



Governor's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships

Monday, April 28, 2025

Webex

2:00 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.

Minutes

Present:

Co-Chair Jeffrey Cox, Co-Chair Lee Lilley, Co-Chair Senator Settle

Andréa Allard, Jennifer Allen, Representative Vernetta Alston, Senator Val Applewhite, Mark Bolton, Chad Bouffiou, JB Buxton, Sherry Carpenter, Brian Floyd, Cecilia Holden, Representative Matthew Winslow, Steve Mange, Edsel McDonald, Trey Michael, Anna Perkinson, Dr. Travis Reeves, Eric Shoults, Tammy Simmons, Karen Wade, Dr. Thomas Walker, Wendy Walker-Fox, Tom West.

Message from Governor Stein

Governor Stein has a goal of being the best state in the nation for business and economic opportunity for all North Carolinians – we cannot achieve either without a strong workforce. Our workforce 1) fuels our state's continued economic growth, 2) ensures employers have the talent they need, and 3) expands pathways to careers for North Carolinians that support thriving families and communities across our state. As the Council continues its work, the Governor emphasized that we should keep this higher purpose in mind. That is, credential and degree attainment, labor market alignment, apprenticeships, etc. are key, but they are not the real goal. They are the means to get us to the overarching goal we all share – opportunity for North Carolinians to build careers and for businesses to grow and succeed – equaling more prosperity and promise for our state. Governor Stein has said that no state will outwork NC when it comes to workforce development and he means it. It is the Council's opportunity to help define exactly what work NC should be doing. This Council has the make-up to get things done and each member is here because of the expertise they bring. When the goals and strategies are set, the best ideas and biggest concerns should be addressed – if not, it will have been a lost opportunity for this state to benefit from the Council's expertise. The Governor encouraged the Council to really engage. He created this Council and asked each member to be a part because he believes we have the ingredients in NC to set the national standard in workforce development. He has tasked the Council with outlining the plan forward. And as our Governor, he is committed to doing all in his power to make sure that the work of this Council is put into practice for the benefit of NC workers and employers alike.

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Opening and Roll Call

- Council Co-Chair Senator Eddie Settle opened the meeting with expressions of sympathy for Dr. Cox's recent loss on the passing of his mother and recognized council members in attendance.
- Members introduced themselves, including Andréa Allard, Senator Val Applewhite, and Brian Floyd, sharing their backgrounds and commitment to workforce and education in NC.
- Roll call was conducted; quorum was established.
- Motion made by Sen. Val Applewhite and seconded by JB Buxton to approve minutes from the last meeting; approved without objection.

Goal Review and Discussion

Council Co-Chair Dr. Jeff Cox shared a message from Governor Stein emphasizing the need to align workforce efforts with statewide economic opportunity goals. He highlighted that degree attainment, apprenticeships, and workforce development are means, not ends, and must serve the overarching mission of prosperity and opportunity. Workforce development is central to North Carolina's economic success. He noted that the emphasis should be placed on outcomes, not credentials alone—and allowing the opportunity for meaningful employment is the ultimate goal. The Council has a responsibility to turn expertise into measurable goals and implementation.

Dr. Cox noted that today's meeting is a continuation from the previous session to refine and align existing and new workforce development goals for submission to the Governor in June. There are 13 draft goals under consideration. Today the Council will be refining, consolidating, or cutting down the list to create measurable, meaningful, and actionable goals. He noted that the consensus, which is based on feedback from last meeting, is to strengthen existing goals and clearly define metrics for new ones.

Presentation by Dr. Michael Cline, State Demographer, Office of State Management and Budget

- Provided a data presentation on demographic trends and labor market shifts through 2060.
- Called attention to growing diversity, aging population, and rural/urban disparities, population decline affecting workforce supply.
- North Carolina is among the fastest-growing states.
- Demographic shifts (age, location, labor market demand) must guide policy and strategy.
- Presented labor demand data and emphasized aligning training programs accordingly and the mismatch between skills of job seekers and employer needs.
- Top employer challenges include soft skills, punctuality, and dependability.

- State government jobs must become more competitive compared to the private sector.
- Labor participation rate and wages are key metrics for alignment.
- NC's population growth increasingly driven by net migration, especially among working-age adults (18–44).
- By 2030, over 20% of the population will be over age 65.
- Urban counties are driving growth; rural areas face aging populations and youth outmigration.
- Schools reflect future diversity trends—no single majority race/ethnicity in K-12.

Presentation by Josh Levy, Senior Policy Analyst, Labor and Economic Analysis Division, Department of Commerce Employer Feedback Highlights

- Employability challenges dominate (soft skills, reliability, punctuality).
- Second/third shift work, childcare, and transportation are critical barriers.
- Desire for broader talent pipelines, including both college and non-college pathways.
- Healthcare employers face high turnover in entry-level roles and stress the need for career progression models.

Credential and Degree Attainment

The Council members support adding a new goal that focuses specifically on high school students, emphasizing post-secondary pathways that lead to family-sustaining wages. These wages are proposed to be defined using MIT's cost-of-living data. Stakeholders agree on the need for clearly measurable and disaggregated goals tracking enrollment, credential completion, employment, military enlistment, and other outcomes.

Council discussion emphasized creating pathways that reflect real opportunities for upward mobility and workforce readiness. One example noted was that the state aims to recognize equivalent experience and associate degrees for entry-level roles. Continued analysis of job classifications to determine which truly require degrees. The Council acknowledged that a goal to open more state jobs to candidates with non-traditional credentials and experience could be relevant.

Proposed Goals for Credential and Degree Attainment

- Strong alignment with existing "MyFutureNC" goals and continued support for the 2 million by 2030 attainment goal.
- Emphasis on tracking post-secondary enrollment, credential alignment with family-sustaining wages, and military enlistment separately for better data clarity.
- Draft goals presented for increasing credentialed individuals to meet labor market demand.

Members asked to provide feedback on whether these goals are appropriately ambitious and realistic. Council goals to align with real-world needs and regional variations and address the need to close gaps in attainment across demographic groups.

Pre- and Registered Apprenticeships

Participants endorsed the Governor's goal to double active registered apprenticeships by 2029, emphasizing the value of measurable, quality-assured programs. There was discussion about whether to include programs like SkillBridge, which support military transitions, but consensus leaned toward focusing on formal registered and pre-apprenticeship programs due to the ability for the state to track those experiences.

- Strategies discussed to support expansion of both pre-apprenticeships and registered programs, especially for high-need sectors as a key workforce pipeline.
- Emphasis on increasing visibility and accessibility across urban and rural communities.
- Supported collaboration with employers and community colleges.
- Only 12% of employers currently offer apprenticeships or pre-apprenticeships. Underutilized tool for building pipelines, particularly for young and varied workers, based on the Employer Needs Survey data from last year's survey.
- Viewed as a key strategy to support work-based learning and fill workforce gaps.

Proposed Goal: Double Active Registered Apprenticeships by 2028

This goal is well-supported and considered central to the state's workforce development strategy. It aligns with broader efforts to expand high-quality career pathways and meet labor market demands.

- Encouragement for industry and education sector collaboration to meet this target.
- Supported by employer demand and talent shortages.
- Requires coordination, outreach, and funding alignment.
- Identified as a key strategy to build sustainable, skilled workforce.

Work-Based Learning (WBL)

The Council expressed broad agreement on expanding WBL across all educational levels. Council members emphasized the importance of defining WBL types—such as internships, co-ops, and job shadowing—and suggested consolidating WBL and apprenticeship goals. A special focus was placed on ensuring rural and underserved students have access to these opportunities.

- Commitment to expanding work-based learning opportunities, particularly in high school and community college settings.
- Emphasized need for employer engagement and aligned incentives.

- Highlighted as a bridge between education and employment.
- Includes internships, co-ops, and job shadowing—essential for youth and adult learners
- 37% of employers offer WBL, primarily job shadowing and internships – from Employer Needs Survey.
- Need to expand partnerships with employers and educational institutions.
- Align WBL with career progression (e.g., CNA to RN to NP).

Labor Market Alignment

Council members shared that goals should focus on credentials that match in-demand, well-paying careers, considering regional variations in living costs. Members noted that they would like to see a better match between educational output and job market needs and include career and technical education (CTE) in alignment efforts.

- Labor participation rate and wages are key metrics for alignment.

Sector-Based Strategies

Sector-based strategies were identified as a next-step priority. Proposed focus sectors include healthcare, education, construction, and advanced manufacturing, with an emphasis on tailoring strategies to regional needs.

- Discussion of tailoring strategies to different sectors (e.g., healthcare, tech, construction) to address high-need industries.
- Need for targeted investment in sectors critical to state growth and community health.

State Government Employment

There is an interest in developing state employment pathways, particularly for underrepresented groups. This could involve creating apprenticeships or training routes into government jobs.

Proposed goal: reduce state vacancy rate to 15% (currently around 20%).

- Recognized as a priority area, especially for retention and multiplicity.
- Proposed strategies for internships, fellowships, and stronger on-ramps into public service careers.
- Opportunity to use state government roles as a model for workforce development.
- Apprenticeships and work-based learning programs to be expanded in state agencies.
- Need to modernize hiring criteria and highlight government jobs as viable and competitive careers.

Additional Goals – Increase Labor Force Participation and Family-Sustaining Wages

A family-sustaining wage is defined using MIT data, ranging from \$16.83/hour for a single adult to \$42.45/hour for a family of four. There's a call to use dashboards and data tools to track progress on this goal. Increasing labor participation is linked to improving credential attainment, expanding apprenticeships, and reducing entry barriers.

- Two new goals proposed:
 - Increase labor force participation, especially among underrepresented groups.
 - Increase the number of jobs that pay family-sustaining wages, particularly in rural areas.
- Members were encouraged to consider policy, programming, and funding levers to support these targets.
- Addressing systemic barriers such as childcare, and transportation.
- Emphasis on engaging underutilized populations (e.g., formerly incarcerated, disabled individuals).
- Increase prime working age labor force participation (currently at 82.7% for ages 25–54).
- Raise the percentage of families earning a family-sustaining wage.

Proposed goal: Launch a statewide public outreach campaign to promote workforce resources and opportunities.

Key Takeaways

- Strong alignment around the vision of workforce development as a pathway to economic prosperity.
- Enthusiastic support for measurable, equity-driven goals across all focus areas.
- Need for ongoing employer input, demographic insights, and community engagement to ensure effectiveness and inclusivity.

Council Member Action Steps

1. Provide Feedback: Council members to review and submit feedback on draft goals.
2. Support Outreach: Members asked to support engagement efforts with rural and underserved communities.
3. Prepare for Goal Adoption: Be ready to finalize goal language and metrics at the next meeting.

Next Steps

The next phase includes refining and consolidating the current draft goals into a more concise set with clear metrics. Coordination among education and workforce partners (e.g., DPI, MyFutureNC,

community colleges) is crucial. Engagement will expand to include stakeholders like childcare councils to address workforce access barriers.

- Finalize measurable goals and timelines for each focus area.
- Engage industry leaders and local partners for implementation strategies.
- Schedule working groups for credential attainment, apprenticeships, and sector alignment.
- Continue stakeholder engagement, particularly employers and education partners.
- Staff to consolidate goal language, ensure alignment with metrics, and coordinate with other state agencies.
- Further engagement with employer groups (especially small businesses) to validate goals and strategies.
- AI Skills Strategy: Explore and define integration into workforce development across sectors. Suggested deeper focus on AI strategy coordination (cross-agency) and a specific goal proposal. Identify and align AI initiatives and labor strategy efforts statewide.
- Follow-up meetings to be scheduled for final goal confirmation and implementation planning to provide input on the drafted goals and collecting individualized feedback to inform final goals.
- Clarify Definitions: Especially for credentials, apprenticeships, and work-based learning.
- Baseline Data Collection: For labor alignment, apprenticeship participation, and CTE metrics and refining labor participation targets for the 16–54 age group.
- Stakeholder Engagement: Expand employer input (especially regional and small businesses).
- Narrow Goal Focus: Consider naming a few priority sectors to pilot alignment and workforce strategies.
- Staff to provide draft metrics and implementation plans for each proposed goal.

Upcoming Meeting Dates

- May 22, 2025 – 2-4p Virtual Meeting: John Loyack to fill in for Dr. Cox
- June 12, 2025 - 2-4p In person Meeting: Full council reconvenes to finalize goals and assess progress

Webex Chat notes /Themes

Childcare Comments

- Employer-supported childcare is essential for recruitment and retention.

- Some employers provide onsite daycare and financial assistance.

Quotes:

- “There are efforts to have employers participate in childcare costs.” – Sen. Applewhite
- “ECU Health...provides assistance with childcare costs and onsite daycare.” – Brian Floyd

Employer Needs Survey

- Employer Needs Survey (ENS) shared to inform the workforce about planning and strategy development.

Links:

- [Employer Needs Survey | LEAD Analytics](#)
- [ENS Report PDF | LEAD Analytics](#)

Military Vets and Spouses (Strategies)

- Credential portability for military spouses.
- Statewide credit-for-prior-learning policies needed.
- Programs supporting veterans (e.g., MMAC).

Links:

- [Military Medics & Corpsmen \(MMAC\) – Virginia DVS](#)

Family Sustaining Wages

- Highlighted dashboard tracking wages that support a family.
- Connection to pre-apprenticeship programs (e.g., SkillBridge).

Links:

- [Family Sustaining Wage Dashboard – MyFutureNC](#)

High School Post-Secondary Outcomes Goal Discussion

- Clarifying outcomes: credentials vs. degrees.
- Cultural shift by setting postsecondary expectations.
- Broadening “credential” to include non-credit certifications.

Apprenticeship and WBL Goals

- Need for unified definitions and broader metrics (beyond registered apprenticeships).
- Tracking and expanding provider participation.

- Highlighting platforms for WBL.

Links:

- [Experience More NC \(WBL definition\)](#)
- [Work-Based Learning Navigator](#)

Labor Market Alignment and Sector-Based Strategies

- Inclusion of untapped talent (justice-involved, opportunity youth).
- Employer engagement and skill development focus.
- Importance of the education sector in workforce development.

Links:

- [Military to Civilian Healthcare Bridge Programs Report – CAEL](#)

AI

- Integration of AI into community college curriculum and continuing education.
- AI as a growing skillset across multiple disciplines.

State Government Hiring

- Misconceptions around minimum age for state employment.
- Some roles may not be inappropriate for students under 18.
- OSHR is active in addressing state hiring and retention.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM.

Minutes Prepared By: Veronica Howard Green, NCWorks Commission

Date: May 1, 2025