindness continued to be a priority for DSB staff. A Pre-ETS Program flyer and a Transition Program flyer in English and Spanish were developed to enhance such efforts. Transition staff had the opportunity to educate and clarify student referrals through a virtual webinar with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and collaborate with school staff on our Pre-ETS and Transition programs and activities throughout the year. DSB revised the job posting for the Pre-ETS Associates position to better identify the specific skill set needed for this role which resulted in increased interest and response for this position. Pre-ETS Associates assist with identifying potentially eligible students and help increase the provision of pre-employment transition services. DSB has engaged with other states and the technical assistance centers regarding Pre-ETS delivery models. In addition, the Rehabilitation Program Specialist has been meeting with DPI staff to increase collaboration.

**Priority: Business engagement**

**Goal:** Build stronger relationships and partnerships with businesses and government agencies to develop or expand work experiences, internships, and employment opportunities for adults and youth who are blind, visually impaired or deafblind.

**Strategies:**

- Develop branded outreach materials to market services to employers
- Increase staff participation in local chambers of commerce and business leadership networks to help build stronger relationships with business partners
- Increase the provision of business services for employers including disability-related in-service training, assistance with recruitment/pipeline development, assistance in identifying and providing services to retain employees with disabilities, assistive technology and information regarding financial incentives for hiring individuals who have disabilities

- Provide training for staff regarding evidence-based best practices pertaining to business engagement.

**Progress Evaluation:** The agency's progress on this goal has been hampered by the pandemic. Despite the restrictions and limitations caused by the pandemic, agency staff have continued efforts to build and maintain strong relationships with business partners. Staff have also continued to work with our NCWorks partners. Additionally, staff participated in virtual and in-person networking meetings offered by local Chambers of Commerce.

**Priority: Capacity building**

**Goal:** Increase internal capacity and develop the program infrastructure needed to improve service delivery for VR participants and employers.

**Strategies:**

- Research innovative and effective VR service delivery models.
- Reorganize the VR program staff structure as needed to improve service delivery for consumers and employers.
- Identify other division staff and resources that can be better utilized to support this effort.
- Provide staff training, equipment, materials and resources to facilitate more efficient and effective higher quality VR services.
- Collaborate with DPI, ECU and ECAC to provide staff training regarding deafblindness
- Collaborate with DPI, ECU and ECAC to provide staff training regarding Person-Centered Planning.

**Progress Evaluation:** Agency leadership began working with the division's human resources unit regarding possible reallocations of VR counselor positions to counselor-in-charge positions to better meet business needs as well as to provide more VR counselors a promotional career path. During the pandemic, vocational rehabilitation staff were equipped with new laptops and docking stations to enable them to function more effectively remotely. The Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC) staff collaborated with DSB staff to provide Deafblind 101 training for 58 DSB staff in June 2021.

**Goal:** Increase collaboration with core WIOA and required program partners and community stakeholders to integrate and expand services for individuals with visual disabilities.

**Strategies:**

- Continue outreach efforts to inform and educate the partners and stakeholders about DSB and the needs of individuals who are blind, visually impaired or deafblind.
- Continue to promote DSB's presence in NCWorks Career Centers through regular visits and periodic meetings.
- Seek opportunities for division director and agency participation on the local workforce boards.
- Continue to work with WINTAC to complete integrated resource team/community academy training and implement this service delivery model that builds wrap-around services, including those provided by these partners, to meet the holistic and individualized needs of consumers seeking employment.

**Progress Evaluation:** Collaboration continued to be a priority for DSB staff during FFY 2021. DSB staff attempted to maintain presence at the NCWorks Career and Training Centers, however this was limited due to the pandemic. DSB staff attended partnership meetings in person or virtually if offered. The Division had a final meeting with the WINTAC representatives, prior to the end of their contractional period, regarding the work they were assisting DSB with pertaining to the integrated resource team service delivery model to ensure the agency staff understood and are comfortable with moving forward with this effort. Dialogue began with the Secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services and the NCWorks Commission to designate a position on the Commission for one of the directors of the state's vocational rehabilitation programs. DSB's director was appointed to the Commission by the governor in September 2021.

**Priority: Supported Employment**

**Goal:** Increase outreach to identify individuals who are most significantly disabled and require supported employment services to achieve a successful competitive integrated employment outcome including outreach to consumers who reside in rural areas who may also be underserved.

**Strategies:**

- Conduct more targeted outreach activities.
- Build and nurture business relationships with businesses and organizations that provide services and supports for individuals who will require supported or customized employment services to achieve competitive integrated employment to facilitate more referrals for VR services.

**Progress Evaluation:** For FFY 2021, DSB sponsored Supported Employment services for 23 consumers. The prior year there were 44 consumers sponsored for Supported Employment cases however, the pandemic caused many consumers to be hesitant to move forward with services involving an employment setting. DSB had 49 approved vendors available to provide Supported Employment to consumers who are most significantly disabled; 4 new vendors were added to the approved vendor list this FFY 2021.

**Goal:** Provide supported employment training for new counselors.

**Strategies:**

- Provide training regarding the classification of most significantly disabled, impediments to employment, policies, procedures, and best practices pertaining to supported and customized employment, and available resources, i.e., community rehabilitation program providers, etc.

**Progress Evaluation:** Mandatory Best Practices training has been provided to new counselors. This training is largely focused on assisting consumers to address and overcome barriers to employment and identifying career-based employment. A specific component pertaining to supported employment is included in the training. The agency modified policies and procedures to enable service providers to render some services remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Goal:** Continue efforts to identify and expand the number of community rehabilitation program providers focusing on areas across that state that have limited resources.

**Strategies:**

- Partner with existing or newly created community rehabilitation program providers who may have historically not provided services for individuals who have visual impairments to encourage and support the expansion of their services for consumers.

- Provide sensitivity and awareness training for community rehabilitation program staff and supported employment service providers pertaining to working with individuals who are blind or have visual impairments including exposure to assistive technology and adaptive devices.

**Progress Evaluation:** DSB has 49 approved vendors that can provide supported employment to consumers who are most significantly disabled, four were added to the approved vendor list during FFY 2021. Sensitivity and awareness training for community rehabilitation program (CRP) staff and supported employment service providers pertaining to working with individuals who are blind or have visual impairments is known as New Employee Sensitivity Training (NEST). This training typically takes place twice a year at the DSB Career and Training Center. Due to the pandemic, this training was modified and provided remotely during FFY 2021. CRP staff were offered an opportunity to participate in the training and elected not to at that time. However, our Assistive Technology Consultants and Deaf Blind Specialists provided four trainings to one of the newly added CRPs to increase their knowledge of assistive technology, adaptive devices, and working with individuals who have dual sensory loss.

**PY 2020 Updates: The following goals, priorities and strategies are retired.**

**Priority 1 (Retired)**: 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.

**Progress Evaluation:** In order to enhance job opportunities for consumers as well as to build relationships with employers, DSB's VR program focused on increasing the number of work experiences for clients on a statewide basis. This number has had a slow but steady increase each year and in PY 2018, consumers participated in 131 work experiences, in comparison to prior PY 2017 with a count of 125 work experiences completed. Internships for consumers exiting post-secondary programs has also been a stable. Although there were only a few completed statewide in PY 2018, efforts to provide this service to consumers are encouraged in counselor trainings. Community-based work adjustment services are also provided to consumers. The following reflect results in PY2017- 2019 in terms of successful outcomes and active program participation for consumers: successful closures of SE cases: PY 2017 (6); Year PY 2018 (4); PY 2019 (4). Although there appears to have been some decline in the number of successfully closed SE cases over the past few years, this trend is expected to have a slow but steady increase. This prediction is due to the number of cases served under a Supported Employment plan during PY 2019 (72 clients).While substantial services are being provided on an on-going basis, the successful outcome is probable unless otherwise impacted by Executive Order #121 (temporary closing of businesses due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

Consumers who are received community-based work adjustment services from PY 2017-2019 are as follows: PY 2017(13), PY 2018 (31), PY 2019 (36). This was great progress since 2017 and continued growth is expected. As a result of these collective efforts, in PY 2018, the average wages for consumers increased to $13.83 per hour. With regard to employment outcomes with benefits, the percentage rate for PY 2018 increased by more than 100 percent (baseline 2018-192). Of this number, 192 had benefits during employment with 58 having received benefits through their employer.

**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.

**Progress Evaluation:** Training has been provided to the VR Counselors in their Annual VR Counselor Training as well as to new counselors in Best Practices Training, both provided as a mandatory learning initiative. These trainings are largely focused on assisting consumers to

address and overcome barriers to employment and identifying career-based employment. Training to staff who primarily provide employment services; inclusive of job development and placement have completed additional learning opportunities focused on strategies for developing employment with employers in national industries which traditionally possess opportunities for career advancement, higher wages and substantial health and retirement benefit programs. Monthly conference calls were implemented by the rehabilitation program specialist for Employment Services with staff who provide employment services to clients for open discussions on local barriers, job development strategies and review/discussion of monthly employment reporting from these staff. The chief of rehabilitation field services also attended national training conferences, which were offered through two universities for the purpose of creating job driven strategies for transition-aged and adult consumers. One of these universities worked in alignment with the National Research and Training entity which had completed a comprehensive research project through Mississippi State University to review barriers and factors which impeded and supported increased employment outcomes. Strategic information learned within these platforms were brought back to counseling staff and thoroughly discussed in the annual VR Counselor Training. Successes in this goal area can also be measured by the high degree consumer satisfaction reported overall with the quality of services received as well as an increase in consumer wages overall, which emphasizes improved strategies in job placement.

**Goal 1.3.** Increase the use of supported employment services to facilitate successful employment outcomes for persons with the most significant disabilities. The 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.

**Progress Evaluation:** Currently serving 77 individuals in SE, according to BEAM. Prior to PY 2017, we partnered with twelve providers of SE services. Six SE Providers were added during PY 2017 and four were added PY 2018 for a total of 22 CRPs providing services at the end of PY 2018. Prior to PY 2017 there were four contracts with CRPS for the provision of extended services. During the following two years, six new contracts with CRPS were added for the provision of SE extended services. The rehabilitation program specialist has recently located two additional CRPs in rural areas of the state (Pitt County areas) who are interested in providing SE services to our consumers. Training for these providers is planned in January 2020.

**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. The 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.

**Progress Evaluation:** Attendance to a holistic approach for consumers is a focus of the DSB VR Program. This area is attended through by recognition of secondary conditions and the impact that it has on the individual in addition to their primary visual condition(s). In order to engage counseling staff in the holistic approach, case reviews completed by the chief of RFS are completed annually with a follow-up on results to staff. Case plans are reviewed thoroughly and should address all areas of the consumer that are not stable or may pose a threat to the success of their rehabilitation program. Attention of counseling staff to this area has improved significantly over the past year as a result of this effort. Satisfaction surveys are completed randomly by contract services and the results reflect positive levels of consumer satisfaction overall with the DSB VR program; 90.6% felt that their needs (e.g., additional schooling, transportation, medical treatment, etc.) were identified properly which led to their becoming

successfully employed. Ninety-two percent of survey respondents reported being satisfied with their overall experience with DSB.

**Priority 2 (Retired):** 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 one percent (baseline 2013 – 429 individuals).

**Progress Evaluation:** Assistive technology is constantly evolving. Assistive technology staff meets yearly for in-service training to maintain expertise in providing AT services to blind, visually impaired, and deaf-blind consumers. In PY 2018, there were more than **620** DSB VR clients served by assistive technology field staff which is a substantial increase from prior year of approximately over a 30 percent increase.

**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. Because of the ever-changing types and updates to the area of assistive technology, there presents a constant need for training and research on need awareness.

**Progress Evaluation:** Assistive technology staff meets yearly for in-service training to maintain expertise in providing AT services to blind, visually impaired, and deafblind consumers. This year, training was provided on the impact of refractive errors, Echo Dot, NVDA, Windows 10 Narrator, impact of Pre-Employment Transition Services on AT services, new low vision devices, JAWS refresher, and Zoom Text Fusion highlights. There are other opportunities for AT training randomly provided to AT staff upon registration on various training platforms; to include, state-leveled LMS system and through private vendors; i.e., American Federation for the Blind (AFB).

**Priority 3 (Retired):** 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 two percent (baseline for FFY2013 – 310).

**Progress Evaluation:** During PY 2018, 296 students between the ages of 14-21 were served by DSBs transition program. Although there was a slight decrease in the numbers served, this number does not include the number of students that received pre-employment transition services who were "potentially eligible" for services and may later apply for the transition program. Also, consideration should be given to the increase in programmatic transition services through contracts for providing pre-employment transition services and through over private vendors for summer programs.

**Goal 3.2.** DSB will provide continuing education training for transition program staff.

**Progress Evaluation:** Training to VR transition staff is a large focus of DSB as well. Annual VR counselor training as well as to new counselors in BEST PRACTICES are provided to transition counselors along with individualized training and job shadowing to new transition staff by the rehabilitation program specialist for transition and seasoned community employment specialist, with guidance from the Division's Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services.

**Goal 3.3.** Rehabilitation Counselors will increase their awareness of opportunities for internships and work experiences for transition age students.

**Progress Evaluation:** These trainings are largely focused on assisting transition consumers to address and overcome barriers to employment and identifying career-based employment. The annual trainings are provided by the chief of rehabilitation field services to all DSB VR Counselors. In addition to DSB internal trainings, transition staff have opportunities that are regularly taken advantage of for participation in trainings and conferences offered by the NC Department of Public Instruction at various locations around the state. Transition and VR counselors also attend employment-focused trainings in which they learn about internships, work experiences and the possibility of exploring apprenticeships, often available through partnerships with NCWorks.

**Priority 4 (Retired):** 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.

**Progress Evaluation:** At this time, DSB does not have the capacity to enter outreach data into BEAM due to limitations in developing the system. The agency is preparing to move transition to a new, more developed case management system which will likely include outreach data. In PY 2018, 267 outreaches were completed. Of these events, 245 minorities were in attendance.

**Goal 4.2.** DSB will develop marketing opportunities to targeted audiences regarding specific agency programs.

**Progress Evaluation:** DSB has identified and assigned staff to focus on outreach activities on a statewide basis. This is with the goal of focusing on specific underserved populations who may have unique needs based on their location and availability of resources. The division's outreach specialists identify targeted outreach opportunities in the community as well as creating opportunities for DSB initiated community events, i.e., job fairs.

**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.

**Progress Evaluation:** DSB has identified and assigned staff to focus on outreach activities with emphasis on veterans with disabilities. Information on services to veterans is distributed to staff weekly. Much of the information shared with staff who work with the veteran population is focused on resources, ticket to work for those who receive disability benefits and local training events as well as learning opportunities available via webcasts. The staff identified to work with outreach to this population is also the agencies' program specialist for assistive technology and the deafblind population. This is an advantageous alignment of staff to provide services to meet the needs of the veteran population. DSB has also participated in and has begun conducting job fairs on a statewide basis. Although there is much work to be done in this area for widespread outreach, there has been some great participation from employers and consumers in these events. Some collaboration is done with local NCWorks Career Centers and other agencies that provide disability-related employment services.

**Goal 4.4.** DSB will continually seek and identify ways in which to reach the growing minority populations across North Carolina.

**Progress Evaluation:** These efforts are exercised through the many ongoing outreach events that DSB staff participate in throughout the state. Rehabilitation staff have a regular presence at many of the NCWorks Career Centers, schools throughout the state, and reach out to programs designed to work with individuals with disabilities who may otherwise not be aware of the DSB

programs. Regular contacts are also made with physicians throughout the state to educate them about agency services and solicit referrals.

**Priority 5 (Retired):** 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.

**Progress Evaluation:** DSB area supervisors and the chief of rehabilitation program field services complete quality assurance reviews for counselors. Feedback is provided with corrections to necessary areas. Counselors are required to submit monthly reports to their supervisors to reflect the monthly number of consumers being served and other relevant information. Other evaluations are completed monthly related to service provision per office and area of the state along with the costs expended per service for consumers. Continuous ways to measure program effectiveness is continuously being evaluated and research by agency administrators.

**Goal 5.1.** To provide consistent and accurate data using the new case management system, BEAM, to assess program performance. Measurable criteria are the program will be in place and staff will have received training by the end of FFY2015.

**Progress Evaluation:** Monitoring of case for compliance is reviewed bi-monthly from the area and district supervisors along with the chief of rehabilitation field services, who receives reports per area in this regard. Training to staff for BEAM functioning with regard to staff performance is offered in yearly VR Counselor training. BEAM training is also offered intermittently as the need arises by the system administrator for DSB. To date, all VR staff have completed training on how to complete activities within the system required for their job duties.

**Goal 5.2.** To provide holistic, consistent, and accurate methods of quality assurance and program evaluation. Measurable 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.

**Progress Evaluation:** BEAM has provided a platform for extensive data to be collected and WIOA-based data is reported quarterly. This data gives a comprehensive look at the services being received by consumers and the associated costs. Through these means, it is easier to view the level and degree of services received per consumer and collectively for consumers across the board. This allows administration to better plan for changes needed in areas of need as well as identify areas that have grown. DSB has regular leadership meetings which are often used to discuss program performance and problematic areas. This provides a collective and open forum amongst leaders of the division to brainstorm on programmatic adjustments that may be beneficial.

B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Please reference p. 1. A. above

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

Please reference p.1.A above

B. DESCRIBE THE FACTORS THAT IMPEDED THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE GOALS AND PRIORITIES

Please reference p. 1. A. above

3. THE VR PROGRAM'S PERFORMANCE ON THE PERFORMANCE ACCOUNTABILITY INDICATORS UNDER SECTION 116 OF WIOA

DSB Vocational Rehabilitation Program performance measures for PY 2020

| | |
|---|---|
| Measurable Skills Gains State Level | 30.3% |
| Measurable Skills Gains NC-Blind | 37.4% |
| Employment Rate Q2 State Level | 44.1% |
| Employment Rate Q2 NC-Blind | 34.4% |
| Employment Rate Q4 State Level | 34.3% |
| Employment Rate Q4 NC-Blind | 42.4% |
| Median Earnings State Level | $2,973 |
| Median Earnings NC-Blind | $5,257 |
| Credential Attainment Rate State Level | 26.3% |
| Credential Attainment Rate NC-Blind | 31.8% |

4. HOW THE FUNDS RESERVED FOR INNOVATION AND EXPANSION (I&E) ACTIVITIES WERE UTILIZED

In PY 2017 and 2018, innovation and expansion funds were applied towards the operations and support costs of the State Rehabilitation Council. Additionally, funds were contributed toward the collaborative development of NC Careers, an on-line career exploration tool that will have NC-specific career information and should also lead to a source of referrals and assist counselors with the provision of career guidance that will be a continuation of early career counseling they receive as early as intermediate/middle school.

During FFY 2021, NC DSB's expansion budget request for a work incentive counselor position was approved and an FTE allocated to the division. Funds have been reserved for this innovation and expansion initiative.

Q. QUALITY, SCOPE, AND EXTENT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

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

DSB purchases supported employment services from CRPs and offers supported employment services to eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities statewide including high school students participating in the DSB's transition programs. The funding for this program is from Title I funds and extended services are provided through separate funding. DSB has recently contracted with more supported employment services providers which allows eligible individuals to have more choices available to them for supported employment services to assist them in reaching their employment goals.

Services rendered by CRPs that provide VR and supported employment services for individuals with the most significant disabilities who are pursuing supported employment outcomes in competitive integrated employment include: situational assessments and employment plan

development; job development and job placement services; job coaching and supports to help consumers learn and stabilize on the job performance.

2. THE TIMING OF TRANSITION TO EXTENDED SERVICES

For DSB, transition occurs when individuals work successfully without the provision of substantial services for at least 90 days. Extended follow-along services must be immediately available to preclude any interruption in the provision of the ongoing support needed to maintain employment. The expanded scope of supported employment long-term supports requires a continuation of DSB's involvement to assist with the coordination and collaboration with the CRPs, employers, families and natural supports.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (BLIND) CERTIFICATIONS

1. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE,) IS AUTHORIZED TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 (REHABILITATION ACT), AS AMENDED BY WIOA[14], AND ITS SUPPLEMENT UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT[15];

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE

North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Services for the Blind

2. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE I OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES, THE (ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY)[16] AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE VR SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[17] , THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[18] , POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER SECTION 111 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF VR SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY

NC Department of Health and Human Services

3. AS A CONDITION FOR THE RECEIPT OF FEDERAL FUNDS UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AGREES TO OPERATE AND ADMINISTER THE STATE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN[19] , THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[20] , POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES ESTABLISHED BY THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION. FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER TITLE VI ARE USED SOLELY FOR THE PROVISION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE SUPPLEMENT TO THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN;

4. THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY AND/OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO PERFORM THE FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE REGARDING THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

5. THE STATE LEGALLY MAY CARRY OUT EACH PROVISION OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

6. ALL PROVISIONS OF THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT ARE CONSISTENT WITH STATE LAW.

7. THE (ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY UNDER STATE LAW TO RECEIVE, HOLD, AND DISBURSE FEDERAL FUNDS MADE AVAILABLE UNDER THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT;

ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Cynthia Speight

8. THE (ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND THE SUPPLEMENT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Director

9. THE AGENCY THAT SUBMITS THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT HAS ADOPTED OR OTHERWISE FORMALLY APPROVED THE PLAN AND ITS SUPPLEMENT.

FOOTNOTES

CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

| | |
|---|---|
| Signatory information | Cynthia Speight, is the current Director of the Division of Services for the Blind |
| Name of Signatory | Cynthia Speight |
| Title of Signatory | Director |
| Date Signed | March 8, 2022 |

ASSURANCES

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| 1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. | |
| 2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case | |

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140. | |
| 3. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: | |
| 3.a. The establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 3.b. The establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable (A or B must be selected): | |
| 3.b.(A) "is an independent State commission" (Yes/No) | No |
| 3.b.(B) "has established a State Rehabilitation Council" (Yes/No) | Yes |
| 3.c. Consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 3.d. The financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3) | |
| 3.e. The local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds (Yes/No) | No |
| 3.f. The shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs (Yes/No) | No |

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| 3.g. Statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? (Yes/No) See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan | No |
| 3.h. The descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 3.i. All required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 3.j. The requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 3.k. The compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 3.l. The reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities | |
| 3.m. The submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will: | |
| 4.a. Comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4.b. Impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of | |

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4.c. Provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (Yes/No) | Yes |
| 4.d. Determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4.e. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4.g. Provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4.h. Comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by section 101(a)(14)of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 4.i. Meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs | |
| 4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State, | |
| 4.j.i. Has developed and will implement, | |
| 4.j.i.I. Strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and | |
| 4.j.i.II. Strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for | |

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and | |
| 4.j.ii. Has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25)) | |
| 5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement: | |
| 5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 5.c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act | |
| 6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program: | |
| 6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services | |

| The State Plan must include | Include |
|---|---|
| to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 7. Provision of Supported Employment Services: | Yes |
| 7.a. The Designated State Agency Assures That it Will Provide Supported Employment Services as Defined in Section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 7.b. The designated State agency assures that: | |
| 7.b.i. The comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act | |
| 7.b.ii. An individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act | |

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

| Performance Indicators | PY 2022 Expected Level | PY 2022 Negotiated Level | PY 2023 Expected Level | PY 2023 Negotiated Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Employment (Second Quarter After Exit) | 46.2% | 46.2% | 46.2% | 48.2% |
| Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit) | 35.5% | 36.0% | 35.5% | 38.0% |
| Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit) | $2,983 | $2,984 | $2,983 | $3,043 |
| Credential Attainment Rate | 26.4% | 27.0% | 26.4% | 28.0% |
| Measurable Skill | 45.0% | 38.0% | 45.0% | 39.0% |

| Performance Indicators | PY 2022 Expected Level | PY 2022 Negotiated Level | PY 2023 Expected Level | PY 2023 Negotiated Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gains | | | | |
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] | Not Applicable [1] |

*[1]*

*"Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being developed and this data will not be entered in the 2022 State Plan modifications.*

## VII. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR COMBINED STATE PLAN PARTNER PROGRAMS

## PERFORMANCE INDICATOR APPENDIX

## ALL WIOA CORE PROGRAMS

All WIOA Core Programs

| Performance Indicators | PY 2020 Expected Level | PY 2020 Negotiated Level | PY 2021 Expected Level | PY 2021 Negotiated Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Effectiveness in Serving Employers | Not Applicable[1] | Not Applicable[1] | Not Applicable[1] | Not Applicable[1] |

*[1] "Effectiveness in Serving Employers" is still being piloted and this data will not be entered for 2020 State Plans.*

## ADDITIONAL INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE

| Additional Indicators of Performance |
|---|
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| |
| |
| |
| |