

# Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

## Unified State Plan

March 28, 2018

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## I. WIOA State Plan Type

North Carolina has elected to submit a Unified State Plan.

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

## II. Strategic Elements

- (a) **Economic, Workforce, and Workforce Development Activities Analysis.**  
The Unified State Plan must include an analysis of the economic conditions, economic development strategies, and labor market in which the State’s workforce system and programs will operate.

(1) **Economic and Workforce Analysis**

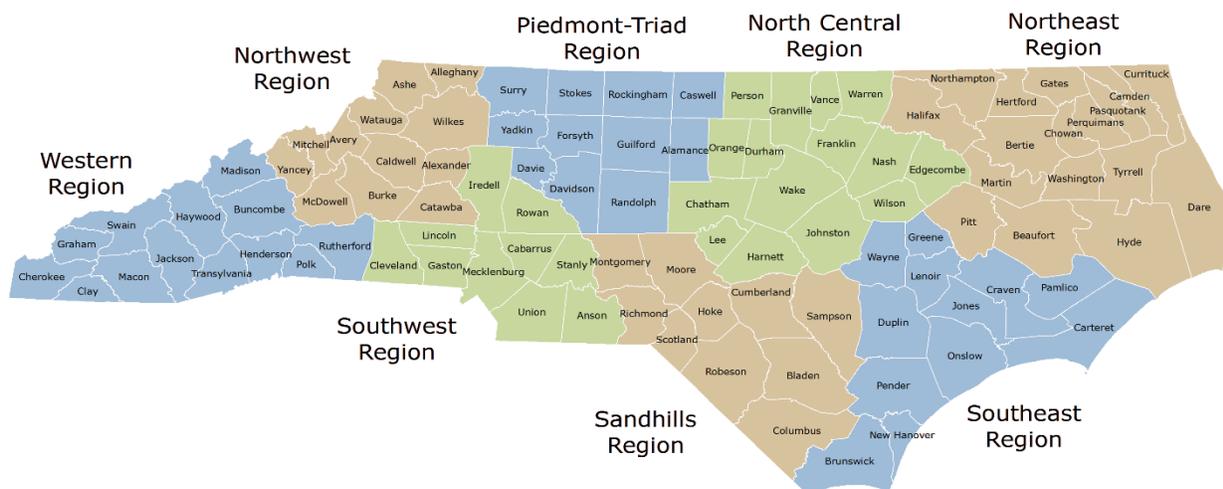
(A) **Economic Analysis.**

The Unified State Plan must include an analysis of the economic conditions and trends in the State, including sub-State regions and any specific economic areas identified by the State. This must include—

- (i) **Existing Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations.**  
Provide an analysis of the industries and occupations for which there is existing demand.
- (ii) **Emerging Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations.**  
Provide an analysis of the industries and occupations for which demand is emerging.
- (iii) **Employers’ Employment Needs.**  
With regard to the industry sectors and occupations identified in (A)(i) and (ii), provide an assessment of the employment needs of employers, including a description of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required, including credentials and licenses.

As part of the State’s vision for building economic prosperity across all areas of the state, North Carolina established prosperity zones via legislation in 2014. These eight multi county regions implemented in January 2015 are intended to help ensure economic growth across all of North Carolina’s 100 counties, by leveraging regional economic, workforce and educational resources. Overlaying the eight prosperity zones are North Carolina’s 23 local workforce development board areas. North Carolina has the 9<sup>th</sup> largest state population, encompasses an area of almost 54,000 square miles ranging from the Blue Ridge Mountains to

### North Carolina Prosperity Zones



the Atlantic Ocean, and had a GDP of \$518 billion in 2016, making it about the size of the country of Sweden's economy.<sup>1</sup> Over the previous century, it has transformed from an agricultural state with a manufacturing base in tobacco, textiles, and furniture to an advanced economy with strengths in finance, biotechnology, and advanced manufacturing and the knowledge economy more broadly. Throughout this transformation, the North Carolina economy has in many ways become more like the U.S. economy, while maintaining some key distinctions.

North Carolina has benefitted from Sunbelt migration over the past several decades, particularly during the 1990's and 2000's, which helped to develop several of North Carolina's large metropolitan statistical areas including: Charlotte, Durham, Raleigh, and the Piedmont Triad, as well as the smaller but fast-growing metros of Asheville and Wilmington. This process involved adding people from other parts of the U.S. as well as through international immigration. Still, North Carolina has the second highest rural population in the U.S. and 34 percent of the state's residents live in rural areas.<sup>2</sup> However, the rural population has not benefitted to the same extent from the transformation of the state and its economy. Out-of-county commuting has increased, with only 12 counties having more than 50 percent of their workers living and working in the same county as of 2014 (the latest data available), down from 47 counties in 2002.<sup>3</sup>

Like the U.S. and other developed nations, North Carolina's population faces certain larger structural challenges including a slowing population growth rate, an aging workforce, and issues of inequality and regional disparities. Like the U.S., the state has become less homogenous, with prosperous urban areas (characterized by knowledge-intensive service industries) and less prosperous rural areas still reflective of manufacturing's legacies. In addition, North Carolina is also experiencing larger changes to the economy due to technological advancements, global trade and interdependence, and the slowing of economic growth, new firm formation and productivity. As we seek to understand recent changes in North Carolina's economic performance, it is important to highlight areas in which the state is reflective of general trends as well as areas in which it diverges from these trends.

Furthermore, North Carolina's economy, while expanding, must be viewed in the context of the Great Recession and the slow recovery which followed, which accelerated existing structural changes already underway. Following a peak in late 2007, North Carolina's number of jobs fell by 400,000 (almost 10 percent) and it took seven years to return to pre-recession levels.<sup>4</sup> In 2016, the state had only 5 percent more jobs than during its 2007 peak.<sup>5</sup> Recent changes in the North Carolina economy must be understood in the context of the long shadow of this transformative event.

### *Industry Projections*

North Carolina is projected to add more than 550,000 jobs by 2024, with the Service-Providing sector projected to contribute nearly 90 percent of all net new jobs created.<sup>6</sup> Health Care and Social Assistance, the state's largest industry by employment, is projected to add 135,000 jobs. Construction is projected to be one of the fastest growing industries in the state, growing 20.6 percent and adding nearly 37,000 jobs. Projections for the Manufacturing industry show a very modest increase of 0.7 percent, adding 2,900 jobs.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Economic Analysis, International Monetary Fund.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. 2016. OnTheMap Application. Longitudinal-Employer Household Dynamics Program. <http://onthemap.ces.census.gov/>

<sup>4</sup> Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, North Carolina Department of Commerce.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> All projection data from Employment and Occupational Projections, North Carolina Department of Commerce.

<b>NC Industry Employment Projections, 2014 - 2024</b>				
<b>Industry Group</b>	<b>Employment Est. 2014</b>	<b>Employment Est. 2024</b>	<b>Net Change</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
<i>Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting</i>	21,832	20,680	-1,152	-5.3%
<i>Mining</i>	2,833	2,755	-78	-2.8%
<i>Utilities</i>	13,662	12,826	-836	-6.1%
<i>Construction</i>	179,131	216,103	36,972	20.6%
<i>Manufacturing</i>	449,132	452,055	2,923	0.7%
<i>Wholesale Trade</i>	176,934	194,433	17,499	9.9%
<i>Retail Trade</i>	472,161	522,793	50,632	10.7%
<i>Transportation and Warehousing</i>	132,469	140,285	7,816	5.9%
<i>Information</i>	72,571	75,157	2,586	3.6%
<i>Finance and Insurance</i>	153,490	180,950	27,460	17.9%
<i>Real Estate and Rental and Leasing</i>	52,324	60,024	7,700	14.7%
<i>Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services</i>	207,838	247,708	39,870	19.2%
<i>Management of Companies and Enterprises</i>	80,446	103,353	22,907	28.5%
<i>Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services</i>	282,767	326,758	43,991	15.6%
<i>Educational Services</i>	369,701	403,675	33,974	9.2%
<i>Health Care and Social Assistance</i>	554,651	689,872	135,221	24.4%
<i>Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation</i>	61,315	74,856	13,541	22.1%
<i>Accommodation and Food Services</i>	382,048	446,790	64,742	16.9%
<i>Other Services (except Government)</i>	167,997	179,311	11,314	6.7%
<i>Government</i>	290,358	300,768	10,410	3.6%
<i>Self Employed and Unpaid Family Workers, All Jobs</i>	280,354	306,032	25,678	9.2%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,404,014</b>	<b>4,957,184</b>	<b>553,170</b>	<b>12.6%</b>
<b>Source: Industry Projections, Labor &amp; Economic Analysis Division, North Carolina Department of Commerce</b>				

As part of a collaborative effort among the state’s workforce partners and the state’s Labor and Economic Analysis Division, North Carolina established the prosperity zone sub regions. These multi county regions were established to facilitate and encourage regional planning. Counties were grouped into sub-regions within the eight prosperity zones based on analysis of commuting patterns and other economic factors which reflect how people and employers interact geographically.

The total projected job growth provides a measure of the relative strength of the regional economies, changes in the underlying industrial sectors will continue to lead the economic transformation within each of the 16 prosperity zone sub-regions. For example, by the year 2024 total industrial employment in the Charlotte prosperity zone sub-region is projected to have nearly 1.3 million jobs, more than 186,500 jobs over the region’s 2014 employment level. However, the manufacturing sector is only expected to add a little over 3,500 jobs to that total. All 16 prosperity zone sub-regions are projected to experience either little growth or slight declines in manufacturing employment, while at the same time 15 of the sub-regions are expected to experience significant growth in both the Construction and Professional and Business service industry sectors. Thirteen sub-regions are expected to experience growth within the Education and Health Services sector with growth rates ranging from a low of 3.87% in the Greensboro sub-region to 30.89% in the Wilmington sub-region.

#### *Occupational projections*

A diverse set of industrial sectors are expected to contribute to the state and regional economic transformation in the coming years. The demand for these 550,000 workers will also be distributed among a

diverse group of occupations. Over 74% of the net job growth is expected to come from eight broad occupational groupings: Food Preparation and Serving Related, Healthcare Practitioners and Technical, Sales and Related, Office and Administrative Support, Healthcare Support, Business and Financial Operations, Transportation and Material Moving, and Construction and Extraction. The only major occupational group expected to experience overall job decline is Farming, Fishing and Forestry.

A majority of projected job openings are expected to come from replacement needs rather than new growth. Eighty-six percent of all classified occupations are expected to grow; only 14 percent are projected to lose employment. Jobs with low educational requirements (occupations requiring no post-secondary or college experience) are projected to produce the most job openings (mostly due to replacements); however, they are also projected to have the slowest rate of growth. Occupations requiring a Master’s Degree or higher are projected to experience the greatest percentage increase in employment.

Jobs in occupations that paid over \$75,000 are projected to grow faster than those that paid under \$30,000; however, the increased number of net new jobs from today’s low-paying occupations are projected to outnumber the increase in high-paying ones by a ratio of nearly 3 to 1, since there are far more jobs at the bottom end of the pay scale.

<b><i>NC Occupational Employment Projections, 2014-2024</i></b>				
<b><i>Occupational Group</i></b>	<b><i>Employment Est. 2014</i></b>	<b><i>Employment Est. 2024</i></b>	<b><i>Net Change</i></b>	<b><i>Percent Change</i></b>
<i>Management</i>	<i>246,799</i>	<i>273,336</i>	<i>26,537</i>	<i>10.8%</i>
<i>Business and Financial Operations</i>	<i>202,910</i>	<i>237,366</i>	<i>34,456</i>	<i>17.0%</i>
<i>Computer and Mathematical</i>	<i>115,212</i>	<i>138,773</i>	<i>23,561</i>	<i>20.5%</i>
<i>Architecture and Engineering</i>	<i>59,638</i>	<i>64,658</i>	<i>5,020</i>	<i>8.4%</i>
<i>Life, Physical, and Social Science</i>	<i>38,410</i>	<i>42,942</i>	<i>4,532</i>	<i>11.8%</i>
<i>Community and Social Service</i>	<i>74,588</i>	<i>83,981</i>	<i>9,393</i>	<i>12.6%</i>
<i>Legal</i>	<i>29,889</i>	<i>33,044</i>	<i>3,155</i>	<i>10.6%</i>
<i>Education, Training, and Library</i>	<i>250,115</i>	<i>276,757</i>	<i>26,642</i>	<i>10.7%</i>
<i>Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media</i>	<i>56,773</i>	<i>62,266</i>	<i>5,493</i>	<i>9.7%</i>
<i>Healthcare Practitioners and Technical</i>	<i>261,091</i>	<i>317,095</i>	<i>56,004</i>	<i>21.5%</i>
<i>Healthcare Support</i>	<i>154,005</i>	<i>200,777</i>	<i>46,772</i>	<i>30.4%</i>
<i>Protective Service</i>	<i>105,774</i>	<i>114,660</i>	<i>8,886</i>	<i>8.4%</i>
<i>Food Preparation and Serving Related</i>	<i>392,606</i>	<i>460,803</i>	<i>68,197</i>	<i>17.4%</i>
<i>Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance</i>	<i>152,506</i>	<i>170,624</i>	<i>18,118</i>	<i>11.9%</i>
<i>Personal Care and Service</i>	<i>135,607</i>	<i>156,361</i>	<i>20,754</i>	<i>15.3%</i>
<i>Sales and Related</i>	<i>484,429</i>	<i>537,911</i>	<i>53,482</i>	<i>11.0%</i>
<i>Office and Administrative Support</i>	<i>633,846</i>	<i>687,124</i>	<i>53,278</i>	<i>8.4%</i>
<i>Farming, Fishing, and Forestry</i>	<i>17,768</i>	<i>16,985</i>	<i>-783</i>	<i>-4.4%</i>
<i>Construction and Extraction</i>	<i>165,735</i>	<i>193,910</i>	<i>28,175</i>	<i>17.0%</i>
<i>Installation, Maintenance, and Repair</i>	<i>178,579</i>	<i>200,841</i>	<i>22,262</i>	<i>12.5%</i>
<i>Production</i>	<i>346,096</i>	<i>356,274</i>	<i>10,178</i>	<i>2.9%</i>
<i>Transportation and Material Moving</i>	<i>301,638</i>	<i>330,696</i>	<i>29,058</i>	<i>9.6%</i>
<b><i>TOTAL</i></b>	<b><i>4,404,014</i></b>	<b><i>4,957,184</i></b>	<b><i>553,170</i></b>	<b><i>12.6%</i></b>
<b><i>Source: Occupational Projections, Labor &amp; Economic Analysis Division, NC Department of Commerce</i></b>				

Across the sixteen prosperity zones sub-regions several occupational groups will experience demands related to employment growth. Health care related occupations, Computer and Mathematical Occupations and Construction and Extraction Related Occupations will be among the fastest growing occupational groups in each of the prosperity zones sub-regions. Three of the prosperity zones sub-regions; Wilmington, Charlotte, Raleigh-Durham are expected to experience over 26% growth in Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations, three sub-regions will experience a growth of over 20%, while Rocky Mount-Wilson and Elizabeth City are projected to experience declines, 5.5% and 6.9% respectively. Growth rates across the prosperity zones for Healthcare support occupations range from a high of 37.7% in the Wilmington to a low of 1.2% in the Greenville.

### *Employer Needs*

North Carolina's Workforce Development partners are committed to working with the state's employers in order to understand their business needs and assist in providing a skilled workforce. Part of this collaboration has included the implementation of an employer needs survey. The first survey was implemented in 2014 and has been an ongoing effort. Since 2014, as part of this commitment the partners have carried out a large-scale employer needs survey every other year. The survey focuses on assessing employer hiring plans, recruitment strategies, hiring experiences and workforce challenges. The 2017 survey data collection was completed late in the year and results will be published in a report which will be released in the second quarter of 2018.

However, the preliminary analysis of the survey indicate:

- Higher percentage (50%) of NC employers claimed hiring difficulties than previous years (roughly 40% in 2014 & '16)
- Higher for manufacturers (58%)
- Increase in difficulty may be due, at least in part by, a very tight labor market & structural economic changes
  - Low # of applicants is cited as a reason by roughly 60% of employers who have had hiring difficulties
- Employers are bullish on adding jobs in 2018 – 43% plan to grow employment
  - Employers in rural areas expect to grow employment at a slower rate (24%)
- Hiring Difficulties are highest in mid-size metro areas (not Charlotte & Triangle)
- Difference in reasons for difficulty vary by position seniority of position
  - Employability/Personal Issues are high – particularly for entry-level positions
  - Lack of Relevant Experience is high for Mid- & Senior Positions
- Greatest Workforce Challenges Finding Job Candidates & Turnover (40% each overall)
  - In Manufacturing, Finding Job Candidates is the overwhelming #1 challenge (60%) followed by Turnover (22%)
- Employers are expanding use of Internet resources for finding talent – including NCWorks Online (which is used by 43% of Manufacturers)
- Opportunities exist for Workforce System to better market & match services

### **(B) Workforce Analysis.**

**The Unified or Combined State Plan must include an analysis of the current workforce, including individuals with barriers to employment, as defined in section 3 of WIOA4. This population must include individuals with disabilities among other groups<sup>5</sup> in the State and across regions identified by the State. This includes—**

#### **(i) Employment and Unemployment.**

**Provide an analysis of current employment and unemployment data, including labor force participation rates, and trends in the State.**

**(ii) Labor Market Trends.**

**Provide an analysis of key labor market trends, including across existing industries and occupations.**

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

**Provide an analysis of the educational and skill levels of the workforce.**

**(i) Skill Gaps. Describe apparent 'skill gaps'.**

### *Population*

Since 2010, the state's population growth has continued to outpace the nation, having grown 6 percent compared to the nation's 4 percent.<sup>7</sup> Between 2015 and 2016, North Carolina's population grew by 1.1 percent, adding 112,000 people. The state grew faster than the nation (0.7%) and at a similar rate to the South as a region (1.1%).

Looking back at the past several years, the state's population growth rate has been consistently higher than the U.S. North Carolina's growth rate peaked at 2.4 percent prior to the Recession, followed by a slowing growth rate which leveled out at about 1 percent from 2011 to 2014. The past two years have seen an uptick in growth, diverging from the mostly flat U.S. rate.

From 2015 to 2016, the combined populations of Mecklenburg and Wake Counties grew by over 46,000 people, accounting for about 42 percent of the state's net population increase. The Charlotte, Raleigh, and Durham Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) accounted for 72 percent of the state's total growth between 2010 and 2016.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, many North Carolinians still live in rural areas. As of 2010, 34 percent of the state's residents live in rural Census tracts, giving North Carolina the second largest statewide rural population in the country.<sup>9</sup>

The composition of the state's population growth has been changing over time. In 2016, net migration accounted for nearly three of every four new residents to the state, while natural growth declined to the lowest level since 1970.

The aging of the state's population as well as lower fertility rates have contributed to this gradual decline in natural increase. In 2010, 13 percent of the state's population was 65 or older. In 2016, the 65+ age group had increased to 15 percent of the total population, matching the U.S. proportion. This age group is projected to reach 21 percent of the state's population by 2034.<sup>10</sup>

### *Labor Force*

The labor force, as defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, is the civilian, non-institutionalized population aged 16 or above that is either employed or actively seeking employment. From 2007 through 2016, labor force growth in North Carolina (8%) has outpaced the U.S. (4%), reaching nearly 4.9 million people.<sup>11</sup> North Carolina ranked 6<sup>th</sup> out of the 50 states for labor force growth rate since the recession.

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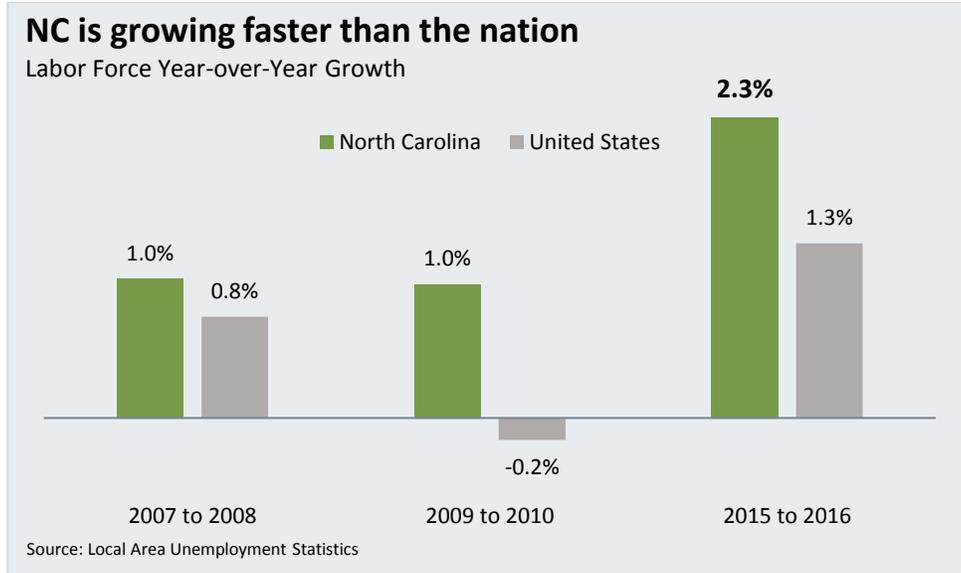
<sup>7</sup> Population data in this section from U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

<sup>8</sup> Carolina Demography analysis of U.S. Census Bureau population estimates.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census.

<sup>10</sup> North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management

<sup>11</sup> All labor force data from Local Area Unemployment Statistics, North Carolina Department of Commerce and Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics.



North Carolina, like the nation, has an aging population, which has pulled down the labor force participation rate.<sup>12</sup> In addition to this longer-term structural trend, changes in the business cycle such as recessions as well as increased higher education enrollment can lower the labor force participation rate. Previous research has estimated that about half the decline in the state’s rate is attributable to an aging population. North Carolina’s labor force participation rate fell by 3.8 percent from 2007 to 2016, during which the U.S. fell by 3.2 percent. While North Carolina’s rate has been lower than the U.S. since 2007, the state’s rate increased by 0.8 percent from 2014 to 2016 and is now 1 percent below the U.S. rate.

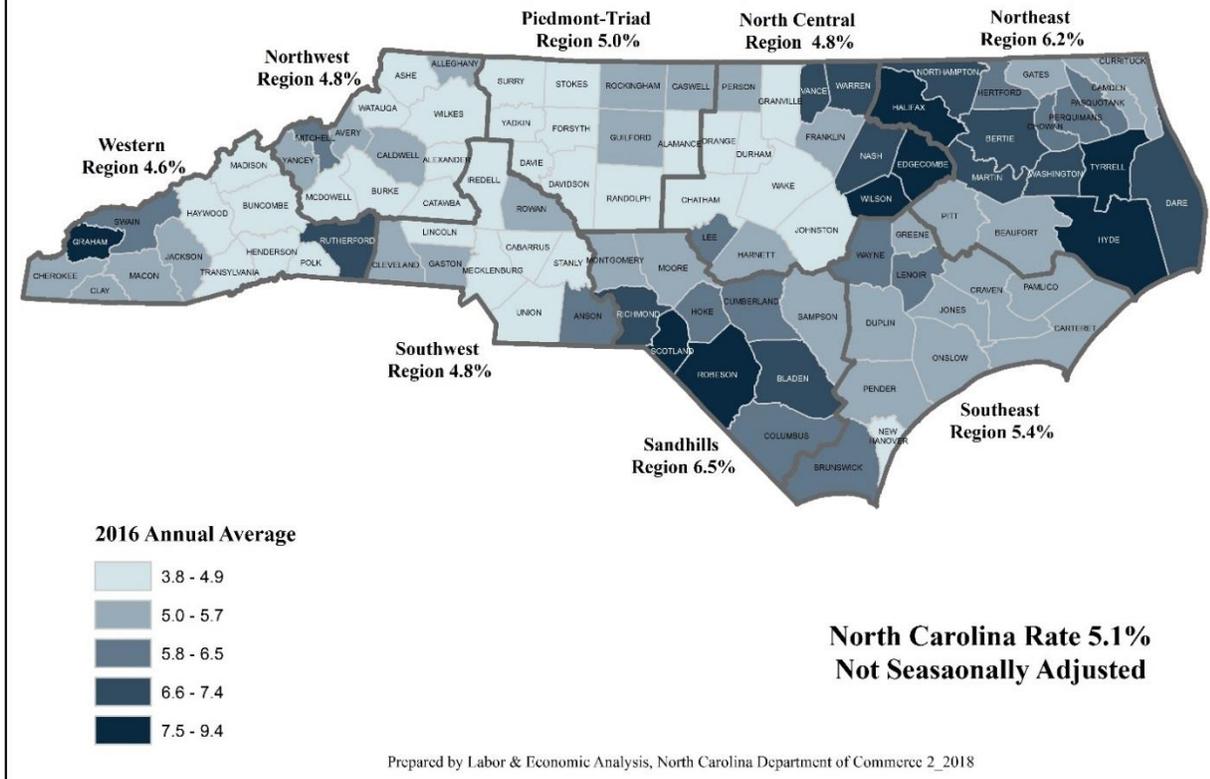
*Unemployed*

Historically, North Carolina’s unemployment rate has trended below the U.S. level. However, since the turn of the century, North Carolina’s rate has exceeded that of the nation, particularly during the two most recent recessions. North Carolina’s unemployment rate reached 10.9 percent in 2010, far surpassing the previous high recorded during the early 1980s.<sup>13</sup> The state also saw a record number of Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants in 2009. Job losses during the recession were concentrated in the Goods-Producing sectors and non-metro counties of our state. In 2016, the number of jobs in these sectors and regions remained 16 percent and 5 percent below 2006 levels, respectively.

Since 2013 the state’s unemployment rate has more closely tracked the U.S. rate, although remaining at a slightly elevated level. In 2016, North Carolina had an annual unemployment rate of 5.1 percent versus the national rate of 4.9 percent. Between 2015 and 2016, North Carolina’s rate fell by 0.7 percent versus a national decline of 0.4 percent. Within the state, large differences in unemployment rates exist between urban and rural counties, between metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, and among metropolitan areas as well (see the following table).

<sup>12</sup> The percent of the civilian, non-institutionalized population aged 16+ in the labor force.  
<sup>13</sup> All unemployment data from Local Area Unemployment Statistics, North Carolina Department of Commerce and Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

## North Carolina Unemployment Rate by County Annual Average 2016



In addition to the differences in county unemployment rates, unemployment rates across the prosperity zones have also reflected differential patterns of economic improvement. In 2016, the not seasonally adjusted unemployment rates across the eight prosperity zones ranged from a low of 4.6 in the Western Region to a high of 6.5 in the Sandhills Region. While all regions experienced a decline in the number of unemployed workers of at least 9%, only one region, the North Central Region experienced an increase in the number of employed workers that exceeded 4%.

The population of long-term unemployed are of interest to the workforce development system and policymakers. The share of unemployed without work 27 or more weeks reached 49 percent in 2010, nearly double the highs seen in the early 1980s, and remained historically high through 2016. Research carried out by LEAD has shown that long-term unemployment was a widespread phenomenon that affected workers in all industries, demographic groups, and regions of North Carolina, despite the concentrated impact that the recession had on sectors of the state's economy. The long-term unemployed tended to be older than the short-term unemployed, although other differences in composition between the two groups were generally small. Workers from Goods-Producing sectors were as prevalent among the short-term unemployed as among the long-term. The aggregate increase in long-term unemployment in North Carolina can be explained by prolonged jobless durations within all demographic groups, rather than by a compositional shift in the unemployed population.

North Carolina has been undergoing a period of economic expansion including expansion and diversity of its population and labor force. Over the last five years, North Carolina's Civilian Non-institutionalized Population has grown from nearly 7.5 million in 2012 to almost 8.0 million in 2017 while the state's civilian labor force has grown from nearly 4.7 million to 4.9 million an increase over 208,000 individuals over the same time period. Growth in the labor force has been driven by an increase of 142,000 more women (a 6.4%

increase) and an increase of 65,000 more men (a 6.6% increase). Among other labor force demographic groups there has been significant growth among several subpopulations including a 36.6% increase in the Hispanic and Latino labor force. This includes the addition of 71,000 Hispanic females and 54,000 Hispanic males. North Carolina’s labor force has experienced an increase of 17,000 African American’s in the labor force. The State has also experienced significant changes in the age distribution of its labor force. This includes an increase of 78,000 individuals aged 65 years and over (a growth of 54%), as well as the addition of 96,000 more individuals aged 45 to 54.

North Carolina’s participation rate has trended downward since 2001 due primarily to demographic-related factors such as the aging of the Baby Boomer generation and the increasing prevalence of school enrollment among young adults. However, the 2016 data revisions showed a surprising and welcome increase in the participation rate of 1.1 percentage points between December 2014 and December 2016. This is the largest 2-year increase that North Carolina has seen since March 2001, before the participation rate began its 13-year decline. North Carolina saw increasing participation rates among all age groups over the past two years, along with relative growth in the number of prime working age (25-to-54) residents, who tend to participate in the labor force at high rates.

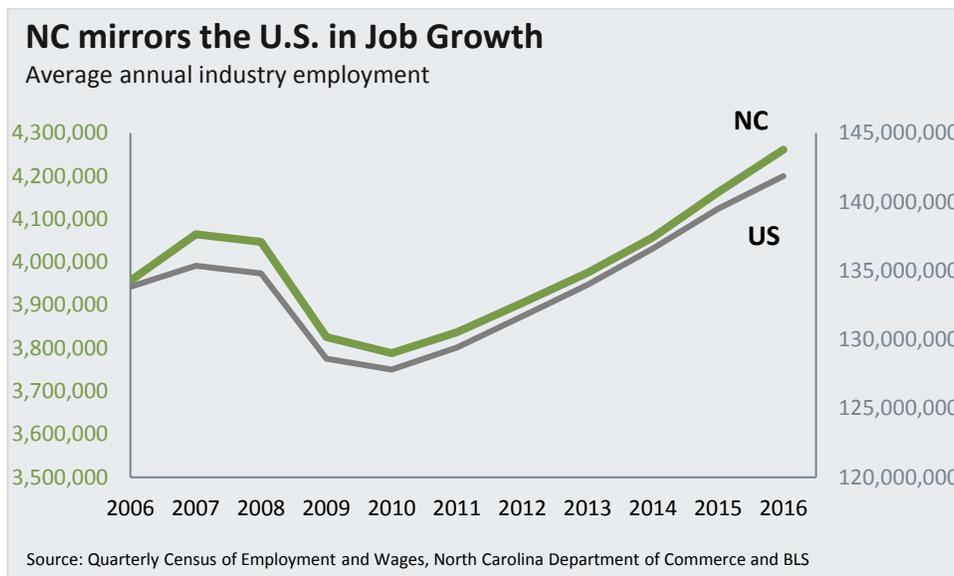
North Carolina’s labor force statistics also reveal significant variations with respect to several subpopulations including individuals with disabilities as well as to the state’s veteran’s population. Based on information from the American Community Survey 5-year Estimates, there were nearly 1.29 million individuals aged 16 years and older of these 22.9% were employed and 73.7% were reported as not being in the labor force in 2016. As a comparison, amongst individuals 16 years and older with no disability almost 65.5% were employed and only 30.5% were not in the labor force.

<b>NC Employment Status for Population Age 16 &amp; Up</b>			
<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Total Civilian Noninstitutionalized Population</b>	<b>With a Disability</b>	<b>No Disability</b>
Population Age 16 and Over	7,928,881	1,287,604	6,641,277
Employed	58.6%	22.9%	65.5%
Not in Labor Force	37.5%	73.7%	30.5%
<b>Source: 2012-2016 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates for North Carolina, Table S1811</b>			

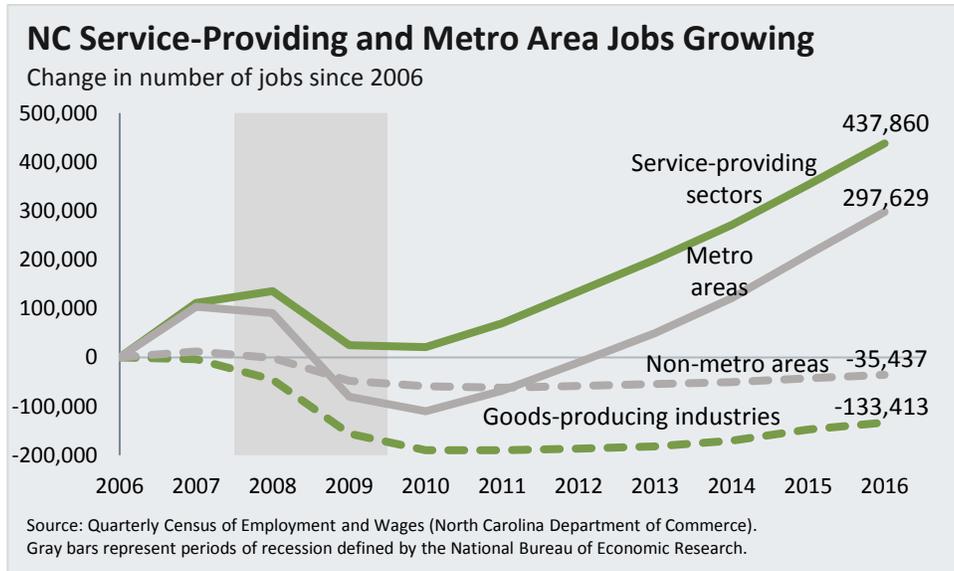
North Carolina’s labor force composition is significantly impacted by the presence of several large military bases as well as the number of veterans who call North Carolina home. Based on recent information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2017 there were over 364,900 veterans in North Carolina’s civilian labor force aged 18 and over. As a group, their annual average unemployment rate was 4.7%, however differences exist in veteran sub populations. Among Gulf War I era veteran’s the unemployment rate was 1.4% but among the Gulf War II era veterans the unemployment rate was 9.2%.

*Labor Market Trends*

Since 2007, both North Carolina and the U.S. have experienced 4.8 percent growth in the number of jobs.<sup>14</sup>

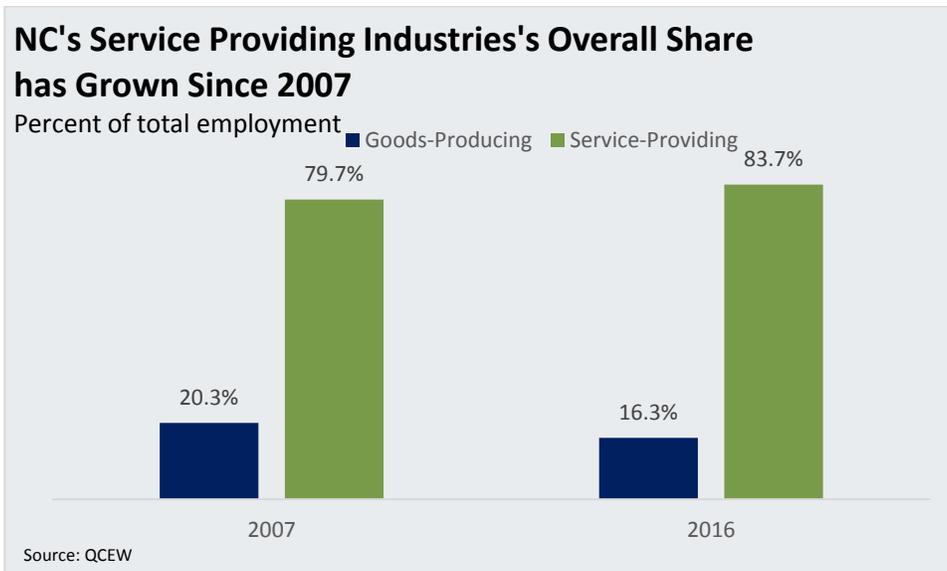


However, this growth followed large job losses due to the recession and the recovery has varied by industry as well as by geography. Overall, metropolitan areas of the state and Service-Providing industries have grown, while non-metro and Goods-Producing industries have not recovered to their pre-recession levels.



North Carolina’s economy, like the U.S., has been transitioning from a Goods-Producing to a Service-Providing economy over the past several decades. The largest sector by employment is Health Care and Social Assistance at over 600,000 jobs, followed by Retail Trade at over 500,000 jobs. Manufacturing is third at about 465,000 jobs, showing its ongoing importance to the state. Accommodation and Food Services (412,000 jobs) and Educational Services (372,000 jobs) round out the top 5 industries.

<sup>14</sup> All industry data from Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, North Carolina Department of Commerce and Bureau of Labor Statistics.



(See industries above)

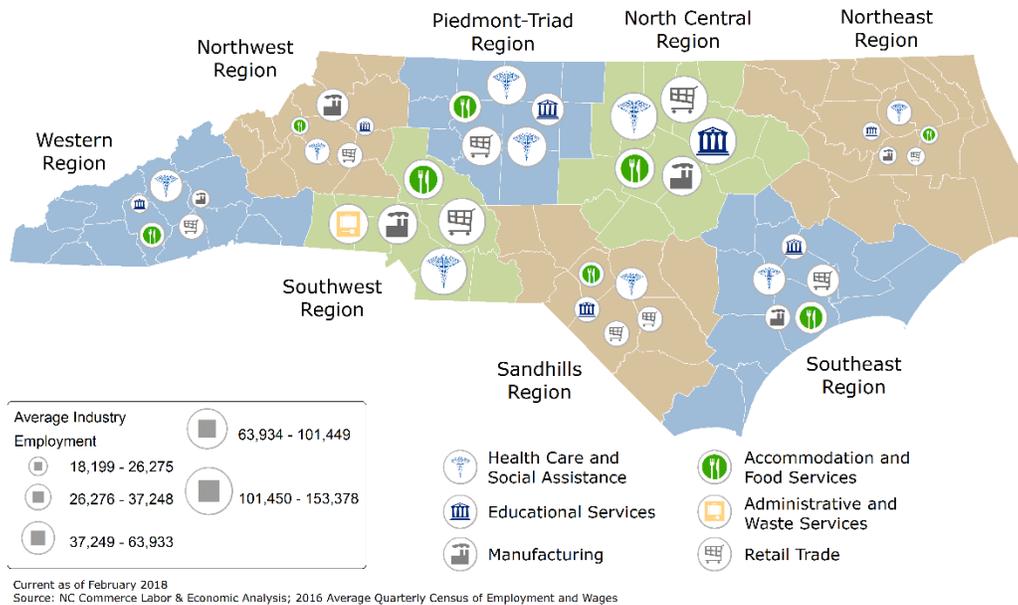
Between 2015 to 2016, North Carolina added about 99,000 net new jobs to the state to reach an annual average employment of over 4.26 million jobs, an increase of 2.4 percent. The U.S. grew by 1.7 percent during this time. Goods-Producing industries only added 14,000 jobs while Service-Providing industries added close to 85,000.

Of the top 5 industries, Health Care and Social Assistance added 12,000 jobs (2.0%), Retail added 11,000 jobs (2.3%), Manufacturing added 3,500 (0.8%), Accommodation and Food Services added 15,500 jobs (3.9%) and Educational Services added less than 1,500 jobs (0.4%). Construction employment increased by 11,000 jobs following gains over the past two years (5.7% from 14-15 and 6.0% 15-16) Manufacturing gained less year-over-year, adding 3,493 between 2015-16 versus 12,384 jobs between 2014-15.

Industry employment by prosperity zone provides a more refined view of local trends. Based on annual average information for 2016, the eight prosperity zones ranged in total employment size from over 1 million in the North Central zone to below 230,000 in the Northeast zone. Three of the zones, the North Central, Southwest and the Piedmont-Triad region accounted for over two-thirds of all employment in the state, 61% of all employment establishments, and over 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 region, the Burlington, Greensboro-High Point and Winston Salem MSAs in the Piedmont Triad Zone and the Raleigh; Durham-Chapel Hill and Rocky Mount MSAs in the North Central Zone. In addition, these three regions rank the highest in average weekly wage.

The four smallest prosperity zones in terms of total employment, the Northeast, Northwest, Western, and Sandhills zones as a group account for less than a quarter of the state's total employment and employment establishments. These regions together account for only 18% of the states total wages and their 2016 average weekly wages were less than 80% of the state's average weekly wage. While there are significant geographic and economic differences across the eight prosperity zones, each of the regions are dominated in employment by four major industrial groups. These include Health Care and Social Assistance; Educational Services, Retail Trade and Accommodations and Food Services. However, Manufacturing remains a key sector in six of the prosperity zones.

## 2016 Largest Industries by Prosperity Zones



North Carolina's existing workforce is spread across a diverse group of occupations. Nearly 15% of the state's occupational mix is centered in Office and Administrative Support Occupations, 10.7% are in Sales and Related Occupations, 9.7% in Food Preparation and Serving Related Occupations, 8.1% in Production Occupations and 7.3% in Transportation and Material Moving Occupations. Over the next several years employment in Health related occupations is anticipated to continue to expand, current employment levels reveal that 6.3% of all occupational employment is in Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations and an additional 3.6% are in Healthcare Support Occupations. An additional 6.3% of the state's occupational employment is concentrated in Education, Training and Library occupations.

### Wages

North Carolina's average wage for all industries was \$47,260 in 2016, rising 0.4 percent from 2015 after adjusting for inflation.<sup>15</sup> The U.S. average wage was \$53,611 in 2016, rising 0.2 percent from 2015. North Carolina has closely tracked the U.S. in wage growth—the state grew by 5.5 percent in real terms since 2010 while the U.S. grew by 5.3 percent. North Carolina's average wage has remained at around 88 percent of the U.S. average since 2000. Per the Bureau of Economic Analysis, North Carolina's regional price parity was 91.2 percent of the U.S., meaning North Carolina's average wage was still about 3 percentage points below the U.S. after adjusting for differences in regional prices.

Because industry average wage is only calculated as the *mean* wage, it is also useful to look to another source which calculates a *median* wage. Estimates from the Occupational Employment Statistics program show North Carolina had a median annual wage of \$33,920 in 2016. Therefore, half of North Carolina's jobs paid less than \$33,920 per year in 2016. The U.S. median annual wage was \$37,045 in 2016.

<sup>15</sup> All wage data from Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages, North Carolina Department of Commerce and Bureau of Labor Statistics.

## *Education and Skill Levels*

North Carolina's possesses a world class system of higher education which is comprised of two public systems of higher education, the North Carolina Community College System and the University of North Carolina System. The Community College System is comprised of 58 colleges and the UNC system has 16 post-secondary institutions. In addition, the state has over 40 private 2-year and 4-year institutions of higher education. While the combined efforts of these institutions help to produce a skilled workforce for the state, challenges still exist. In 2016 almost 14% of the labor force 25 years and over had less than a high school diploma, 26.4% had a high school diploma, 21.8% had some college, 9.1% had an Associate's degree and 29% had a Bachelor's degree or higher.

In addition, to the educational attainment of the state's labor force, North Carolina faces challenges in addressing the education and training needs of those individuals with disabilities. Based on information from U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 5-year estimates there are over 1.17 million individuals with a disability in North Carolina who are 25 years of age or older. Of these 25.4% have less than a high school diploma, 32.4% are high school graduates, 28.1% have some college or associate's degree and 14.1% have a bachelor's degree or higher. When compared to the population 25 and older without a disability, only 10.9% of those without a disability have less than high school diploma, 25.0% are high school graduates, 31.4% are have some college or associate's degree and 32.7% have a Bachelor's degree or higher.

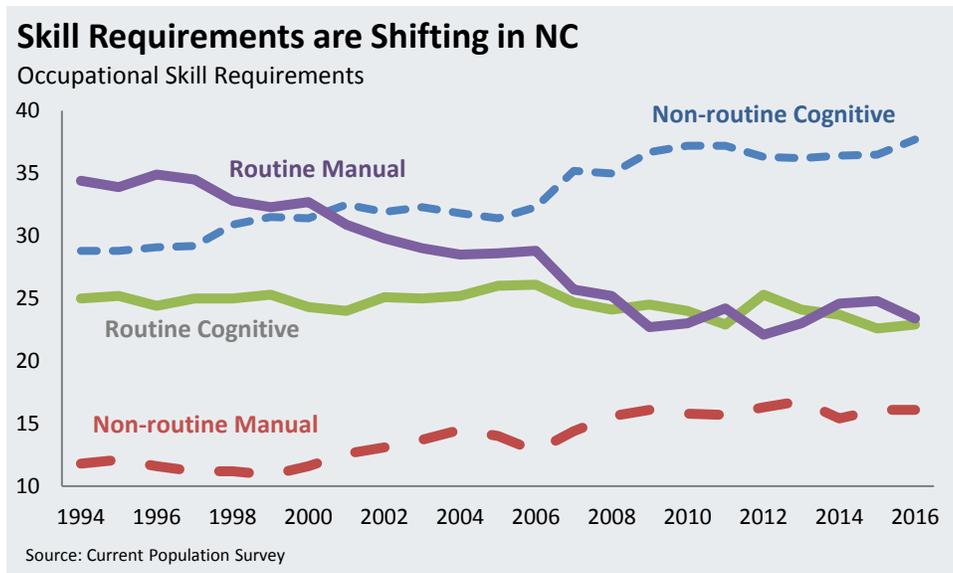
## *Skills Gap*

In 2016, North Carolina's labor force exceeded 4.6 million workers. Of these, 39% had a high school diploma or less, 30% had some college or an associate's degree, 21% had a Bachelor's degree and 11% had a master's degree or higher. 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. Governor Roy Cooper has set a goal for North Carolina to be a "Top 10 Educated State," which includes the goal of increasing the percentage of North Carolinians with a post-secondary degree or credential. In addition, the recent research completed by Georgetown University's Public Policy Institute estimates that by the year 2020, employment in North Carolina will exceed 5 million and that 67% of those jobs will require some form of post-secondary education.

One way to capture the changing nature of jobs is to divide existing occupations into whether they involve primarily manual or cognitive activities, and whether those activities are primarily routine or non-routine. Since the mid-1990s, non-routine jobs have been growing as a portion of total jobs, while the share of routine jobs has fallen. In particular, non-routine cognitive jobs (sometimes thought of as "knowledge jobs") have increased from 29% of jobs in 1994 to 38% in 2016, while routine manual jobs ("blue collar jobs") have fallen from 34% to 23%.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Occupational data from Current Population Survey and North Carolina Department of Commerce calculations.



Based on employment projections through 2024, non-routine jobs are expected to continue their growth as a portion of the job market. Again, showing that North Carolina needs to increase the number of individuals with some post-secondary education so that they can compete in the job market and supply employers with the skills required.

- (2) **Workforce Development, Education and Training Activities Analysis.**  
**The Unified or Combined State Plan must include an analysis of the workforce development activities, including education and training in the State, to address the education and skill needs of the workforce, as identified in (a)(1)(B)(iii) above, and the employment needs of employers, as identified in (a)(1)(A)(iii) above. This must include an analysis of—**
- (A) **The State’s Workforce Development Activities.**  
**Provide an analysis of the State’s workforce development activities, including education and training activities of the core programs, Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan, and required and optional one-stop delivery system partners.**

Governor Cooper wants North Carolinians to be better educated, healthier, and have more money in their pockets so that they can live more abundant, purposeful lives. The linchpin to achieving that goal is to help people get good-paying jobs to support themselves and their families.

In February 2018, Governor Cooper laid out the core principles of his job readiness initiative, NC Job Ready. NC Job Ready is built on three core principles: skills and education attainment so North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow, employer leadership to remain relevant to evolving industry needs, and local innovation to take great ideas and apply them statewide.

North Carolina’s workforce development system, NCWorks, is a statewide partnership that helps unemployed and underemployed people find new or better employment, and helps businesses connect with the talented workers they need. The NCWorks system is essential to NC Job Ready. The system consists of programs and networks designed to help individuals succeed in the workplace by providing skill development, training and employment services to employees and by helping businesses obtain a skilled workforce by providing employment services, training programs, and subsidized employment.

The NCWorks system provides workforce development activities that increase occupational skill

attainment, employment, retention, and earnings by participants. These programs are designed to improve the quality of the workforce, reduce welfare dependency, link talent to jobs, and enhance the state's productivity and competitiveness.

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

In 2014, the NCWorks Commission (North Carolina's state workforce investment board) completed a review of 20 workforce development program plans, policies and services across five agencies in North Carolina. This review included an analysis of core programs, as well as other one-stop delivery system partners. The commission reviewed workforce program funding levels and sources, service provision types, special populations served and business outreach initiatives. Appendix 2B includes a summary of the workforce programs offered in North Carolina.

Through its assessment of the workforce development system, the NCWorks Commission found North Carolina's programs to be service-driven with a focus on mission and target populations. Overall, the programs prioritize employment, career counseling, and assessment for the adult population. The commission also found that many programs also provide services to employers.

**(B) *The Strengths and Weaknesses of Workforce Development Activities.* Provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the workforce development activities identified in (A), directly above.**

*Strengths*

North Carolina is well situated to have a strong and seamless workforce development system. Overall, North Carolina has strong workforce development programs that offer a wide variety of services to a broad range of individuals with the goal of helping job-seekers and students obtain and maintain employment through training, education, and support and helping businesses find the qualified workers they need to be successful. North Carolina has are four key mechanisms currently in place to ensure the state continues to have a strong workforce development system and continuously improve.

First, NCWorks is a statewide partnership that brings together and aligns the state's workforce development programs to create a more efficient and effective system. In addition to focusing on aligning the state's workforce programs the partners also work closely with businesses throughout the state, helping them find the right candidates and develop training programs that can improve the skills of their current workers. By offering these services, North Carolina's system is connecting employers to a steady pipeline of talented individuals who have the skills to make their businesses thrive. The partnership was launched to better serve North Carolina by strengthening our partnerships between business, education, and workforce agencies for more effective programs.

Second, North Carolina has a strong statewide workforce investment board, the NCWorks Commission. This commission was recently reinvigorated to meet the WIOA requirements resulting in a commission that is stronger and more representative of the state's economy and workforce. The NCWorks Commission oversees the workforce development system to ensure it is coordinated and aligned to meet the needs of North Carolina people and businesses. The NCWorks Commission has the authority and responsibility in both state and federal law to ensure that the state's programs are working together in the most efficient and effective way with an end goal of preparing the state's workforce and meeting the needs of businesses.

In 2014, the NCWorks Commission approved the biennial strategic plan with a shared mission and vision for the workforce development system. This plan was the result of the commission's desire to create a comprehensive workforce development system that is transformable, sustainable, and demand-driven.

The four strategic goals as approved take advantage of the system's current strengths and proposes new strategies for aligning the services in a way that results in high quality workers trained for in-demand occupations. The plan also contains a strategic action plan that clearly identifies the strategies needed to strengthen the state's workforce development system.

The commission is also focusing on using data to drive strategies and hold programs accountable. The commission worked collaboratively with program staff to design and implement universal performance measures. The commission recognized that 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. In addition, the commission has begun developing state performance measures for local workforce development boards to ensure high performance across the state.

Third, Career pathways are a key area 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.

The NCWorks Commission has developed a certification process for recognizing comprehensive career pathways that at helping to develop a talent pipeline for in-demand occupations. NCWorks Certified Career Pathways are created by regional and local teams that consist of engaged employers, workforce development boards, high schools and community colleges. Following are the criteria for certification as an NCWorks Certified Career Pathway:

- demand-driven and data-informed;
- employer engagement;
- collaborative;
- career awareness;
- articulation and coordination;
- work-based learning;
- multiple entry and exit points; and
- evaluation.

Fourth, N.C. Department of Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD) is a strong resource for the NCWorks partners. LEAD provides a multitude of labor market and career information used by the system partners to inform data-driven decisions. Regional ETA staff, during a recent Workforce Information Grant (WIG) review, identified best practices in the areas of career and labor market information products, financial management and customer responsiveness.

Fifth, in 2014 the N.C. General Assembly created Prosperity Zones that organize the state's 100 counties to provide a consistent regional structure for economic and workforce development activities. These zones have been used for regional planning by the state's local workforce boards and to coordinate workforce development activities. Having this structure already in place is a benefit for WIOA implementation.

Finally, in 2013 the Division of Workforce Solutions in the Department of Commerce implemented the integrated service delivery model in conjunction with the local workforce development boards for our career center system (N.C.'s one-stop system). This model brings together the programs and services provided under Titles I and III in WIOA. Some of the key components of integrated service delivery are:

- integrated customer flow that responds to customer need, not just program requirements;
- staff-assisted services are emphasize and center services will be continuously promoted and provided until the customer's goal has been achieved;
- all career center customers, including unemployment insurance claimants, are provide with the

opportunity to know their skills improve their skills, and get the best job possible with their skills; and

- customers have easy access to a wide range of skill development services and the opportunity to improve employment opportunities through skill upgrading, skill validation, and credentialing.

North Carolina has a strong workforce development system that had already begun implementing many of the key activities in WIOA. The NCWorks Commission is focusing on aligning workforce programs and will be holding programs accountable for their performance. In addition, the state is focusing on business engagement and career pathways as two key strategies for helping to prepare students and jobs seekers and to meet the needs of the state's businesses.

### *Weaknesses*

North Carolina has a strong foundation of programs and much work has been done to integrate and develop strategies to collaborate more effectively. However, the workforce system is complicated and more work is needed to continue streamlining and integrating programs for individuals and businesses. Further integrating programs and services will ensure that the system is customer-centered.

In addition to continued work on integrating programs to ensure that all people are provided high quality service regardless of barriers, the following areas have been identified for improvement.

- North Carolina has a lot of information on the labor market, but needs to create more comprehensive communication and training strategies to ensure all staff from state policy makers to workforce board directors to front-line staff have the information needed to advise customers.
- 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.
- 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.
- A closer relationship with economic development organizations across the state to understand the needs of the current and future economy will help the workforce development system prepare the workers that are needed by new and expanding businesses in North Carolina.

The NCWorks Commission is focused on developing an innovative, relevant, effective, and efficient workforce development system and developed a roadmap for how the state workforce programs will achieve the goals and objectives that will address these limitations while creating a more customer-centric system that listens and responds to the needs of businesses, and trains workers to be successful in the current and future economy.

**(C) *State Workforce Development Capacity. Provide an analysis of the capacity of State entities to provide the workforce development activities identified in (A), above.***

North Carolina's capacity to provide workforce development activities is strong. The NCWorks Commission (North Carolina's state workforce investment board) ensures coordination of, oversees, and assesses the performance of, the core programs. In addition, the three agencies responsible for the WIOA core programs are have created a WIOA State Steering Council comprised of leaders from each agency to ensure programs are aligned at the state and local level.

The six WIOA core workforce programs are provided to job seekers and employers via NCWorks Career Centers (one-stop career centers in North Carolina), online at the state's official job matching and labor exchange portal, NCWorks Online, at local vocational rehabilitation offices, and at community colleges. Below is an overview of the capacity of the three agencies.

*N.C. Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions*

The Division of Workforce Solutions oversees WIOA Title I and III programs. The division has implemented an integrated services delivery model at local NCWorks Career Centers to ensure an integrated and customer-focused approach to providing services to individuals and business.

North Carolina has 23 local workforce development boards that are working to ensure all communities have the capacity to provide high quality services to individuals and businesses across the state. Local boards have representation from the Division of Workforce Solutions, community colleges, and local vocational rehabilitation programs to ensure coordination and capacity building at the local and regional level.

NCWorks Career Centers are operated by North Carolina's 23 local workforce development boards and are overseen by the NCWorks Commission. 81 career centers, located throughout the state, provide Title I and III services. Staff at NCWorks Career Centers, Community Colleges, and Vocational Rehabilitation offices all maintain good referral processes among each other when serving customers. Some career centers are co-located with a community college, social services offices, or offices where vocational rehabilitation services are available. In addition there are 28 career center outposts where services are provided.

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

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

Services provided to employers include:

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

## *N.C. Community College System*

The N.C. Community College System is the pass-through agency for Title II Adult Education Family Literacy Act. Through a competitive request for proposal process, eligible providers will be funded to provide services and activities that improve adult literacy skills and knowledge for postsecondary transition and or employment. NC community colleges are the main partners for adult education providers for developing and implementing activities and services that support transition to postsecondary training and or employment such as Integrated Education and Training, Workplace Preparation Activities, Pre-apprenticeships, and the model that specifically supports English language learners, the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education.

## *N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation*

North Carolina has 80 local vocational rehabilitation offices 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 Vocational Rehabilitation. Specific arrangements and staffing patterns by Vocational Rehabilitation staff vary from site to site depending on local needs and agreements. Enhanced working relationships with key partners of the workforce development system such as Social Services, N.C. Division of Employment Security, N.C. Community College System, and other local partnerships allow all the agencies to better meet the needs of the individual.

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

North Carolina's agencies overseeing the six core WIOA programs have enhanced their partnerships, locally, regionally, and at the state level over the last several years to ensure coordination of programs and capacity to serve that state's 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.

### **(b) State Strategic Vision and Goals.**

**The Unified or Combined State Plan must include the State's strategic vision and goals for developing its workforce and meeting employer needs in order to support economic growth and economic self-sufficiency. This must include—**

#### **(1) Vision**

**Describe the State's strategic vision for its workforce development system.**

The NCWorks Commission, North Carolina's state workforce investment board under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, developed and adopted in February 2015 a strategic plan with interagency input that sets forth a vision and goals for the state's workforce development system. The vision and goal statements below are from this plan and, upon review of current economic conditions, workforce statistics, and workforce development activities, remain relevant and serve as the backbone of the state Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Unified Plan. The vision and goals outlined below align with Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready initiative built on three core principles: skills and education attainment so North Carolinians are ready for the jobs of today and tomorrow, employer leadership to remain relevant to evolving industry needs, and local innovation to take great ideas and apply them statewide.

Vision: To grow the North Carolina economy by strengthening the state's workforce and connecting employers to skilled, high quality employees.

(2) **Goals**

**Describe the goals for achieving this vision based on the analysis in (a) above of the State's economic conditions, workforce, and workforce development activities. This must include—**

- (A) Goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce, including preparing youth and individuals with barriers to employment and other populations.
- (B) Goals for meeting the skilled workforce needs of employers.

The NCWorks Commission developed four strategic goals to achieve the state's vision for the workforce system as part of its strategic plan. As the commission was developing the goals and objectives for the strategic plan, the members realized there were several principles that applied to all goals and objectives. Instead of repeating these common themes with each goal, the task force decided to create guiding principles that apply to all goals and objectives.

- Strategies will be developed locally, regionally, and statewide to address the unique needs of different areas of the state.
- Best practices will be identified and replicated across North Carolina.
- The workforce system will be flexible and adaptable to the changing needs of the economy and the state.
- Strategies will focus on the needs of today's economy and developing talent for tomorrow.
- The workforce system will focus on target industries and career clusters.

Below is an overview of each of the commission's goals.

*Goal 1: Create an integrated, seamless, and customer-centered workforce system.*

The commission recognizes that North Carolina's public workforce development system is a key part of the state's economy. It is comprised of a variety of programs with a broad range of activities that serve a diverse group of people. It includes a group of interactive and interdependent entities, programs, and services. Activities range from self-service activities online, to staff assisted services in a workforce office, to multi-year training programs at a public school or community college. In addition, programs serve people with varying levels of education, employment experience, and barriers. Individuals may participate in a single program or activity or may be eligible to receive services through a variety of programs and entities. The system exists to help businesses find qualified workers to meet their present and future workforce needs and to help individuals gain the skills and training they need to obtain and maintain employment.

The commission recognized that the state needed to strengthen the system by integrating programs and services and ensuring that the system is seamless and customer-centered. An integrated system will allow all customers to access timely and relevant services from a multitude of entry points. Achievement of this goal will result in a system moving in the same direction with the same goals. Citizens will experience better service while businesses will find a trusted partner to turn to for their workforce development needs. And, workforce development programs will have improved outcomes.

This goal is the foundation for the other goals of the commission's strategic plan. If North Carolina's workforce development system is going to meet the needs of businesses and prepare workers for the jobs that are needed, then the system must be aligned and focused on the customer.

*Goal 2: Create a workforce system that is responsive to the changing needs of the economy*

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

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

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

*Goal 3: Prepare workers to succeed in the North Carolina economy and continuously improve their skills.*

The speed of change in the economy is increasing. Not only has the North Carolina economy shifted from one focused on agriculture and manufacturing to one that is focused on the knowledge economy, but the types of jobs have also changed. Employers want people with more education and training than was required in the past. Today, middle-skill jobs, which require more than a high school education, but less than a four-year degree, make up the largest segment of jobs. To succeed workers must stay informed of new technology and continually increase their knowledge and skills.

North Carolina's workforce development system is designed to help workers find good-paying jobs by assessing skills, provide information on careers, connect people to needed training and education programs, and refer people to jobs. One of the best ways to help individuals gain skills and learn more about a career is through work-based learning. These programs combine classroom education with on-the-job experience and individuals gains valuable work experience while learning new skills.

Governor Cooper believes that education is the foundation to a strong workforce. As the skill requirements of jobs increase and rapidly change, businesses need to find people with the right skills for the jobs they create and North Carolinians need access to training to be ready for those jobs. Governor Cooper continues to make education and preparing the state's youth to enter the workforce a key focus of NCWorks. Governor Cooper's goal is to make North Carolina a Top Ten Educated State by 2025 by increasing the percentage of four-year-olds enrolled in high quality pre-K, raising the high school graduation rate, and increasing the percentage of North Carolinians with a post-secondary degree or credential. An educated North Carolina is a job-ready North Carolina.

The state is making investments to ensure high school graduates are college and career ready by strengthening preK-12 education, enhancing career and technical education, adult literacy programs, and high-demand courses at community colleges, and creating high expectations for employment among youth, including youth with barriers to employment. In addition, efforts are being made to help prepare young people for careers in critical cluster areas, by increasing competency-based credentials, work-based learning opportunities and apprenticeship programs across the state.

North Carolina's ability to grow its human capital infrastructure and raise educational attainment levels is necessary to compete in today's economy. Educational attainment is also a key factor in determining the ability of workers to perform in increasingly knowledge-based work in every industry and occupation and achieve economic self-sufficiency. Data indicates that access to education and training impacts the lives of North Carolinians when looking at the average salaries and unemployment rates of workers. When workforce agencies and economic development work together to create career pathways, it will increase the prosperity of jobseekers.

*Goal 4: Use data to drive strategies and ensure accountability.*

Data must be used to make well-informed decisions about critical career clusters and determine where to target limited resources. North Carolina has strong resources available to identify key industries and occupations across the state and in regional communities. This information must be used to guide state programs as well as to advise customers.

In addition, it is important that North Carolina's system is held accountable for the money spent on

workforce programs and services, as well as for the quality of services provided. Government efficiency is both expected and necessary. It is the commission's expectation that all state agencies with workforce investment responsibilities work together to maximize the use of all funds, including federal dollars. The workforce system will promote demand-driven and data-informed decision making and evaluation to more effectively meet workforce customer needs and enhance system accountability.

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

**Using the table provided in Appendix 1, include the State's expected levels of performance relating to the performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance described in section 116(b)(2)(A) of WIOA. (This Strategic Planning element only applies to core programs.)**

<b>Appendix 1</b>	Year		Year	
	Proposed/Expected Level	Negotiated/Adjusted Level	Proposed/Expected Level	Negotiated/Adjusted Level
<b>Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)</b>				
Adults				
Dislocated Workers				
Youth*				
Adult Education				
Wagner-Peyser				
Vocational Rehabilitation				
<b>Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)</b>				
Adults				
Dislocated Workers				
Youth*				
Adult Education				
Wagner-Peyser				
Vocational Rehabilitation				
<b>Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)</b>				
Adults				
Dislocated Workers				
Youth				
Adult Education				
Wagner-Peyser				
Vocational Rehabilitation				
<b>Credential Attainment Rate</b>				
Adults				
Dislocated Workers				
Youth				
Adult Education				
Wagner-Peyser	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Vocational Rehabilitation				

<b>Appendix 1</b>	Year		Year	
<b>Measureable Skill Gains</b>				
Adults				
Dislocated Workers				
Youth				
Adult Education				
Wagner-Peyser	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Vocational Rehabilitation				
<b>Effectiveness in Serving Employers</b>				
Adults				
Dislocated Workers				
Youth*				
Adult Education				
Wagner-Peyser				
Vocational Rehabilitation				

**(4) Assessment**

**Describe how the State will assess the overall effectiveness of the workforce development system in the State in relation to the strategic vision and goals stated above in sections (b)(1), (2), and (3) and how it will use the results of this assessment and other feedback to make continuous or quality improvements.**

The NCWorks Commission is responsible for evaluating the overall effectiveness of the state’s workforce development system. To accomplish this task, the commission has established a performance and accountability committee which 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 annual performance measures for all workforce programs;
- investigating the possibility of system-wide customer satisfaction surveys;
- reviewing the implementation of WIOA 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-coordinate, customer-focused, high-quality, and meeting the needs of both individuals and businesses.

(c) **State Strategy.**

**The Unified or Combined State Plan must include the State's strategies to achieve its strategic vision and goals. These strategies must take into account the State's economic, workforce, and workforce development, education and training activities and analysis provided in Section (a) above. Include discussion of specific strategies to address the needs of populations provided in Section (a).**

- (1) Describe the strategies the State will implement, including industry or sector partnerships related to in-demand industry sectors and occupations and career pathways, as required by WIOA section 101(d)(3)(B), (D). "Career pathway" is defined at WIOA section 3(7). "In-demand industry sector or occupation" is defined at WIOA section 3(23).**

The NCWorks Commission created a strategic action plan as a companion piece to its strategic plan to identify the key action steps necessary for achieving the goals identified. The action steps identified by the commission and through stakeholder engagement and input fall into four categories: system alignment and transformation, business engagement, career pathways, and data. These action steps formed the foundation for the strategies listed below.

*Career Pathways*

North Carolina's primary work around industry and sector partnerships is done through its career pathways strategy. Career pathways begin with an engaged group of employers from a high-growth industry. This group meets with education and workforce professionals to discuss the workforce needs of the industry as well as specific knowledge, skills, ability, credentials, and experiences needed for occupations within that industry. Education providers then use this information to develop a clear plan for all individuals, including students, job seekers, dislocated workers, veterans, and individuals with disabilities, to use to prepare for these occupations in the most efficient way.

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

North Carolina has a strong career pathway strategy in place that expanded on the work done over the last decade by the K-12 and community college systems. The current strategy includes a certification process by the NCWorks Commission that requires eight key element be in place to ensure pathways are comprehensive with multiple entry and exit ramps for in-demand occupations. Specific strategies to continue to strengthen and use career pathways are listed below.

- Continue to support and promote the development of NCWorks Certified Career Pathways for critical industry clusters.
- Require workforce development partners use the career pathways to target resources towards helping individuals gain the skills and experience needed for in-demand occupations.
- Provide programs that link low-skilled adults and individuals with barriers to employment to career pathways and job-ready skills along with basic skills.
- Develop a career information portal to ensure students and jobs seekers have reliable information on career opportunities and educational programs to prepare for those opportunities.
- Support individuals with barriers to employment by mitigating obstacles and increasing access to education and other training opportunities along career pathways.

- 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.
- Individually and collaboratively address the unique needs of current and prospective customers, including community college students, youth, and individuals with barriers to employment, veterans, and other populations to help them succeed in education and careers.

### *Business Engagement and Sector Partnerships*

North Carolina also has several additional strategies that will proactively address the changing needs of the economy for a job-driven system by strengthening and expanding our business engagement strategies. 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.

- Research best practices on sector strategy initiatives and develop a strategy to implement networks for in-demand industries in North Carolina.
- Implement sector strategy initiatives to get input from the business community on their workforce needs and use this information in combination with analysis of data to make informed decisions and build a globally competitive workforce.
- Work with industry networks and business associations to educate businesses about N.C.'s career pathways strategy.
- Help connect businesses to local and regional career pathways activities.
- Increase, strengthen, and promote work-based learning activities including 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.
- Expand the number of NCWorks Certified Work-Ready Communities to demonstrate to businesses that communities have the workforce needed.
- Identify back-to-industry opportunities for teachers/instructors to help them stay current with industry trends, enhance curriculum appropriately, and integrate work-based learning into their programs.

**2. Describe the strategies the State will use to 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 to the State to achieve fully integrated customer services consistent with the strategic vision and goals described above. Also describe strategies to strengthen workforce development activities in regard to weaknesses identified in section II(a)(2).**

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

The three agencies responsible for the six core programs under WIOA – the N.C. Community College System, N.C. Department of Commerce, and N.C. Department of Health and Human Services – are aligning core programs and one-stop partner services via NCWorks. The focus of the initiative is on one goal: connecting North Carolina jobs with North Carolina people through the efficient use of resources, streamlined customer service for citizens and businesses, alignment of programs and a consistent,

cohesive strategy all under one name – NCWorks. By focusing on common goals and building on each other’s strengths, North Carolina will develop the organizational tools, structures and cross-agency protocols needed to support the vision of WIOA and the goals of NCWorks.

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

The NCWorks Commission identified coordination and alignment of programs as one of the key strategies to ensure North Carolina has the best workforce development system in the county. In addition, the WIOA State Steering Council, comprised of statewide leaders representing the programs offered through WIOA, was established in the spring of 2015 to oversee the development of the State Unified Plan and implementation of WIOA. This council will continue to exist to review policies and develop strategies for further integration of programs.

The strategies identified by the NCWorks Commission and the State Steering Council to further coordinate programs at the state and local level include:

- ensure the WIOA State Steering Council continues as a permanent cross-agency body to coordinate and align policy;
- create new inter-agency teams at the local and regional levels to enhance alignment in workforce services;
- continue to collaborate with all statewide education and workforce development entities to get all workforce system participants enrolled in NCWorks Online;
- continue to incorporate and promote the NCWorks brand for all workforce development system programs to help customers recognize the value of the system;
- develop and implement a system-wide and consistent outreach strategy;
- develop a consistent menu of services and activities highlighting business and industry engagement opportunities, and develop interagency protocols to better meet employer and jobseeker needs; and
- create a framework for ensuring cross-trained, qualified staff have the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to support the local delivery system to ensure that North Carolina has the nation’s most talented, collaborative professionals and leaders for workforce development.

### *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 through the following actions:

- investigate the process of interfacing NCWorks Online with North Carolina’s array of workforce development case management systems;
- develop an annual workforce development system report card with universal success metrics;
- create metrics based on consistently collected feedback from customers to strengthen the workforce development system;
- pilot consumer reporting that provides industry-recognized credentials to better assess the outcomes of those individuals who participate in the workforce;
- collaboratively develop information exchange systems for demand- driven, data-informed decision making and evaluation; and
- finalize state performance measures for local workforce boards.

### III. Operational Planning Elements

**The Unified or Combined State Plan must include an Operational Planning Elements section that supports the State’s strategy and the system-wide vision described in Section II(c) above. Unless otherwise noted, all Operational Planning Elements apply to Combined State Plan partner programs included in the plan as well as to core programs.**

**(a) State Strategy Implementation – The Unified or Combine State Plan must include –**

**(1) State Board Functions**

**Describe how the State board will implement its functions under section 101(d) of WIOA (i.e., provide a description of Board operational structures and decision making processes to ensure such functions are carried out).**

*State Board Operational Structures and Processes*

The NCWorks Commission is the designated state workforce investment 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 “one-stop” career center system.

*Membership*

Representation on the NCWorks Commission is mandated by federal and state law. Commission membership includes workforce agency leaders, elected officials, the private sector, and labor, training, and community based organizations. The majority of the members are from the private sector as directed by WIOA. All members are appointed to four-year terms by the Governor. The heads of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, N.C. Department of Administration, N.C. Department of Public Instruction, N.C. Community College System, University of North Carolina System, and N.C. Department of Commerce all serve as ex-officio members.

*Committees*

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 bi-annual 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 chairs of each committee, along with the commission chair also compose the Executive Committee.

*Staff*

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

*Meetings*

The commission conducts quarterly 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 comprised of commission members. 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**

**Describe how the lead State agency with responsibility for the administration of each core program or a Combined State Plan partner program included in this plan will implement the State's Strategies identified in II(c) above. This must include a description of—**

**(A) Core Program Operations**

**Describe the activities the entities carrying out the respective core programs will fund to implement the State's strategies. Also describe how such activities will be aligned across the core programs and Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan and among the entities administering the programs, including using co-enrollment and other strategies, as appropriate.**

The core programs in WIOA will achieve the strategies identified in North Carolina's State Unified Plan of strengthening the state's workforce and connecting employers to skilled, high quality employees. The NCWorks Commission's strategic plan and action plan will provide the foundation for this work and the commission will continue to track the success of the plan. Below is more detail on the action steps to accomplish this work.

*Coordinate Across Programs at State and Local Levels*

North Carolina has already made strides in integrating programs under WIOA. Currently programs in Titles I and III, operated by the N.C. Department of Commerce, are already integrated with a referral process to programs in Titles II and IV. The N.C. Department of Commerce will work to continuously improve the integration of services to ensure a customer-centered approach to service delivery. The WIOA State Steering Council will review current referral policy and strategies to identify ways to strengthen this process.

The NCWorks Commission's 2014-2016 strategic plan provides a framework for all workforce programs in North Carolina, including, but not limited to the programs covered under WIOA. This plan is centered on the work of coordinating and aligning all workforce programs. The State Steering Council also identified key actions needed to ensure coordination and alignment.

- Ensure the WIOA State Steering Council continues as a permanent cross-agency body to coordinate and align policy.
  - The State Steering Council was established in spring 2015 to ensure implementation of WIOA and coordination and alignment of programs at the state and local levels. The council will continue to meet on a regular basis to review progress on WIOA implementation and develop strategies for improvement. In addition, the council will review state policies that may inhibit programs from fully aligning activities. The council will provide feedback to the NCWorks Commission and its accountability committee regarding challenges and barriers to completing the work, and suggestions for new policy.
- Create inter-agency teams at the local and regional levels to enhance alignment in workforce services.
  - State-level coordination and alignment can 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.

- Prosperity Zones were established by legislation in 2014 to promote collaboration for prosperity within the state. Regional prosperity teams will bring together education, workforce, economic development, and industry leaders to develop strategies for strengthening the workforce system at the local and regional level.
- Continue to collaborate with all statewide education and workforce development entities to get all workforce system participants enrolled in NCWorks Online.
  - NCWorks Online is the state's job-matching system 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.
  - 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.
- Continue to incorporate and promote the NCWorks brand for all workforce development system programs to help customers recognize the value of the system. Currently, workforce development programs and services are branded under a variety of names, making it difficult for customers, individuals, and businesses to identify where to get workforce development services. In April 2014, the former Governor announced NCWorks and the need for the workforce development system to work under one name.
  - A single brand is needed to create a seamless workforce development system that is easily identifiable to all customers. Citizens, businesses, and key stakeholders will find value in North Carolina's workforce development system when the overwhelming complexity is minimized and services streamlined.
  - A single brand for the entire workforce development system will eliminate the historic focus on individual program services and replace it with a state-wide approach. A common brand also reduces confusion for those unfamiliar with the system by simplifying the message and increasing the efficiency of statewide outreach.
- Develop and implement a system-wide and consistent outreach strategy.
  - Customers of the state's workforce development system may access more than one service. For example, a business looking to grow will 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 apprenticeship programs to ensure it can fill its current and future workforce needs. The workforce development system needs to develop outreach strategies that provide information on the full range of services available.
  - Currently, each program promotes its services separately, leaving many businesses and individuals confused about what services are available to meet their needs. In addition, combining services across programs is often left up to the customer to figure out. A consistent outreach strategy needs to be developed at the state level that allows for customization at the local level.
- Develop a consistent menu of services and activities highlighting business and industry engagement opportunities, and develop interagency protocols to better meet employer and

jobseeker needs.

- There are many ways for businesses to engage with the workforce development system that will help businesses access the services they need and provide opportunities for individuals to gain work experience necessary to be a successful candidate for employment. A recent survey of businesses found that lack of work experience was one of the top three reasons employers were having difficulty finding the talent they need. However, businesses may not be fully aware of the ways they can connect with the workforce development system to provide opportunities that both help individuals gain the experience they need and develop a pipeline of talent to meet the businesses' need.
- Workforce development programs need to work together to identify all the ways that businesses can interact with the workforce development system from facility tours, to internships and externships, to apprenticeships, and on-the-job training opportunities. Then, business outreach specialists can share information with the businesses on the full range of activities, across programs, in which a business can engage to help develop the talent needed to grow their business.
- Create a framework for ensuring cross-trained, qualified staff have the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to support the local delivery system to ensure that North Carolina has the nation's most talented, collaborative professionals and leaders for workforce development.
  - 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 workforce program staff, will develop a framework for providing cross-training of workforce programs.

### *Business Engagement and Sector Partnerships*

North Carolina will proactively address the changing needs of the economy for a job-driven system by strengthening and expanding sector partnerships and business engagement strategies. 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.

- Research best practices on sector strategy initiatives and develop a strategy to implement networks for in-demand industries in North Carolina to get input from the business community on their workforce needs and use this information in combination with analysis of data to make informed decisions and build a globally competitive workforce.
  - Currently, the NCWorks Certified Career Pathways initiative is a primary example of a sector strategy initiative throughout the state. This initiative is employer driven and promotes partnerships among local businesses and workforce development entities.
- 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.
  - A recent study of employer needs found that work experience was the top reason businesses had trouble finding the qualified workers they need to be successful. Work-based learning is a key strategy for helping to reduce this challenge and is a key element in career pathways and other work.

- North Carolina is currently participating in a National Governor’s Association Policy Academy on work-based learning to increase and promote work-based learning activities across the state. North Carolina leaders will investigate how work-based learning activities could be incorporated into agreements with companies receiving state and/or local economic development incentives. There are a variety of types of work-based learning in which a business could engage including internships for students, externships for educators, co-ops, and apprenticeships. Businesses would benefit from these programs by helping to develop the future talent they need to maintain or grow their business.
- Expand the number of NCWorks Certified 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. The NCWorks Commission’s strategic plan provides a framework for all workforce programs in North Carolina, including, but not limited to the programs covered under WIOA. This plan is centered on the work of coordinating and aligning all workforce programs. The State Steering Council also identified key actions needed to ensure coordination and alignment.

### *Career Pathways*

North Carolina has a strong career pathway strategy in place that expanded on the work done over the last decade by the K-12 and community college systems. The current strategy includes a certification process by the NCWorks Commission that requires eight key elements be in place. Specific strategies to continue to strengthen and use career pathways are listed below.

- Continue to support and promote the development of NCWorks Certified Career Pathways for critical industry clusters.
  - North Carolina has a Director of Career Pathways position that was created through a grant from the John M. Belk Endowment. This position is responsible for helping teams across the state develop career pathways ready to be certified by the NCWorks Commission.
  - The N.C. Department of Commerce has also received a U.S. Department of Labor Sector Partnership National Emergency Grant that is focused on the development and implementation of career pathways.
- Require workforce development partners use the career pathways to target resources towards helping individuals gain the skills and experience needed for in-demand occupations.
  - NCWorks Career Pathways focus on local and regional in-demand occupations. Development of the pathway is only the first step. The next step is to help individuals enroll in career pathways programs to ensure that there is a pipeline of workers for these occupations. To do this, education and workforce development partners need to target their resources on career awareness and increasing enrollment in career pathways.
  - As resources for the education and the workforce development system continue to shrink in North Carolina and across the country, programs will need to focus their efforts to be more efficient and effective. Targeting resources towards helping people enroll in career pathways for high-demand occupations will help the workforce system be more efficient with its resources; individuals gain access to high-demand occupations and improve their quality of life; and business have the workforce they need to be successful and grow.

- Link Basic Skills programs at community colleges and other Title II providers, designed for low-skilled adults and individuals with barriers to employment to career pathways and job-ready skills.
  - NC Basic Skills programs will provide educational services and activities to this target group to improve foundational literacy skills and employability skills needed for workforce success. 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 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.
- Develop a career information portal to ensure students and jobs seekers have reliable information on career opportunities and educational programs to prepare for those opportunities.
  - There is a variety of readily available career information sites, listings, web pages, and portals supported by various agencies and programs. The amount of information is often overwhelming for students and job seekers especially if the data is inconsistent.
  - An interagency working group of partners will review and assess the career information currently available and make recommendations to create a single web portal. This web portal will be a hub where students and job seekers can turn to find relevant and accurate career information. This hub will not replace available career information but provide appropriate navigation to the best resources.
- 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.
  - The vocational rehabilitation programs will incorporate, to the maximum extent possible, career pathways within their services to individuals with disabilities through approaches to include increase emphasis and reference of 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, and 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, regardless less of their current situation to determine how to achieve their career goals. Pathways include multiple entry and exit points so all people can use the pathway to plan their career. North Carolina's career pathways strategy includes education and training on how to use career pathways to advise and support all individuals.

### *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.

- Investigate the process of interfacing NCWorks Online with North Carolina's array of workforce development case management systems.
  - There are nearly a dozen 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.
  - Also, the workforce system does not have a way of tracking services across agencies, which increases the chances of duplication of funds and services. This lack of information also impacts the referral process and decreases staff efficiency.
  - The State Steering Council will begin investigating the opportunities and challenges that exist for integrating case management system. Currently, programs offered under Titles I and III use the same system and the council will explore options for expanding the use of this system to other programs.
- 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 program.
- Create metrics based on consistently collected feedback from customers to strengthen the workforce development system.
  - Each workforce development agency has historically been responsible for measuring the overall satisfaction of its clients. Measuring this level of satisfaction is program specific and 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.
  - The workforce development system must be continuously responsive to its customers. With so many programs delivering services to job seekers and businesses, the NCWorks Commission will work with workforce development agencies to establish a continuous improvement process that canvases all customers regardless of access point, seeks to understand their challenges, and provides a mechanism for

strengthening the system based on that understanding. This data will be used to create customer satisfaction metrics aimed at continuously improving the system.

- Pilot consumer reporting that provides industry-recognized credentials to better assess the outcomes of those individuals who participate in the workforce.
  - As industry certifications 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 N.C. Community College System initiated a conversation with other community college systems and began to hear a consistent need across the country to make progress on this issue. As a result, the system office was encouraged to take a leadership role in leading this national conversation.
- Finalize state performance measures for local workforce boards.
  - North Carolina General Statute directs the NCWorks Commission to develop state performance measure for local workforce development boards. The commission will review baseline information in the spring of 2016 and develop 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.

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

**Describe how the activities identified in (A) will be aligned with programs and activities provided by required one-stop partners and other optional one-stop partners and activities provided under employment, training (including Registered Apprenticeships), education (including career and technical education), human services and other programs not covered by the plan, as appropriate, assuring coordination of, and avoiding duplication among these activities.**

Activities listed in section A above, developed by the NCWorks Commission, the state's Workforce Development Board under the Opportunity Act, were planned for the entire workforce development system under the Commission's strategic plan. The NCWorks Commission's 2014-2016 strategic plan provides the framework for all workforce programs in North Carolina, including but not limited to the programs covered under WIOA. These programs include Registered Apprenticeship, 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) and Food and Nutrition Services, and other programs offered by the NC Community College System, and the NC Department of Commerce.

The NCWorks Commission, which includes representatives from the business community, heads of state workforce agencies, educators, and community leaders align workforce programs and activities at the state-level that are focused on coordinating and aligning all workforce programs, and avoiding duplication across workforce activities. Efforts include extensive stakeholder work and 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, 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), 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 with regard to funding and service capacity, number counties served, types of services provided, and target populations. In the most recent review, the Commission found that the majority of programs offered some type of skill development and employment services for adults, but relatively 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.

Other strategic planning efforts related to workforce development, including those of the Economic Development Board, Education Cabinet, Community College System, and State Board of Education are concurrent 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. For example, the strategic plan of the North Carolina Community College System, *Align4NCWorks*, is aligned with the WIOA Unified Plan. Community colleges throughout the state hosted regional Workforce Learning Summits involving partners from business and industry, public schools, workforce development boards and career centers, and economic development. Elected officials, local government leaders, community organizations and other partners also participated. As an alignment strategy, elements of *Align4NCWorks* have been incorporated into the WIOA Unified Plan, with workforce partner agency representatives contributing to the development of both plans.

The NC Community College System also maintains partnerships with a network of community based organizations (CBO) and faith based organizations around North Carolina that have the capacity to outreach and serve those adults who have multiple barriers to job training and employment. The CBO's, who work locally, have the knowledge and relationships to target services to address local economic and social needs of the community. These organizations, already collaborative partners, are included in various trainings, and have access to online resources as described in section A. Similarly, the 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 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.

One state-level initiative that integrates workforce programs is *Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities*, which establishes a state-level framework for the review and expansion of postsecondary education and employment opportunities for people with disabilities in North Carolina. This initiative requires the NC Department of Health and Human Services with the assistance of the Department of Public Instruction, the University of North Carolina, and the N.C. Community College System, and in consultation with the N.C. Postsecondary Education Alliance, community stakeholders, and other interested parties to assess gaps and system needs to support transitions of people with disabilities to adulthood; develop a program and fiscal policies to expand and sustain postsecondary education and employment opportunities for people with disabilities; plan and implement approaches to public awareness about postsecondary education and employment for people with disabilities; plan and implement joint policies and common data indicators for tracking the outcomes of people with disabilities after leaving high school; and consider options for technology to link agency databases.

The *Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities* report to the North Carolina General Assembly for 2016 establishes WIOA as foundational federal legislation upon which the state policies and practices concerning system needs are established and aligned. Specific elements of the Unified State Plan and Opportunities Act that have been incorporated include the earmarked Title IV funding, representing roughly \$16 million, for pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities who are eligible or 'potentially eligible' for the VR program; the restrictions on subminimum wage employment so that individuals with even the most significant disabilities are encouraged and permitted to pursue competitive integrated employment; the expansion of the triennial statewide comprehensive needs assessment under Title IV to focus on the vocational rehabilitation needs of youth with disabilities; and performance measures aligned with the WIOA Performance Accountability measures for youth as statewide indicators of North Carolina's success.

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

**Describe how the entities carrying out the respective core programs, Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan, and required and optional one-stop partner programs will coordinate activities and resources to provide comprehensive, high-quality, customer-centered services, including supportive services to individuals including those populations identified in section II(a)(1)(B). The activities described shall conform to the statutory requirements of each program.**

As a system, NCWorks will pursue strategies to ensure job seekers have access to all services across programs. The NCWorks Commission recognized in 2014 during its strategic planning process that while North Carolina has some of the best workforce development programs in the country, these programs did not always operate as a cohesive system. As a result, commission identified coordination and alignment of programs as one of the key goals for the system and developed key strategies to meet this goal (see section II(c) State Strategy for more details). An integrated system will allow all customers to access timely and relevant services from a multitude of touch points wrapped around a customer service core. Achievement of this goal will result in a system moving in the same direction with the same goals, and job seekers will experience better service.

To accomplish this goal, the NCWorks Commission has established several key mechanisms to ensure programs are coordinated. Currently Titles I and III are already fully integrated and there is a strong referral process with programs offered through Title IV. The mechanisms listed below will be used to strengthen the coordination between all WIOA programs.

First, the WIOA State Steering Council was established to bring together the senior leadership of each program covered under WIOA to review current activities, discuss solutions, and track implementation. This council will continue to meet on a regular basis to review progress on WIOA implementation and develop strategies for improvement. In addition, the council will 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 and its accountability committee regarding challenges and barriers to completing the work, and suggestions for new policy.

Second, local and regional teams will be developed to ensure that coordination and alignment is happening at the local level as well. State-level coordination and alignment can 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. These councils will report to the WIOA State Steering Committee on best practices as well as barriers to success.

Third, North Carolina will use the NCWorks brand to assist in creating a seamless workforce development system that is easily identifiable to all customers. Job seekers will find value in North Carolina's workforce development system when the overwhelming complexity is minimized and services streamlined. A common brand will reduce confusion for those unfamiliar with the system by simplifying the message and increasing the efficiency of statewide outreach.

Fourth, NCWorks partners will develop and implement a system-wide and consistent outreach strategy. Currently, each program promotes its services separately, leaving many individuals confused about what services are available to meet their needs. In addition, combining services across programs is often left up to the customer to figure out. A consistent outreach strategy needs to be developed at the state level that 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 is developing a framework to ensure program staff have basic knowledge of all workforce programs in the state.

Finally, the commission has established a performance and accountability committee that will review the implementation and effectiveness of WIOA, NCWorks Career Centers, and overall performance of the system. This committee will report back to the full commission on successes and challenges of the system and will recommend key policy changes to the Governor, N.C. 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.

### *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 is currently working to develop key strategies for integrating Titles II and IV. 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 N.C. 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 Opportunities 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 utilize integrated technology to generate an integrated customer pool and customer flow. Staff are organized by function are cross-trained so that all center staff has 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 used by staff. Customers (when eligibility permits) are enrolled in both WIOA Title I Adult program and Wagner-Peyser program; and all Trade Adjustment Act customers are enrolled in WIOA Title I Dislocated Worker program. This model emphasizes cross-training of staff and strong partnership to serve customers better.

The NCWorks Commission was charged with setting new criteria and standards for quality customer service for the state-wide career center system. This new criteria was approved by the Commission in May 2013 and includes 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.

In addition, many centers are co-located with community colleges or county social services and have vocation 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Vocational Rehabilitation Programs

The N.C. Department of Health and Human Services Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) and Services for the Blind have working partnerships with NCWorks and other components of the statewide workforce development system, and will coordinate activities and resources to provide comprehensive, high-quality, customer-centered services. At a systems level this is accomplished through participation on interagency strategic planning committees and workgroups. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services, the designated state agency for the VR programs, is represented on the NCWorks Commission and also the Governor's Education Cabinet to align human services programs focused on employment with education and workforce development initiatives. At a local level, DVRS and other workforce partners have representation in strategic planning on local workforce boards.

DVRS 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 VR and other partner agencies have access to NCWorks data, which enables faster service delivery and cross-agency collaboration.

Cooperative agreements and memoranda of agreement have been established between the DVRS and 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 connect all components of the statewide workforce development system; that connect 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 referral procedures, 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.

In every community where there are NCWorks Career Centers, local DVRS offices provide counseling staff, vocational evaluators, human resource placement specialists and other staff as appropriate to meet the needs of those individuals who enter an NCWorks Career Center and require the specialized services offered by DVRS. Specific arrangements and staffing patterns by DVRS staff at NCWorks career centers vary across the state, depending on local needs and agreements. One of the ongoing goals for both the vocational rehabilitation and NCWorks system is to continue to refine the processes and procedures for NCWorks staff to better determine which consumers with disabilities utilizing the centers should be referred to DVRS rather than being served through NCWorks. 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 and NCWorks. DVRS will also provide disability-related trainings for NCWorks staff.

Enhanced working relationships and communication with other key partners of the workforce development system such as the N.C. Division of Social Services, N.C. Community College System, 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, N.C. 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 N.C. 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.

### *N. C. Community College System*

The NC Community College System is the pass-through agency for Title II Adult Education Family Literacy Act. Through a competitive request for proposal process, eligible providers will be funded will be funded to provide services and activities that improve adult literacy skills and knowledge for postsecondary transition and or employment. NC community colleges are the main partners for adult education providers for developing and implementing activities and services that support transition to postsecondary training and or employment such as Integrated Education and Training, Workplace Preparation Activities, Pre-apprenticeships, and the model that specifically supports English language learners, the Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education.

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

- Expand Community College Basic Skills Plus program to include creating on-ramps for students functioning at Adult Basic Education level, and students with disabilities and English language

learners. Basic Skills Plus is high on the list of planned activities because it was originally conceived of as an on-ramp to career pathways programs and included tuition waivers. It provides additional “on-ramps” for individuals that have multiple barriers to employment due to low skills or education attainment. Basic Skills Plus is an integrated and training model that requires co-enrollment in basic skills instruction, occupational training, employability skills and support services.

- Expand Integrated Education and Training (IET) models as links to NC Career Pathways. Develop curriculum improvement projects to contextualize instruction to high demand industries as support for providers operating IET. Provide training to providers on developing career pathway that meet the needs of individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- Disseminate Best Practices. Innovative models previously funded will be disseminated to all providers through professional development activities. Best practice collection and dissemination will include insights about how adult education and literacy providers partner effectively with Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act core partners and mandatory One-Stop partners.
- Enhance Partnership with NCCCS Human Resources Development (HRD) Program and NCWorks Centers. Use State Leadership funds to partner with HRD program to implement a curriculum improvement project to standardize instruction and create a single response to employability skills training that meets employer needs.
- Enhance accountability. Improve data management system to expand real-time data collection and reporting. Create data tools to allow providers to use data for continuous improvement. Create system to systematically monitor provider data and create alert system to provide technical assistance to providers who are in danger of not meeting negotiated performance outcomes.

The Unified Plan process and the NCWorks Certified Career Pathways are also opportunities to bring together Adult Education/Literacy and Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act Youth programming in new ways. The NC Community College System’s Align4NCWorks plan supports these types of integration strategies through its objectives 6.A. and 6.B.:

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

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

**Describe how the entities carrying out the respective core programs, any Combined State Plan partner program included in this plan, required and optional one-stop partner programs will coordinate activities and resources to provide comprehensive, high-quality services to employers to meet their current and projected workforce needs and to achieve the goals of industry or sector partners in the state. The activities described shall conform to the statutory requirements of each program.**

The three agencies responsible for the core WIOA programs work together in local, regional, and state-level teams to meet the needs of employers in North Carolina. Currently, an inter-agency NCWorks team is coordinating development of comprehensive employer services literature and brochures for dissemination across all programs, investigating options for an integrated customer relationship

management tool, and establishing regional business services teams to ensure coordination among local workforce development boards. Further, the State will recommend a business services committee be established by local workforce development boards that will develop local and regional strategies for employer engagement and report to the Boards quarterly.

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

Local workforce areas are pursuing a regional approach, and establishing a framework, for business engagement. 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 programs. This work will be focused on business engagement, developing comprehensive solutions (across programs when applicable), and satisfying the talent needs of those businesses.

The following overarching goals are essential:

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

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

North Carolina has several other key strategies to engage employers to help meet their workforce needs. Local teams will use the strategies below alone or in combination when working with businesses. Below is a summary of these key strategies.

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

## *Apprenticeship*

The apprenticeship program transferred from the N.C. Department of Commerce to the N.C. Community College System at the end of 2017. 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 person will need to learn, and the wages he or she will earn. Through 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; and
- valuable assets in the recruitment and retention of a highly qualified workforce.

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

ApprenticeshipNC added pre-apprenticeships to its portfolio for work-based learning to offer greater flexibility to employers while establishing a process for individuals to get "credit" toward a Registered Apprenticeship based on work-based experiences and/or classroom training.

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

Key coordination strategies between WIOA and ApprenticeshipNC are upgraded training of existing employees, WIOA On-the-Job Training Services, along with in-school and out of school-youth apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships.

WIOA can coordinate with economic development and ApprenticeshipNC to provide services to high demand industries: Advanced Manufacturing, Healthcare, Logistics/Transportation, Energy, Construction, IT and Hospitality. A DOL/OA grant award for expanding apprenticeship could assist in this coordination.

## *N.C. Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions On-the-Job Training*

N.C. Department of Commerce Division of Workforce Solutions on-the-job training ("OJT") 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 board OJT policy is critical for consistency, institutionalizing services the local board seeks to deliver, and managing and leveraging OJT funds. Local OJT policy also provides guidance on how to comply with federal and state OJT requirements and leverage other hiring.

## *Work Opportunity Tax Credits*

The Work Opportunity Tax Credit encourages employers to hire individuals who are qualified for open positions but face barriers to employment. Businesses can receive a one-time tax credit of \$2,400-\$9,600

for hiring a qualified job applicant; the amount varies, depending on the hire. To be eligible for the tax credit, employers must hire an individual from one of the following groups:

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

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

### *Services to Employers through the Community Colleges*

The North Carolina Community College System is a system of 58 comprehensive community colleges that melded the collection and missions of the state's public junior colleges and its public Industrial Education Centers in the 1960s. The System has a long-standing history of serving employers throughout its programs and became known nationally as the nation's first and most robust Customized Training programs. In addition, it is the designated provider for High School Equivalency test administration and Basic Skills programs.

Title II Adult Education and Literacy is administered through the NC Community College System. Community colleges are the main educational partners for Title II providers for key workforce development strategies to include Human Resource Development, Basic Skills Plus, Integrated Education and Training, apprenticeships, and employer engagement. The Community College System's current strategic initiative, Align4NCWorks, has a major emphasis on employer services and seeks to meet employer needs through a collaborative approach.

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

The 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 N.C. 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.

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

North Carolina has a long history in sector strategies using WIOA funded services, with locally and regionally defined initiatives as well as statewide sector initiatives in areas ranging from Allied Health, Green Energy, Advanced Manufacturing (including specific areas such as Aviation), 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.

#### *NCWorks Customized Training*

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

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

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

#### *Small Business Center Connections to WIOA services*

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

#### *Vocational Rehabilitation Programs*

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) currently utilizes a dual customer approach by providing services to both businesses and individuals with disabilities. The division emphasizes the definition and marketing of business services to ensure the dual customer approach is recognized and implemented. Business services include recruitment, hiring, consultation on Section 503 compliance, sensitivity/diversity training, accessibility consultation, internships, on-the-job training (OJT), education on tax incentives, and follow-up and job retention services.

DVRS continues to market business services by employing 67 business relations representatives (BRR) that serve as employment specialists across the state. These individuals often have education and experience in a business-related field, such as human resources and marketing, so the division is equipped with personnel who understand the needs of employers. In addition to providing individualized job seeker services, the business relations representatives connect with local industry through participation in networking events and working relationships with workforce system partners.

The performance of business relations representatives is measured, in part, by assessing relationships with business as evidenced by direct and indirect placements of eligible jobseekers with disabilities. DVRS believes that relationships with employers is the essence of creating positive connections between jobseekers and business, and that providing follow-up and technical assistance to business fosters these relationships so that they can have a sustainable impact on the supporting individuals with disabilities in finding, maintaining, and advancing in employment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DVRS plans to enhance its current internship policies to expand the service to a larger group of students with disabilities, including possibly, those who are college-bound or currently enrolled in college training. The goal is to create enriching work experiences for students that expose them to work options, allow them to develop high expectations around their capacity for competitive employment, and build a resume that will enable young people with disabilities to compete for quality jobs. DVRS plans to also enhance internship opportunities for individuals with disabilities by developing employer-based internship programs with businesses who recognize the value of building up workers. Internship opportunities for

youth will be short-term, occur in conjunction with the student's educational requirements or during the student's school breaks, and may involve paid training and engage internship training supports such as job coaching.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Describe how the State's Strategies will engage the State's community colleges and area career and technical education schools, as partners in the workforce development system to create a job-driven education and training system. WIOA section 102(b)(2)(B)(iv).**

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

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

The NCWorks Career Center community college partnerships and the community college representation on the 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*

In order to prepare workers to succeed in the North Carolina economy and continuously improve their skills, the workforce development system must strengthen career development services and ensure consistency across programs; enhance programs and enrollment in critical career clusters by targeting resources; coordinate programs among workforce partners to develop skill and education pathways; and become a national leader in providing structured work-based learning. One such strategy is the creation of NCWorks Certified Career Pathways.

Career pathways are purposeful plans for education and training leading to knowledge and skill acquisition and successful careers. Pathway development is led by engaged employers who identify the skills, credentials, and experiences needed to be successful in high-demand occupations. Local partners from workforce development boards, high schools, community colleges, and North Carolina's public universities use the data to craft programs of study across the educational spectrum and provide workforce services that offer individuals the opportunity to gain the targeted skills, credentials, and experiences. Pathways are developed so that all students and job seekers, including people with disabilities and other barriers to employment, can use them to develop clear education and training plans.

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

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

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

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

### *Vocational Rehabilitation Programs*

The Department of Health and Human Services Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) programs work with N.C. 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 three Project SEARCH sites with community college partnerships with the expectation that two more sites will be added in 2016.

The DHHS VR Programs will continue to develop their partnerships with the NCCCS and its colleges through participation on Align4NCWorks collaborative impact planning committees and by 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.

### **(F) Partner Engagement with Other Education and Training Providers**

**Describe how the State's Strategies will engage the State's other education and training providers, including providers on the state's eligible training provider list, as partners in the workforce development system to create a job-driven education and training system.**

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.

Key to achieving this goal will be to help students and job seekers connect to education and training partners within the system as well providers outside the state system. North Carolina has one of the strongest community college and university systems in the country which provide exceptional opportunities for job seekers to acquire the education, skills, and credentials needed to be successful. Other education and training partners are also available and will be identified through the state's Eligible Training Provider List.

### *Eligible Training Providers*

The NCWorks Online system allows the individual providers the ability to login and apply to be considered to be on the Eligible Training Provider List to receive referrals of Title 1 eligible customers. Once they have completed their application, the workforce development board that is closest to the primary location will review the application and take the necessary steps to determine if this provider is one that should be on the state list of approved providers. Once a provider is approved, they must then key in all the programs they offer that will again have to be reviewed and approved by a local WDB. Once a provider has been approved for WIOA training, every WDB in the state has the option to certify that this provider can be available in their area. With the two year review process, they would have to be approved again based on current standards.

The 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;
- Apprenticeship programs registered by the USDOL Office of Registered Apprenticeship, State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA), and ApprenticeshipNC;
- 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 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 particular local area. Training providers should be aware that programs may be approved for some local areas and denied for others based on local criteria, and the approved local areas for each training provider will be listed as part of the ETPL.

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 (DVRS) will modify its state level memorandum of agreement (MOA) with the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) 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 (PETS) for students with disabilities that are potentially eligible for VR services. At the local-level VR offices and local education agencies (LEA) will also continue Third Party Cooperative Agreements (TPCA) 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 TPCAs are statewide with 96% of all LEAs in North Carolina contributing funding towards 202 positions for VR professional and support staff.

DVRS will maintain and strengthen its 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 TPCA 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 policy.

**(G) Leveraging Resources to Increase Educational Access.**

**Describe how the State's strategies will enable the State to leverage other Federal, State, and local investments that have enhanced access to workforce development programs at the above institutions, described in section (E).**

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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *Vocational Rehabilitation*

The N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) plans to maintain and strengthen its programmatic relationships with school transition services through its continued active participation by the Division's Transition Program Specialist on the State Capacity Building Team for Transition. This team, including NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) leadership, 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 DVRS plans to provide training to VR counselors and LEA representatives in the spring of 2016 to focus on the role of the VR Counselor in the IEP process.

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

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

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

- summer internships for students/youth with disabilities;
- increased utilization of On-the-Job Training (OJT) with students and youth;
- utilizing Transition Navigators to identify and serve students with disabilities who are potentially eligible and/or to provide VR PETS services to groups;
- increasing Project Search sites;

- hosting Self-Advocacy summer summits, camps, or school-based workshops;
- enhancing vocational evaluation tools and allocating increased vocational evaluation staff to serve students with disabilities in exploring career options; and
- increasing work-based experiences for students with disabilities who require on-the-job supports, such as job coaching, by partnering in innovative ways with community rehabilitation programs.

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

By enhancing and incorporating new programs that promote and support work-based experiences, 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 PETS programs/services under consideration are intended to address students' expectations around pursuing employment and to improve their preparedness for participating in additional rehabilitation services, such as training and placement.

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

**(H) Improving Access to Postsecondary Credentials.**

**Describe how the State's strategies will improve access to activities leading to recognized postsecondary credentials, including Registered Apprenticeship certificates. This includes credentials that are industry-recognized certificates, licenses or certifications, and that are portable and stackable.**

Governor Cooper's NC Job Ready initiative and North Carolina's sector strategies, job-driven workforce strategies, and career pathways strategies all emphasize the importance of post-secondary credentials. 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.

*Career Pathways*

North Carolina's strategic focus on career pathways will help individuals' access training leading to in-demand postsecondary credentials. A primary tenant of the career pathways initiative is the flexibility and

creativity in providing opportunities for students and job seekers to enter and exit a pathway. In addition, the commission hopes that local and regional teams develop a system of crediting students for earned credentials, prior learning, and demonstrated job skills. Pathways must be designed to easily allow individuals to enter and exit at different points without duplicating credit/effort. Where possible, pathways must:

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

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

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

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

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

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

### *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 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 an apprenticeship program to talk to other businesses. This peer-to-peer communication has seen success across the state.

NCWorks 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 one apprenticeship program for the group of companies. The state has seen great success with this model and is actively working to expand it.

### *N.C. Community College System Areas of Focus*

The North Carolina Community College System’s strategic plan sets a goal to ensure education and training address and validate skill and competency needs and assessment. This goal calls for the state to increase the number of students leaving the community college system with an in-demand job-ready credential (e.g., third-party certification, state licensure, degree, certificate, or diploma). The action steps under that objective address the following:

- expanding industry-recognized credentials;
- credentials (of any kind) to further students’ success toward career goals;
- continuing to support the implementation of WorkKeys assessments;
- expanding the community college transfer pipeline to universities;
- co-leading a national network of state agencies, research institutions, and national organizations that are researching and piloting strategies to capture industry-recognized credentials tracked by third-party organizations; and
- support work-based learning strategies.

### *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.**

**Describe how the activities identified in (A) will be coordinated with economic development entities, strategies, and activities in the State.**

Throughout the workforce system, economic development partners aid in the identification of economic priorities – key industries and occupations for emphasis in career pathway development, education and training curriculum development, and assistance in reaching businesses that often have less regular communication with workforce development leaders than economic development leaders. In addition, in certain areas, economic development leaders have led the charge for workforce initiatives, ranging from eastern North Carolina regional economic development entities demonstrating the value of Work-Ready Communities to efforts in western NC 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 (N.C.'s state workforce investment board) 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. 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 N.C.'s economic development strategies will help North Carolina current and future businesses be successful. These key statewide strategies are described below.

- Continue to incorporate and promote the NCWorks brand for all workforce development system programs to help customers recognize the value of the system.

A single brand is needed to create a seamless workforce development system that is easily identifiable to all customers. Citizens, businesses, and key stakeholders will find value in North Carolina's workforce development system when the overwhelming complexity is minimized and services streamlined.

A single brand for the entire workforce development system will eliminate the historic focus on individual program services and replace it with a state-wide approach. A common brand also reduces confusion for those unfamiliar with the system by simplifying the message and increasing the efficiency of statewide outreach.

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

Customers of the state's workforce development system may access more than one service. For example, a business looking to grow will 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 apprenticeship programs to ensure it can fill its current and future workforce needs. The workforce development system needs to develop outreach strategies that provide information on the full range of services available.

Currently, each program promotes its services separately, leaving many businesses confused about what services are available to meet their needs. In addition, combining services across programs is often left up to the customer to figure out. A consistent outreach strategy needs to be developed at the state level that allows for customization at the local level.

- Develop a consistent menu of services and activities highlighting business and industry engagement opportunities, and develop interagency protocols to better meet employer and jobseeker needs.

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

help individuals gain the experience they need and develop a pipeline of talent to meet the businesses' need.

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

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.

### *Career Pathways*

North Carolina also has a strong career pathways system that is ensuring that the state has a sustainable talent pipeline for the state's key industries. These pathways show businesses interested in moving to or growing in N.C. that the state will have the workforce needed to ensure their success.

Career pathways begin with an engaged group of employers from a high-growth industry. This group meets with education and workforce professionals to discuss the workforce needs of the industry as well as specific knowledge, skills, ability, credentials, and experiences needed for occupations within that industry. Education providers then use this information to develop clear plan for all individuals (students, job seekers, dislocated workers, veterans, individuals with disabilities, etc.) to use to prepare for these occupations in the most efficient way. The current strategy includes a certification process by the NCWorks Commission that requires eight key element be in place to ensure pathways are comprehensive and will develop the talent needed for in-demand occupations.

### **(b) State Operating Systems and Policies**

**The Unified or Combined State Plan must include a description of the State operating systems and policies that will support the implementation of the State strategy described in section II Strategic Elements. This includes—**

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

**This must include a description of—**

- (A)** State operating systems that support coordinated implementation of State strategies (e.g., labor market information systems, data systems, communication systems, case-management systems, job banks, etc.).
- (B)** Data-collection and reporting processes used for all programs and activities, including those present in one-stop centers.

## NCWorks Online

For Title I and Title III workforce programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser, TAA) NCWorks Online is the state's official labor exchange and case management system. The system, powered by Geographical Solutions, provides access to a complete set of employment tools in one website. It is a one-stop online resource for job seekers and employers in North Carolina. Job seekers can search for jobs, create resumes, and find education and training. Employers can find candidates, post jobs, and search labor market information. The online system is accessible via the Internet or an Intranet at an NCWorks Career Center. It is specifically designed for job seekers, students, case managers, employers, training providers, workforce professionals, and others seeking benefits and services. Each NCWorks Career Center utilizes NCWorks Online for client management and for data collection and reporting on workforce programs. Up-to-date career center contact information and hours of operation are posted in NCWorks Online as well. This system is designed to be intuitive and user-friendly, even for the person who has little computer experience.

## North Carolina Common Follow-up System

The Common Follow-up System (CFS) is a longitudinal tracking system that 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 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.

Data from the CFS have been incorporated into the North Carolina Tool for Online Workforce and Education Reporting (NCTOWER), a web-based tool for the delivery and display of program performance information. The web site currently contains 10 years of post-completion employment and wage information for all Curriculum Programs offered through the North Carolina Community College System and degree programs through the University of North Carolina system. Available information includes outcomes by college/university, degree and major. As part of the enhancement efforts LEAD staff is currently working to expand the data coverage within CFS. This includes working with existing agencies to expand their data submissions and to also include agencies and programs not currently participating in CFS. Data expansion efforts also include expanding access to out of state employment and wage data through the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) and the Wage Record Interchange System 2 (WRIS 2) as well as accessing federal employment related data through the Federal Employment Data Exchange System (FEDES).

## Workforce and Labor Market Information System

North Carolina's Workforce and Labor Market Information System (WLMIS) is managed by NC Commerce's Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEAD). LEAD leverages resources such as the Workforce Information Grant (WIG), Bureau of Labor Statistics, Workforce Data Quality Initiative Grant (WDQI) and other state and Federal funds to effectively provide responsive customer service and quality career/workforce/labor market information products and services. Information is made accessible to the public through an online portal powered by the "D4" Demand Driven Data Delivery System, which provides users online ad hoc query capability regarding local area unemployment statistics, employment and wages, and other labor statistics.

## NC Community College Information Systems

North Carolina's Community College System has relatively decentralized processes for data collection and reporting. The 58 community colleges collect data for their students through case management systems and communication systems that are developed and managed at the individual community college level, and use file extraction process for centralized reporting. For example, the Curriculum Registration Progress and Financial Aid file for Curriculum students includes Student demographics; Course enrollment; Grades; and Graduation information. A Continuing Education Registration File is generated for training programs and education that do not lead to an academic credential includes Student demographics and Course enrollment. The Literacy Education Information System data file is extracted quarterly to report enrollment data, functioning levels, testing, and other student information.

Reporting for the Title II Adult Education and Literacy Program under WIOA is managed by the community college Research and Performance unit. All providers report data to the system office using the community college data management system or Literacy, Adult and Community Education System. Files are extracted and reported to the National Reporting System (NRS). Data analytics tools are being created to assist programs in using data for continuous program improvement.

The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) serves as the state administrator for the Title II - Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) funds. The Providers throughout the state collect student data through the Literacy Education Information System (LEIS) form for each period of participation. The data is reported by the Providers through one of two student information system databases: Colleague by the Colleges and LACES by the Community Based Organizations.

NCCCS serves as the central repository for the collection, evaluation and reporting of the data annually to the Office of Career Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE). The data is evaluated by the Research and Performance Management (RPM) department and reported by the College and Career Readiness (CCR) department on the National Reporting System (NRS) tables developed by the Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL). Through the NRS tables, the state demonstrates learner outcomes for measurable skills gains (MSGs) and follow-up indicators.

The MSGs include:

- Secondary Diploma/Equivalency achievement
  - AHS Diploma
  - High School Equivalency
- Educational Functioning Level gain demonstrated through:
  - Pre/Post Test
  - AHS Credits
  - Program Exit/Entry into Postsecondary Education

The Follow-up Indicators include:

- Employment
- Credential Attainment
  - Secondary
  - Postsecondary

## Department of Health and Human Services Systems

The NC Department of Health and Human Services is the designated state agency (DSA) for the administration of the state's VR programs for individuals with disabilities. NC DHHS is the largest single agency in State government in terms of the budget and second largest in terms of number of employees. As such, enterprise-level systems are integrated across the Department's Health and Human Services programs and interface with other information systems at the levels of local, state, and federal government. The

primary system used for the administration of the WIOA Title IV VR programs is BEAM (Business Electronic Access Management system), a fully automated web-accessible case management and service payment solution. BEAM was implemented in July 2014, fully replacing several legacy mainframe systems. However, the developer for the BEAM system, Libera, will discontinue product support after 2017 and DHHS has since initiated the process of selecting a replacement system.

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

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

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

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

Most recently, an interface was developed between BEAM and NC Tracks, the new multi-payer Medicaid Management Information System for NC DHHS. This interface includes the pricing logic for VR medical service claims submitted by healthcare providers and facilitates accurate medical claims processing. The VR programs are currently investigating the possibility of developing interfaces between BEAM and other program systems for the purpose of expediting referrals across programs, including NCWorks and NC FAST, the system for the Division of Social Services.

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

**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, describe the State's process for developing guidelines for State-administered one-stop partner programs' contributions to a one-stop delivery system, including benchmarks, and its guidance to assist local boards, chief elected officials, and local one-stop partners in determining equitable and stable methods of funding infrastructure in accordance with sec. 121(h)(1)(B). Beginning with the state plan modification in 2018 and for subsequent state plans and state plan modifications, the State must also include such guidelines.**

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 NCWorks Career Centers (N.C.'s one-stop system).

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. (For more information on career pathways, see Section II (c).)

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 will 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.

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 (listed below) to encourage all program participants of North Carolina's workforce programs to enroll in NCWorks Online.

- NCWorks Commission
- Department of Commerce
- Department of Health and Human Services

- Community College System
- Department of Public Instruction
- Department of Administration

By promoting and encouraging workforce program participants to be registered or enrolled in NCWorks Online, the job-matching system will be more robust and offer employers a larger and more varied pool of candidates to choose from.

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

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

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.

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 Efforts (LOE) to address key initiatives within the North Carolina One-Stop system. These Lines of Effort 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, WDB 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 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. PY2018 contributions and a new memorandum of understanding with infrastructure cost agreement addendums will be due by July 1, 2018.

The North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions is in the process of finalizing and issuing 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 is scheduled to be issued in May 2018.

<b>North Carolina Cost Sharing Implementation Timeline</b>	
<b>ACTION</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>
Cost Sharing Line of Effort (LOE) Established	July 2016
Cost Sharing Presentation to Joint DWS Leadership and Director’s Council	September 2016
Initial Meeting with Required State Level Partners to Introduce Cost Sharing	November 2016
Joint Meeting to Review Funding Mechanisms	February 2017
Gather Baseline Cost for All NCWorks Career Centers	March to July 2017
Engage Required State Partners In Negotiations	June to September 2017
Develop Methodology for Allocating Partner Contributions to Each Local Area	September 2017
Develop Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to Capture Agreements	October 2017
Distribute Cost Sharing Allocation Summaries to each WDB	November 2017
Cost Sharing Information / Q & A Sessions held with WDB Directors	November 2017
Process Documented for Ongoing Administration	In Process
Complete Local Area Negotiations	September to November 2017
Complete Infrastructure Funding Agreements (IFA) and Obtain Partner Signatures	Due no later than December 31, 2017
Issue Payments/Invoices to Cover Balances Due	Within 30 Days of Invoice or Per Monthly Payment Date

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

**(A) State Agency Organization.**

**Describe the organization and delivery systems at the State and local levels for the programs covered in the plan, including the organizational structure. Include an organizational chart.**

*State Agency Organization*

The NCWorks Commission guides the workforce development system in North Carolina. At the state level, the commission coordinates 20 programs administered by five agencies. The agencies include Department of Commerce, Department of Health and Human Services, Community College System, Department of Public Instruction, and Department of Administration. In 2015, the University of North Carolina system was also added to the NCWorks Commission membership and the commission is currently working to align programs with the university system as well.

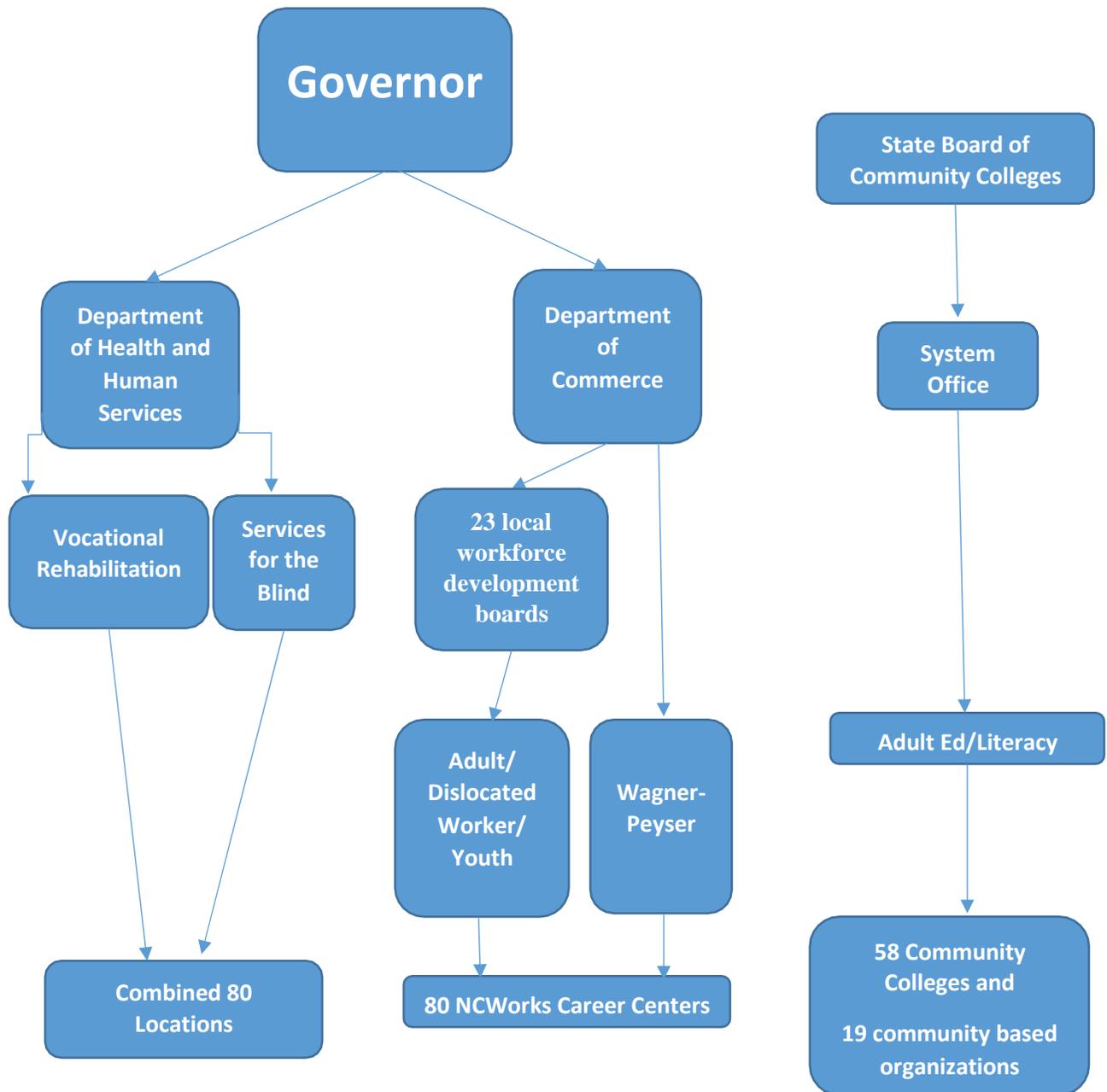
The Departments of Commerce and Health and Human Services are cabinet agencies and report to the Governor. Commerce directly operates the Title III program and oversees the Title I program, which is operated by 23 local workforce development boards. Services offered through Titles I and III are integrated and offered at NCWorks Career Centers, which are overseen by the local workforce development boards in conjunction with commerce staff. There are 81 certified career centers across the state and approximately 20 outreach locations.

The Department of Health and Human Services operates the Title IV program and provides vocational rehabilitation and services for the blind at 80 locations across the state providing coverage of all 100 counties. Some of these offices are shared with other related service organizations and workforce partners. From these offices, Vocational rehabilitation services are primarily provided directly by vocational rehabilitation counselors, vocational evaluators, assistive technologists, rehabilitation engineers, and business relations representatives. Each office is locally managed under the supervision of regional and central management teams under the authority of the central management structure within the Department of Health and Human resources. The vocational rehabilitation programs do have rehabilitation counselors that provide itinerant support at the NCWorks Career Centers on a regular basis to facilitate service coordination for individuals who identify themselves as having a disability and express interest in receiving specialized services, guidance, and supports that lead to successful employment.

The North Carolina Community College System is composed of 58 local community colleges and is governed by the State Board of Community Colleges. The state board has designated the College and Career Readiness (CCR) section of the Programs and Student Services Division to administer the federal and state grant funds under WIOA, Title II-Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA). The CCR section provides leadership, oversight, professional development, policy guidance, monitoring, and evaluation of providers who receive funds from WIOA-AEFLA grant program. The CCR section competes funds to eligible providers to provide instructional services activities for Adult Basic Education, Corrections Education and Education of Other Institutionalized Individuals and Integrated Education and Literacy and Civics. All providers must align their plans with local workforce development board plans.

Staff at career centers, community colleges, and vocational rehabilitation offices all maintain good referral processes among each other when serving customers.

## North Carolina Workforce Development System Organizational Chart



**(B) State Board. Provide a description of the State Board, including-**

- (i) Membership Roster.**  
Provide a membership roster for the State Board, including members' organizational affiliations.
- (ii) Board Activities.**  
Provide a description of the activities that will assist State Board members and staff in carrying out State Board functions effectively.

The NCWorks Commission is the designated state workforce investment 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 “one-stop” career center system.

*Membership*

Representation on the NCWorks Commission is mandated by federal and state law. Commission membership includes workforce agency leaders, elected officials, the private sector, and labor, training, and community based organizations. The majority of the members are from the private sector as directed by WIOA. All members are appointed to four year terms by the Governor. The heads of the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Administration, Department of Public Instruction, Community College System, University of North Carolina System, and Department of Commerce all serve as ex-officio members.

### NCWorks Commission Membership Roster

<i>Member Name</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>	<i>Organization</i>
<i>Roy Cooper</i>	<i>Government Representative</i>	<i>Governor, State of North Carolina</i>
<i>Mark Johnson</i>	<i>Government Representative</i>	<i>State Superintendent, N.C. Department of Public</i>
<i>Machelle Sanders</i>	<i>Government Representative</i>	<i>Secretary, N.C. Department of Administration</i>
<i>Jennifer Haygood</i>	<i>Government Representative</i>	<i>Interim President, N.C. Community College System</i>
<i>Tony Copeland</i>	<i>Government Representative</i>	<i>Secretary, N.C. Department of Commerce</i>
<i>Mandy Cohen</i>	<i>Government Representative</i>	<i>Secretary, N.C. Department of Health &amp; Human Services</i>
<i>Margaret Spellings</i>	<i>Government Representative</i>	<i>President, UNC System</i>
<i>Shawn Brown</i>	<i>Locally Elected City Official</i>	<i>Mayor, City of Claremont</i>
<i>Ronnie Smith</i>	<i>Locally Elected County Official</i>	<i>Commissioner of Martin County</i>
<i>Kevin Trapani</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>The Redwoods Group</i>
<i>Joe Magno</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>NC Center of Innovation Network</i>
<i>Josh Arant</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>Mako Medical Laboratories</i>
<i>Stephen Rosenburgh</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>USDevelopments</i>
<i>Sergi Roura</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>Grifols</i>
<i>Olalah Njenga</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>YellowWood Group</i>
<i>Melanie Chernoff</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>Red Hat, Inc.</i>
<i>Susan Jackson</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>C3HealthcareRx</i>
<i>Stan Sherrill</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>Duke-Energy</i>
<i>Kim Toler</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>PotashCorp</i>
<i>Joe Rogers</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>Rogers International, LLC</i>
<i>Marti Matthews</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>PPDI</i>
<i>Osceola Ellis</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>Military Relocator Real Estate &amp; Property Management</i>
<i>Chris Watters</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>Restoration Hardware</i>
<i>Christopher Gergen</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>Forward Impact</i>
<i>Pam Townsend</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	<i>WSP USA</i>
<i>Vacant</i>	<i>Private Business Representative</i>	
<i>Michael Okun</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>NC State AFL-CIO</i>
<i>MaryBe McMillan</i>	<i>Labor</i>	<i>NC State AFL-CIO</i>
<i>Walter Siegenthaler</i>	<i>Apprenticeship</i>	<i>Max Daetwyler Corporation</i>
<i>Sherry Carpenter</i>	<i>Community Based Organization</i>	<i>Goodwill Industries</i>

<i>Nate Davis</i>	<i>Community Based Organization</i>	<i>World Overcomers Church</i>
<i>Hope Williams</i>	<i>Community Based Organization</i>	<i>N.C. Independent Colleges and Universities</i>
<i>Jeffrey Frederick</i>	<i>Community Based Organization</i>	<i>N.C. Association of Workforce Boards</i>
<i>Member Name</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>	<i>Organization</i>

*Board Activities Committees*

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 2014-2016 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 chairs of each committee, along with the commission chair also compose the Executive Committee.

*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 comprised of commission members. 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.

Several key activities will assist the NCWorks Commission members and staff carry out state board functions. First, the NCWorks Commission has assembled a group of agency leaders to help coordinate and integrate workforce programs across agencies. This State-Agency Sub-Committee is working on policy alignment, a unified branding and outreach strategy, a unified business services strategy, and creating regional teams for North Carolina’s eight Prosperity Zones to ensure a consistent and comprehensive approach to workforce development in each zone.

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

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

The Performance and Accountability Committee of the NCWorks Commission works with the Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEA) in the Department of Commerce to analyze state workforce development program data. LEA maintains the Common Follow-Up System (CFS) which 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. This information has been used to develop annual reports on the workforce development system as well as continuously improve performance measures.

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

(A) **Assessment of Core Programs.**

**Describe how the core programs will be assessed each year based on State performance accountability measures described in section 116(b) of WIOA. This State assessment must include the quality, effectiveness, and improvement of programs broken down by local area or provider. Such state assessments should take into account local and regional planning goals.**

The NCWorks Commission (N.C.'s state workforce investment board) is responsible for assessing N.C.'s workforce development system, including core WIOA programs. This work is accomplished by the commission's performance and accountability committee which reports to the full commission at each quarterly meeting.

First, 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 completed a review of 20 workforce development program plans, policies and services across five agencies in North Carolina. This review included an analysis of core programs as well as other one-stop delivery system partners. The commission reviewed workforce program funding levels and sources, service provision types, special populations served and business outreach initiatives. (See section II(a) 2(A) for a summary.)

Second, 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.

Finally, the commission's performance and accountability committee will be developing strategies to track the implementation, activities, and performance of core programs as directed by WIOA. The commission is also required to develop state performance accountability measures for local workforce development boards.

**(B) Assessment of One-Stop Program Partner Programs.**

**Describe how other one-stop delivery system partner program services and Combined State Plan partner programs included in the plan will be assessed each year. Such state assessments should take into account local and regional planning goals.**

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.**

**Beginning with the state plan modification in 2018 and for subsequent state plans and state plan modifications, provide the results of an assessment of the effectiveness of the core programs and other one-stop partner programs and Combined State Plan partner programs included in the Unified or Combined State plan during the preceding 2-year period (i.e. the 2-year period of the plan modification cycle). Describe how the State is adapting its strategies based on these assessments.**

Performance from the first two years of WIOA will be used as the baseline for future assessments of the effectiveness of core programs and NCWorks Career Center (one-stop) partners.

In March 2017, the NCWorks Commission conducted its most recent annual review, which surveyed 19 statewide workforce development programs administered across the Department of Commerce, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Public Instruction, Department of Administration, and the Community College System. Survey results show that North Carolina's workforce development system serves a wide variety of customers, the most common of which are the unemployed, and underemployed, and low-income individuals, and adults and youth ages 16-24. These programs target youth and adults over 55 least frequently. The programs across the workforce development system offer a wide variety of services to jobseekers in North Carolina. Services include education/training, interview preparations and assessments, resume assistance and job search assistance, and career counseling. Over half of the programs provide various employability and soft skills training—focusing on critical skills like communication, time management, and work adjustment training.

The commission also is required to develop state performance accountability measures for local workforce development boards. The commission developed these measures in consultation with the local workforce development board directors and chairs to complement the WIOA federal primary indicators of performance for adult and youth training and employment. Measuring the performance of local workforce development boards will provide all job seekers, workers, and businesses with high quality career, training and supportive services that they need to succeed. In an effort to identify future opportunities for change and continuous improvement, the NCWorks Commission adjusted measure targets and will vote to approve these updated measures for 2018 to reflect previous performance.

#### **D. Evaluation.**

**Describe how the state will conduct evaluations and research projects on activities under WIOA core programs; how such projects will be coordinated with, and designed in conjunction with, State and local boards and with State agencies responsible for the administration of all respective core programs; and, further, how the projects will be coordinated with the evaluations provided for by the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Education under WIOA.**

North Carolina will conduct vigorous, objective and thorough assessments of WIOA core programs as part of the overarching NCWorks system. Plans for this comprehensive assessment process include:

- Collective regular reviews by the State Steering Council which include agency leaders from all WIOA core programs on data reflecting enrollment, resource sharing among core partners, measures of effectiveness and efficiency and an analysis of mutually agreed upon targets for expected and achieved performance. Further, data from all core partners on consumer input will also be collected, shared, and summarized.
- Formative evaluation on goals established to guide, and focus core partner activities on alignment, coordination of services, referrals, resource sharing, and other important partner engagement activities at both the state and local levels. The result of this assessment will be to determine the level and breadth of partner engagement in serving North Carolina's workforce system in a coordinated, purposeful manner.
- Annual performance evaluation by NCWorks Commission of efficiency and effectiveness of core programs and NCWorks Career Center system and measures of satisfaction of consumers, both businesses and individuals served in the system. Other measures of performance would include the employment and retention outcomes, post-secondary achievements and an examination of the level of penetration into groups and individuals eligible for services and the degree to which the workforce system has reached them.
- State performance measures will also be set by the NCWorks Commission for local workforce boards beginning in program year 2016. These measures will be developed in conjunction with board staff and will be complimentary to the federal performance measures.
- Engagement of outside consultation for third-party review, analysis, evaluation and recommendations for continuous improvement of services and resulting outcomes. Utilizing North Carolina's excellent public and private universities' research capabilities is anticipated.
- The NCWorks Commission will commission research projects on employer needs every two years to follow up on two previous studies, best practices in key topics, and other key areas of research to help improve the workforce development system.

Program assessments conducted during the final two years of the Workforce Investment Act by the NCWorks Commission were reviewed and considered in formulating North Carolina's Unified Plan. Performance from the first two years of WIOA will be used as the baseline for future assessments of the effectiveness of core programs and NCWorks Career Center system. From the baseline assessment on program performance targets will be established and regularly monitored by individual core partner agencies as well as the State Steering Council and the NCWorks Commission. Program performance targets will demonstrate North Carolina's best effort in reaching a diverse workforce and maximizing the system's resources to prepare workers for the demands and needs of employers currently and in years to come. Under circumstances where performance targets fall short of expected levels an analysis will be conducted regarding the reasons with suggested means of improving performance for the next reporting period.

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

Describe the methods and factors the State will use in distributing funds under the core programs in accordance with the provisions authorizing such distributions.

- (A) For Title I programs, provide a description of the written policies that establish the State's methods and factors used to distribute funds to local areas for—
- (i) Youth activities in accordance with WIOA section 128(b)(2) or (b)(3),
  - (ii) Adult and training activities in accordance with WIOA section 133(b)(2) or (b)(3),
  - (iv) Dislocated worker employment and training activities in accordance with WIOA section 133(b)(2) and based on data and weights assigned.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**WIOA 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 2006-2010)

**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 2006-2010)

The State has considered the factors included in WIOA 133(b), but based upon their lack of availability and reliability, has chosen to apply the factors used by the US Department of Labor in determining each state's Dislocated Worker allotment.

**WIOA Dislocated Workers**

***Formula:***

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

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

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

<b>Formula Data Factor Definitions</b>
<p><b>WIOA Youth and Adults Programs</b></p> <p>ASU: contiguous areas with unemployment rate of 6.5 percent or more excess unemployed. Higher of:            (1) excess unemployed (unemployment in excess of 4.5 percent) in ASU's; or            (2) excess unemployed (unemployment in excess of 4.5 percent) in all areas</p> <p>Economically disadvantaged adults: individuals, age 22-72, meeting (or member of family meeting):            OMB poverty level or            70 percent of lower living standard income level (LLSIL).</p> <p>Economically disadvantaged youth: individuals, age 16-21, meeting (or member of family meeting):            OMB poverty level or            70 percent of lower living standard income level (LLSIL).</p>
<p><b>WIOA Dislocated Workers Program</b></p> <p>Excess unemployed: unemployment in excess of 4.5 percent            Long-term unemployed: number unemployed 15 or more weeks</p>

**(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.**
- (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.**

**(i)**

The NC Community College System (NCCCS), College and Career Readiness (CCR) office is the State's agency for managing funding provided through the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA). NCCCS will allocate AEFLA funds for multiyear awards for three years with a reapplication process for continued funding in year two and three for grantees who meet state negotiated performance outcomes. 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 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

Past Effectiveness: All eligible providers must establish that it has demonstrated past effectiveness by providing performance data on its record of improving the skills of eligible individuals, particularly eligible individuals, especially those with low levels of literacy in content domains of reading, writing, mathematics, English language acquisition. Providers must also provide data regarding its outcomes for participants related to employment, attainment of secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and transition to post-secondary education and training. An eligible provider that has not been previously funded under Title II will be required to supply data demonstrating their ability to improve the literacy skills of eligible individuals, including data for participants related to employment, attainment of secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent. A

trained evaluation team will review the proposals using a weighted rubric. Evaluation criteria will include the degree to which improvements meet the State-adjusted level of performance, and the degree to which programs meet the 13 considerations. The NCCCS allocates 82.5 percent of the state allocation for local assistance grants. Funds must be used for AEFLA required activities with 5% allowed for indirect cost. NCCCS funding structure allocates to ensure all counties are served. NCCCS gives priorities to: 1) populations with greatest need, including adults who are functioning at the lowest literacy and numeracy levels and English language learners, and populations residing in rural areas who have multiple barriers to attendance, 2) populations who are functioning above 8th grade level but need to earn a high school diploma or its equivalent or adults who have not attained an equivalent level of education needed to transition to post-secondary, and 3) incarcerated adults who need to earn a high school diploma or its equivalent or adults who have not attained an equivalent level of education.

The following timeline will be followed to make award to eligible providers effective July 1, 2018.

#### Request for Proposals Planning Timeline

- October - December 2017 Convene RFP development team; develop RFP format, content and evaluation rubric
- RFP Technical Assistance workshops January 2018
- Issue RFP January 2018
- Proposals due March 2018
- Review proposals and submit for approval to NCCCS State Board May 2018
- Announce awards July 1, 2018 Effective Start Date for all programs is July 2018

#### (ii)

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. NCCCS office has a formal RFP process that ensures all eligible providers have direct and equitable access to apply for grant and contract funds. The RFP process standardizes the announcement of requests for RFP, application and review process so that the same process is used for all eligible providers. 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 NC will host technical assistance meetings and invite current and potential new adult education providers. NCCCS office will appoint a team to respond to assistance in completing the application for a specified period.

#### (C) Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation

**In the case of a State that, under section 101(a)(2)(A)(i) of the Rehabilitation Act designates a State agency to administer the part of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under which VR services are provided for individuals who are blind, describe the process and the factors used by the State to determine the distribution of funds among the two VR agencies in the State.**

#### *Title IV: Vocational Rehabilitation Programs*

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

**(6) Program Data**

**A. Data Alignment and Integration.**

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

- (i) Describe the State's plans to make the management information systems for the core programs interoperable to maximize the efficient exchange of common data elements to support assessment and evaluation.**
- (ii) Describe the State's plans to integrate data systems to facilitate streamlined intake and service delivery to track participation across all programs included in this plan.**
- (iii) Explain how the State board will assist the governor in aligning technology and data systems across mandatory one-stop partner programs (including design and implementation of common intake, data collection, etc.) and how such alignment will improve service delivery to individuals, including unemployed individuals.**
- (iv) Describe the State's plans to develop and produce the reports required under section 116, performance accountability system. (WIOA section 116(d)(2)).**

There are three state agencies in North Carolina that have administrative responsibility for the WIOA core programs. These include the North Carolina Department of Commerce, 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. As the final WIOA operational and reporting policies and regulations are released, North Carolina's workforce agencies will continue to work and explore mechanisms by which further data integration can be achieved across entities to achieve the data integration and reporting goals of WIOA.

The NCWorks Commission has identified as one of its key action steps to explore opportunities for interfacing NCWorks Online with North Carolina's array for workforce development case management systems. The commission will work with state agency leaders and track this initiative to ensure that all opportunities are explored.

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

Each year participating agencies provide data extracts to CFS. These extracts include record level data files that include participant demographic information and program related information. These extracts are loaded to historical longitudinal data files housed within CFS. In addition to the education and workforce data submissions, CFS also receives data from the state's unemployment insurance system and employer

related information from the Labor and Economic Analysis Division (LEA). UI related information includes detailed UI claims and benefit payment information as well as quarterly unemployment insurance wage data. Currently, CFS contains over 148 million program participant records on over 9 million individuals, over 15 years of monthly UI claims and benefit payment information, over 17 years (over 396 million records) of quarterly UI wage and over 14 years of quarterly employer information including industry classification and employer size.

North Carolina received a Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) grant from the U.S. DOL's Employment and Training Administration in 2013. WDQI resources are being utilized to enhance and expand the capacity of CFS as a longitudinal workforce system. This enhancement effort includes the migration of historical data into relational data structures, the expansion of data submittals, and enhancement of the systems technology infrastructure. While LEA is charged with operation of CFS, the new enhanced CFS is being developed in collaboration with the North Carolina Department of Information Technology's Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC).

Each core WIOA agency will be responsible for submitting their version of the Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) data and yearly and quarterly reports. As the final WIOA operational and reporting regulations are released, North Carolina's workforce agencies will continue to work and explore mechanisms by which further data integration can be achieved across entities to achieve the data integration and reporting goals of WIOA. This includes automation of electronic data exchanges across existing participant systems and to leverage the state's resources available through the Common Follow-up System.

**B. Assessment of Participants' Post-Program Success.**

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

The three agencies the 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.

**C. Use of Unemployment Insurance (UI) Wage Record Data.**

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

The core WIOA agencies have different 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 17 years of historical quarterly wage records. In addition, the state is currently participating in both the Wage Record Interchange System (WRIS) as well as the Wage Record Interchange System 2 (WRIS2). In addition, the state is working to finalize its agreement in the Federal

Employment Data Exchange System (FEDES). Each of the core WIOA programs have access to the State's Unemployment Insurance wage data either through direct access or through the return of matched data files through the Common Follow up System. Access to UI wage records are completed under signed Memoranda of Understanding which outline data sharing and confidentiality laws and requirements.

**D. Privacy Safeguards.**

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

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

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

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

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

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

**(7) Priority Services for Veterans**

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

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

On November 7, 2002, the Jobs for Veterans Act (JVA), Public Law 107-288 was signed into law. One provision of the JVA, codified at 38 U.S.C. 4215, establishes a priority of service requirement for "covered persons" (veterans and certain spouses of veterans, as defined by 38 U.S.C. 4215(a) (1) (A-B), in qualified job training programs. Qualified job training programs include all workforce programs funded directly, in whole or in part, by the US Department of Labor (USDOL), such as WIOA Title I and Title III (Wagner Peyser) employment services and other job training programs offered through competitive grants. The final rule implementing the priority of service requirement took effect on January 19, 2009, and can be found at 20 CFR 1010. Additionally, USDOL has provided policy guidance to the workforce investment system

regarding the implementation of the priority of service. In brief, priority of service means that veterans and eligible spouses are given priority over non-covered persons for the receipt of employment, training, and placement services provided under a qualified job training program. A veteran or an eligible spouse either receives access to a service earlier in time than a non-covered person, or, if the resource is limited, the veteran or eligible spouse receives access to the services instead of or before the non-covered person.

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

Priority of service provisions for veterans are monitored on a regular basis through field checks and by generating reports from NCWorks Online, the state's labor exchange portal. Additionally, North Carolina statute requires annually that a report be 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 Department of Commerce provides a Veteran Services Program across the state to assist veterans with employment. The Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPs) assist veterans with overcoming barriers through intensive, targeted services. Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVERs) reach out to employers to advocate for hiring Veterans. Recent changes to the federal policies concerning the roles of these staff that serve veterans have been made to ensure that eligible veterans and eligible spouses receive the best combination of services, according to their needs. The agency determined that to accomplish this refocusing, Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialists will serve only those veterans and eligible spouses most in need of the intensive services to address significant barriers to employment. As a result, DVOP specialists will serve fewer veterans and eligible spouses, but will be able to provide more intensive services.

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

- disabilities;
- homelessness;
- unemployed for at least 27 weeks;
- criminal background (released within the last 12 months);
- no high school diploma or GED;
- low income; and
- between 18-24 years old.

Veterans with any of these barriers are then referred to a DVOP, or in the limited locations without a DVOP, the veteran will be given a priority of service and will be assisted by another career center staff. Included in career counseling conversations with veterans, staff inform veterans of the Registered Apprenticeship program and the eligibility and utilization of GI Bill Benefits for the apprenticeship program.

Another manifestation of the priority of service policy is in the NCWorks Online job order process. This means that all registered veterans have an opportunity to view the job opening before non-veterans. To

accomplish this, a 24-hour business day hold plus overnight update is placed on each job order before it is released to the general public.

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

**Describe how the one-stop delivery system (including one-stop center operators and the one-stop delivery system partners), will comply with section 188 of WIOA (if applicable) and applicable provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12101 et seq.) with regard to the physical and programmatic accessibility of facilities, programs, services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities. This also must include a description of compliance through providing staff training and support for addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities. Describe the State's one-stop center certification policy, particularly the accessibility criteria.**

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.

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

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

**Career Center Certification Accessibility Criteria:**

- Adequate handicapped parking with compliant curb ramp(s) connected to the accessibility route into the Center(s). Handicapped parking must be clearly marked.
- 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.

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 2016 Career Center staff will receive training to follow established procedures to ensure inclusion and programmatic accessibility to center services. This training, comprised of eight half-day sessions across the state, will allow staff to better understand the different types of disabilities, how to handle issues of disclosure and disability identification with sensitivity at program intake, and how to determine the most effective mix of services and referrals to make when a disability is identified. These trainings will be presented by subject matter experts and include such topics as: federal, state, and local disability policies; identifying barriers/hidden disabilities; disability awareness and etiquette; website accessibility; providing reasonable accommodations; assistive technology accommodations and resources; Section 503 for federal contractors; and simulation training.

**(9) Addressing the Accessibility of the One-Stop Delivery System for Individuals who are English Language Learners.**

Describe how the one-stop delivery system (including one-stop center operators and the one-stop delivery system partners) will ensure that each one-stop center is able to meet the needs of English language learners, such as through established procedures, staff training, resources, and other materials.

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.

#### **IV. Coordination with State Plan Programs**

In spring 2015, North Carolina created the WIOA State Steering Council comprised of leaders from each of the agencies responsible for implementing WIOA (NCWorks Commission, Department of Commerce, N.C. Community College System, and Department of Health and Human Services). This council has met regularly over the last year to develop the State Unified Plan which included gathering input from state and local staff in all core programs. In addition, the council has worked directly with the NCWorks Commission to ensure the plan is aligned with the commission’s strategic plan. Below is a summary of activities of the State Steering Council to develop the State Unified Plan

In the fall of 2015, the State Steering Council held a series of summits across the state to provide information on WIOA and the State Unified Plan development and to gather input from local staff. The summits were held in communities across the state and during each summit, local staff were engaged in conversation about key WIOA themes to gather their input. The council kicked things off with a statewide summit in Durham then followed up with three regional summits in the eastern, western, and central areas of the state. The council completed this work with a roundtable conversation and several town hall events at the state’s NCWorks Partnership Conference.

The council also developed eight working groups organized around plan components and with representation from each of the three core agencies. These working groups met and developed initial content for the state plan. The working groups included:

- alignment and coordination
- economic and workforce system data and analysis;
- services to youth;
- services to persons with barriers to employment;
- core program operations;
- systems and policies;
- IT and data integration; and
- summit planning.

The information developed by the working groups was sent to the State Steering Council which reviewed the content and used it for development of the final draft. The final draft was posted on the NCWorks Commission’s website and an email address was provided for public comments.

The State Steering Council also has several key meetings with the full NCWorks Commission and with the ad hoc WIOA Unified Plan review committee. In December 2015, the council presented an outline of the plan components to the full NCWorks Commission. In January 2015, a full draft of the plan was provided to the ad hoc WIOA Unified Plan review committee. This committee reviewed the plan and met with the steering council to address questions. In February 2016, the review committee recommended to the full NCWorks Commission that the plan be sent to the Governor after final edits from commission feedback and public comments are made to the plan.

After the February 2016 commission meeting, final guidance was released from the federal government. The State Steering Council reviewed the final guidance, commission feedback, and public comments to finalize N.C.'s State Unified Plan.

## V. Common Assurances

<b>North Carolina has met each of the following assurances and has supporting documentation per Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requirements.</b>	
1.	The State has established a policy identifying circumstances that may present a conflict of interest for a State Board or local board member, or the entity or class of officials that the member represents, and procedures to resolve such conflicts;
2.	The State has established a policy to provide to the public (including individuals with disabilities) access to meetings of State Boards and local boards, and information regarding activities of State Boards and local boards, such as data on board membership and minutes;
3.	The lead State agencies with responsibility for the administration of core programs reviewed and commented on the appropriate operational planning elements of the Unified or Combined State Plan, and approved the elements as serving the needs of the populations served by such programs;
4.	<p>(a) The State obtained input into the development of the Unified or Combined State Plan and provided an opportunity for comment on the plan by representatives of local boards and chief elected officials, businesses, labor organizations, institutions of higher education, the entities responsible for planning or administering the core programs and the other Combined Plan programs (if included in the State Plan), other primary stakeholders, and the general public, and that the Unified or Combined State Plan is available and accessible to the general public;</p> <p>(b) The State provided an opportunity for review and comment on the plan by the State Board, including State agency official(s) for the Unemployment Insurance Agency if such official(s) is a member of the State Board;</p>
6.	The State has established, in accordance with WIOA section 116(i), fiscal control and fund accounting procedures that may be necessary to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for, funds paid to the State through allotments made for adult, dislocated worker, and youth programs to carry out workforce investment activities under chapters 2 and 3 of subtitle B;
7.	The State has taken the appropriate action to be in compliance with WIOA section 188, as applicable;
8.	The Federal funds received to carry out a core program will not be expended for any purpose other than for activities authorized with respect to such funds under that core program;
9.	The State will pay an appropriate share (as defined by the State board) of the costs of carrying out section 116, from funds made available through each of the core programs;
10.	The State has a one-stop certification policy that ensures the physical and programmatic accessibility of all one-stop centers with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA);
11.	Service providers have a referral process in place for directing Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) to DVOP services, when appropriate; and
12.	The State will conduct evaluations and research projects on activities under WIOA core programs; that such projects will be coordinated with, and designed in conjunction with, State and local boards and with State agencies responsible for the administration of all respective core programs; and, further, that the projects will be coordinated with the evaluations provided for by the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Education under WIOA.

## VI. Program-Specific Requirements for Core State Plan Programs

**The State must address all program-specific requirements in this section for the WIOA core programs regardless of whether the State submits either a Unified or Combined State Plan.**

### **Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth Activities under Title I-B**

The Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following with respect to activities carried out under subtitle B—

#### **(a) General Requirements**

##### **(1) Regions and Local Workforce Development Areas**

##### **(A) Identify the regions and local workforce development areas designated in the State.**

North Carolina's 23 local workforce development areas are provided as Appendix 2C. The overlay of North Carolina's eight economic development prosperity zones shown on the map are the basis for designation of regions. The current 23 boards meet the performance and fiscal accountability criteria of the Opportunity Act and were accordingly re-designated for the initial two year period. North Carolina began a regional approach to planning and service delivery under the Workforce Investment Act and established eight regions that most closely aligned the geography of the local workforce development areas and the Prosperity Zones without dividing local areas. These regions are consistent with labor market areas and will be the initial regions under the Opportunity Act subject to review at the end of two years. The regions with their constituent local workforce development areas are:

- Western Region: *Southwestern and Mountain Area WDBs*;
- Northwest Region: *High Country, Western Piedmont, and Region C WDBs*;
- Piedmont Triad Region: *Northwest Piedmont, Guilford County, DavidsonWorks, and Regional Partnership WDBs*;
- Southwest Region: *Centralina, Charlotte/Mecklenburg, and Gaston County WDBs*;
- North Central Region: *Kerr-Tar, Durham, and Capital Area WDBs*;
- Sandhills Region: *Lumber River, Cumberland County, and Triangle South WDBs*;
- Northeast Region: *Region Q, Northeastern, and Turning Point WDBs*; and
- Southeast Region: *Eastern Carolina and Cape Fear WDBs*.

##### **(B) Describe the process used for designating local areas, including procedures for determining whether the local area met the criteria for “performed successfully” and “sustained fiscal integrity” in accordance with 106(b) (2) and (3) of WIOA.**

The process for the initial designation of local workforce development areas in North Carolina originates from a letter of request to the Governor from the local Chief Elected Official of each potential workforce development area. The letter of request must contain the official local area name as well as the county(ies) that comprise the area. Upon receipt of the request by the Governor and review, it will be determined if the local area meets the criteria for performed successfully and sustained fiscal integrity.

Describe the process used for identifying regions and planning regions under section 106(a) of WIOA. This must include a description of how the State consulted with the local boards and chief elected officials in identifying the regions.

North Carolina's workforce system includes businesses, organizations, agencies, employed and unemployed persons, training and educational institutions, adults and youth. To enhance service to all these constituents, aligning workforce development planning and services with regional labor markets is both efficient and productive. Communities and regions recognize that to have successful economic development it must go hand-in-hand with a well-functioning workforce development system. North Carolina has built on several years of emphasizing the value of regional efforts and worked with local workforce development boards and local elected officials to establish and enhance identification of appropriate regions and the working relationships that have been developed.

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 designated 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.

**(C) Provide the appeals process referred to in section 106(b) (5) of WIOA relating to designation of local area.**

At the conclusion of the initial two year designation, North Carolina will conduct an official subsequent designation process per Section 106(b)(3) of WIOA. At that time, should a requesting area not be granted designation, the state's appeal process will be followed. North Carolina's process is under development and will follow the WIOA and relevant regulations.

**(D) Provide the appeals process referred to in section 121(h) (2) (E) of WIOA relating to determinations of infrastructure funding.**

North Carolina's appeal process related to determinations of infrastructure funding is under development and will follow WIOA and relevant regulations.

**(2) Statewide Activities**

**(A) Provide State policies or guidance for the statewide workforce development system and for use of State funds for workforce investment activities.**

North Carolina uses statewide funds to develop and fund innovative and dynamic initiatives that pilot new service delivery strategies and target specific populations throughout the state. These initiatives are aligned with the mission and direction of WIOA by assisting job seekers, especially job seekers with barriers to employment, with access to employment, education, training, and support services they need to succeed in the labor market while also matching employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. All guidance related to the usage of WIOA Title I funding is posted on the Division of Workforce Solutions' website.

**Policy Statements**

Policy Statements are used to transmit policy and operational guidance. Policy Statements are indexed and available on the Division's website. Policy Statements are issued through the Assistant Secretary by calendar year with consecutive numbers assigned and posted by Planning and Policy Development.

**Voluntary Transfer of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Funds**

To transmit procedures for voluntary transfers of WIOA funds between Local Workforce Development Areas and to rescind DWS Policy Statement, Number 07-2015.

Revised in Number: PS 09-2016 Date: 6/27/2016

**Funds Transfer Between Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs Under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act**

To issue the requirements for the transfer of local Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) formula funds between Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs and to rescind DWS Policy Statement Number: PS 06-2015

Policy Statement Number 10-2016 Date: October 26, 2016

**NCWorks Mobile Career Center No Cost usage Agreement and Fee-for-Use Schedule**

To provide guidance on the NCWorks Mobile Career Center's expanded no cost usage agreement and update fee-for-use schedule. To rescind DWS PS 09-2015 "Mobile Unit's expanded no cost usage agreement and updated fee-for-use schedule."

Policy Statement Number 11-2016 Date: October 26, 2016

**Revised Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Participant Transportation Policy**

To transmit the changes in the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Participant Transportation, Job Search Allowance, and Relocation Allowance Reimbursement.

Policy Statement Number 12-2016 Date: November 21, 2016

**Requirement for Local Workforce Development Boards to Meet or Exceed All Federal Performance Measures**

To inform local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) of the requirement that Boards must meet or exceed all of the individual Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I Youth, Adult, and Dislocated Worker federal performance measures.

Policy Statement Number 01-2017 Date: January 17, 2017

**Guidance on Eligibility for Participation in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title 1 Dislocated Worker Program**

To provide guidance on eligibility for participation in the WIOA Title 1 Dislocated Worker Program

Policy Statement Number 02-2017 Date: January 18, 2017

Priority of Service for Veterans and Eligible Spouses is all U.S. Department of Labor Job Training Programs To emphasize to staff of local Workforce Development Boards, Division of Workforce Solutions Offices, and NCWorks Career Centers provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Final Rule for Priority in all federally-funded training and employment programs as prescribed in the Jobs for Veterans Act, and to provide instruction on the implementation of the provisions. To rescind DWS Policy Statement Number PS 12-2014.

Policy Statement Number 03-2017 Date: January 17, 2017

Maximize Carolina Sector Grants for Workforce Pipeline Related Projects

The North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions announces the Maximize Carolina Grant for business-led Partnerships to develop and implement projects in targeted sectors designed to solve applicant pipeline problems related to skills gaps or workforce shortages. The grant is also intended to support or implement sector partnerships within regions and possibly be integrated with local career pathways.

Policy Statement Number 04-2017 Date: February 7, 2017

Updates to Local and Regional Area Plan Instructions

To transmit updates to the Division's Program Years 2017-2018 Local and Regional Area Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title 1 Plan Instructions.

Policy Statement Number 05-2017 Date March 29, 2017

WIOA Youth Formula Funds Expenditure Requirements

To inform local Workforce Development Boards of the requirement that Boards must meet the mandated 20% Work Experience expenditure rate for local Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I Youth formula funds and the percentage of Youth formula funds used to serve out-of-school youth must be at least 75 percent.

Policy Statement Number 06-2017 Date: March 29, 2017

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Service Delivery Innovation Grant Guidelines

To transmit guidelines for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Service Delivery Innovation Grant Guidelines.

Policy Statement Number 07-2017 Date April 3, 2017

Electronic File Storage and Protecting Personally Identifiable Information

To provide guidance on the use of electronic file storage, protecting Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and retrieval of workforce and other federal funds' participant, program and financial documents; and to rescind Policy Statement No. 09-2013.

Policy Statement Number 08-2017

Guidance on the Provision of WIOA Work Experience Opportunities

To provide local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) with guidance regarding the use, documentation, and tracking of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funds in the provision of Work Experience (WEX) opportunities for youth, adult, and dislocated worker participants.

Policy Statement Number 09-2017 Date: April 19, 2017

Guidance on the Provision of WIOA Work Experience Opportunities

To provide local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) with additional information and clarification on guidance regarding the use, documentation, and tracking of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I funds in the provision of Work Experience (WEX) opportunities for youth, adult, and dislocated worker participants and rescind Policy Statement 09-2017

Policy Statement Number 10-2017 Date: May 9, 2017

#### Conflict of Interest

To provide additional guidance for Policy Statement 22-2015, Procurement and Contracting. This information includes possible scenarios and exceptions from North Carolina General Statute (NCGS) 14-234.

Policy Statement Number 11-2017 Date: May 17, 2017

#### 2017 Lower Living Standard Income Level and to Rescind DWS Policy Statement Number 05-2016

To transmit the income chart identifying the higher of the “Federal Poverty Level Income Guidelines” and the “70% Lower Living Standard Income Level Guidelines” and rescind DWS Policy Statement Number 05-2016

Policy Statement Number 12-2017 Date: May 23, 2017

#### Local WIOA Workforce Development Program Year 2017 Allocations

To transmit Local WIOA Workforce Development Program Year 2017 Allocations

Policy Statement Number 15-2017 Date June 15, 2017

#### Maximize Carolina Sector Grant

To update the North Carolina Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions Maximize Carolina Grants Guidelines and rescind Policy Statement number PS 04-2017. Maximize Carolina Sector Grants are to assist local Partnerships in the development and implementation of projects in targeted sectors designed to solve applicant pipeline problems related to skills gaps or workforce shortages. The grants are also intended to support or implement sector partnerships within regions and potentially be integrated with local career pathways.

Policy Statement Number 04-2017, Change 1

#### Requesting Dislocated Worker Contingency Funds Available from NC’s WIOA Statewide Rapid Response Allotment

To transmit policy and requirements for requesting Dislocated Worker Contingency Funds and rescind Policy Statement 06-2016.

Policy Statement Number 06-2016, Change 1 Date August 8, 2017

#### WIOA Program Enhancement Grant Application

To transmit guidelines for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Program Enhancement Grant Application. The Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) has developed a systematic approach to reviewing and approving Local Workforce Development Board requests for funding to support enhanced WIOA services.

Policy Statement Number 16-2017 Date: September 28, 2017

#### Guidance for Local Incumbent Worker Training Policies

To provide Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) guidelines, according to WIOA Section 134(d)(4), to Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) choosing to use up to 20 percent of the combined Adult and Dislocated Worker allocated formula program funds to serve Incumbent Workers (IWs).

Policy Statement Number 17-2017 Date: November 20, 2017

#### Conflict of Interest Requirements for Workforce Development Boards and Staff

To inform local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) of the requirement to develop a Conflict of Interest Policy and provide a policy template. To rescind PS 11-2017.

Policy Statement Number 18-2017 Date: November 21, 2017

#### Requirement for Local Workforce Development Boards to Use Competitive Selection Processes to Procure Training Providers and One-Stop Operators

To inform local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) of the requirement that they must use a

competitive procurement process to select providers of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Adult, Youth, and Dislocated Worker services, as well as, for the operator of a local certified NCWorks Career Center using the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Final Regulations. To provide instructions for a waiver in the case of a failed procurement process. To rescind PS 08-2016.

Policy Statement Number 19-2017 Date: November 21, 2017

#### Financial Management Policy for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I

To transmit the current Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) Financial Management policies updated to reflect Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Uniform Guidance. To rescind PS 19-2015.

Policy Statement Number 20-2017 Date: November 21, 2017

#### Procurement and Contracting Policy

To provide local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and other sub recipients minimum standards and procedures designed to ensure the proper procurement of and contracting for services. To rescind PS 22-2015

Policy Statement 21-2017 Date: November 21, 2017

#### WIOA Program Enhancement Planning Grant Application

To transmit guidelines for the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Program Enhancement Planning Grant Application that allows Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) to apply for grant funds for the planning and development of WIOA Program Enhancement Grant Applications to support enhanced WIOA services.

Policy Statement Number 22-2017 Date: December 7, 2017

#### Employer Accounts and Job Order Policy

To provide guidance regarding the Division of Workforce Solutions' Employer Accounts and Job Order Policy and to rescind PS 03-2014.

Number: PS 02-2016 Date: 1/26/2016

#### Consumer Choice in Selecting Training Providers

To ensure that Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) consumers are positioned to make informed choices relative to training opportunities available through the eligible WIOA provider list which maintains the integrity of the WIOA system. To support a workforce system that is readily understood, accessible, and responsive to local and regional workers, job seekers, students and businesses. To ensure customers receive information on the full array of services from public and private sources.

Number: PS 21-2015 Date: 10/23/2015

#### Refocused Roles and Responsibilities of Jobs for Veterans State Grant Staff

To inform Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) staff, NCWorks Career Center staff and workforce partners' staff of the federally required "Refocused Roles and Responsibilities of Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) Staff (Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist and Local Veterans Employment Representative)." The policy conveys duties staff are to perform and discusses the relationship of services provided by staff within the larger workforce system.

Reference Bulletin: JVSG Staff Roles & Responsibilities Bulletin

Number: PS 20-2015 Date: 10/23/2015

#### Incident Reporting Process

To transmit state policy, procedures, and guidance for reporting alleged or suspected program fraud or abuse of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) resources to the N.C. Division of Workforce Solutions and to rescind Local Area Issuance No. 2009-05.

Number: PS 15-2015 Date: 8/14/2015

#### Non-Criminal Program Complaints

To provide local Workforce Development Boards and other Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) sub recipients the minimum standards and procedures for processing non-criminal program complaints and to rescind Local Area Issuance No. 2009-06.

Number: PS 14-2015 Date: 8/14/2015

#### Sector Partnership Grants for NCWorks Certified Career Pathways serving Dislocated Workers

To transmit guidelines allowing local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) to apply for Sector Partnership National Emergency Grant (SPNEG) funds for creation, development and implementation of NCWorks Certified Career Pathways as they relate to dislocated workers as defined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Section 3.

Number: PS 13-2015 Date: 8/10/2015

#### Definition of WIOA's "Requires Additional Assistance" for Youth Eligibility

To provide North Carolina's definition for "requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to serve and hold employment" as it relates to eligibility for youth at Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Sections 129 (1)(B)(iii)(VIII) and (1)(C)(iv)(VII) and to rescind Local Area Issuance 2009-18.

Number: PS 11-2015 Date: 7/27/2015

#### Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Funds and Pell Grants

To provide information on the use of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) resources when combined with Pell Grants and to rescind DWS Policy Statement Number: 18-2013.

Number: PS 08-2015 Date: 7/13/2015

#### Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Nondiscrimination/Equal Opportunity Standards and Complaint Procedures

To provide Local Workforce Development Areas 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 Statement provides current contact information and rescinds DWS Policy Statement Number PS 08-2014.

Number: PS 05-2015 Date: 7/8/2015

#### On-the-Job Training (OJT) Using Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Funds

To establish and communicate the policy requirements and forms for conducting On-the-Job Training (OJT) activities in North Carolina and to rescind DWS Policy Statement 13-2013.

Number: PS 04-2015 Date: 7/8/2015

#### Refocused Roles and Responsibilities of Jobs for Veterans State Grant Staff

To inform Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) Workforce Centers and workforce partners staff of the federally required "Refocused Roles and Responsibilities of Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) Staff (Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist and Local Veterans Employment Representative)." The policy conveys duties staff are to perform and discusses the relationship of services provided by staff within the larger workforce system.

Reference Bulletin: New Roles and Responsibilities

Number: PS 07-2014 Date: 7/11/2014

#### NCWorks Online Service Activity Codes and Definitions; Guidance on Case Notes and Exit Dates

To provide NCWorks Online Participant Service Activity Codes and Definitions, guidance on Case Notes and NCWorks Online Exit Dates.

Number: PS 06-2014 Date: 6/3/2014

NC Division of Workforce Solutions Process for Distribution of Policy and Administrative Information  
To establish an official method of issuing and disseminating the Division of Workforce Solutions' procedural, administrative, management and program directions to Division staff, local Workforce Development Areas and other interested parties.

Number: PS 01-2013      Date: 2/25/2013

**(B) Describe how the State intends to use Governor's set aside funding. Describe how the State will utilize Rapid Response funds to respond to layoffs and plant closings and coordinate services to quickly aid companies and their affected workers. States also should describe any layoff aversion strategies they have implemented to address at risk companies and workers.**

North Carolina will use state set aside funding to support the key goals and strategies laid out in NCWorks Commission's strategic plan and this WIOA State Unified Plan.

- *Sector strategies and business engagement.* Funds will be available to help develop and support public-private partnership, increase number of apprenticeship programs, and cross-training of staff across programs.
- *Career pathways.* Funds will be used to continue to support development of NCWorks Certified Career Pathways through training, materials, and coaching local teams. Funds will also be available to support the development of a Career Information Portal that can be used by all North Carolinians.
- *Career center improvements.* Funds will be used to update and improve outreach materials, technology upgrades, and staff training.
- *Performance funds.* Incentive funding will be available to local workforce development boards that exceed state performance measures.

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 by providing a company with an Incumbent Worker Training Grant.

**(C) In addition, describe the State policies and procedures to provide Rapid Responses in cases of natural disasters including coordination with FEMA and other entities.**

In the event of a natural disaster, the state Rapid Response Dislocated Worker Unit coordinates with USDOL Employment and Training Administration, Federal Emergency Management Agency, NC Public

Safety Emergency Management Division and American Red Cross to ensure available resources are provided to dislocated workers and survivors of a natural disaster. The Unit 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 Unit coordinates with partner agencies to dispatch the mobile career classroom to assist survivors in locating missing family members or file a claim for Disaster Unemployment Assistance.

- (D) Describe how the State provides early intervention (e.g., Rapid Response) to worker groups on whose behalf a Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) petition has been filed. (Section 134(a)(2)(A).) This description must include how the State disseminates benefit information to provide trade-affected workers in the groups identified in the TAA petitions with an accurate understanding of the provision of TAA benefits and services in such a way that they are transparent to the trade-affected dislocated worker applying for them (Trade Act Sec. 221(a)(2)(A) and Sec. 225; Governor-Secretary Agreement). Describe how the State will use funds that have been reserved for Rapid Response to provide services for every worker group that files a TAA petition.**

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 include NCWorks Career Center locations and phone numbers.

Workers are frequently 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 Worker Program Requirements**

- (1) Work-Based Training Models.**  
**If the State is utilizing work-based training models (e.g. on-the-job training, incumbent worker training, transitional jobs, and customized training) as part of its training strategy and these strategies are not already discussed in other sections of the plan, describe the State's strategies for how these models ensure high quality training for both the participant and the employer.**

The Division of Workforce Solutions encourages local workforce development boards to utilize formula funding to fund Local Incumbent Worker training programs. Local Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) is 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.

Local Workforce Board staff guide candidate businesses in the application process, ensuring that quality training is selected to address the employees' identified skills gaps, and fits within the WIOA parameters. The application process includes validation of the trainer and asks the company to describe how the requested training will address the identified skills gaps, improve employee retention, impact company stability, and increase the competitiveness of the employee and employer.

**(2) Registered Apprenticeship**  
**Describe how the State will incorporate Registered Apprenticeship into its strategy and services.**

North Carolina is working closely with NCWorks Career Centers to develop pre-apprenticeships for local employers. The career centers will be assisting with conducting assessments, providing referrals and screening potential apprentices for pre-apprenticeship. The pre-apprenticeship will provide 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 registered apprenticeship. 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 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 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 apprenticeship program.

Additionally, because the US Military is the second largest employer in the state, Ft. Bragg has an approved Registered Apprenticeship program to register soldiers in 72 apprentice occupations. Camp Lejeune has a pipe fitting/welder Apprenticeship program that enables soldiers to receive training and at successful completion will receive credentials upon transitioning out of the service. 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 is also working with several large electrical, plumbing, carpentry and masonry companies to recruit youth into these technical trade skilled careers where there are massive shortages of trained workers.

Additionally, our apprenticeship staff is being integrated into our Business Services teams, 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.

**(3) Training Provider Eligibility Procedures**  
**Provide the procedure, eligibility criteria, and information requirements for determining training provider initial and continued eligibility, including Registered Apprenticeship programs (WIOA Section 122).**

The NCWorks Online system allows the individual providers the ability to login and apply to be considered to be on the Eligible Training Provider List to receive referrals of Title 1 eligible customers. Once they have completed their application, the Workforce Development Board that is closest to the primary location will review the application and take the necessary steps to determine if this provider is

one that should be on the state list of approved providers. Once a provider is approved, they must then key in all the programs they offer that will again have to be reviewed and approved by a local WDB. Once a provider has been approved for WIOA training, every WDB in the state has the option to certify that this provider can be available in their area. With the two year review process, they would have to be approved again based on current standards.

The 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 through ITAs. ITAs may also be used for WIOA Title I Youth funds to provide training to older, out-of-school youth (ages 18–24):

- institutions of higher education that provide a program of training that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential;
- apprenticeship programs registered by the USDOL Office of Registered Apprenticeship, State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA), and ApprenticeshipNC;
- 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.

#### *Initial Eligibility and Application Process*

Training providers that were not eligible providers under WIA may submit an application through the website for initial program eligibility. Training providers may apply for initial program eligibility on a rolling basis throughout the year.

All applications for the ETPL will be completed online. Training providers can apply for a program’s inclusion on the ETPL in one or more local workforce areas with a single application. The specific local areas that are covered must be marked on the application, and performance data for all local areas must be provided.

The first step in the online application process for training providers will verify that the training provider is licensed, certified, or authorized by the relevant state agency with oversight, to operate training programs in North Carolina. If a provider is in compliance with the oversight agency, the provider can proceed to the next step in the application process. If a program is not in compliance with the oversight agency as required by state law, the provider will not be able to apply for inclusion on the ETPL until they meet the necessary requirements. This applies to in–state and out–of–state training providers with training programs.

Next, training providers applying for initial program eligibility must provide the following through the online application:

- description of each program of training services to be offered;
- information on cost of attendance, including costs of tuition and fees;
- which in–demand industry sectors and occupations best fit with the training program; and
- description of the prerequisites or skills and knowledge required prior to the commencement of training.

Once the online application is submitted and the state has determined that the required information has been provided, each local workforce area will be notified to approve, deny, or request further information on the program within 30 days of the receipt of a complete application. Local Workforce Boards may require supplemental information and may set additional eligibility criteria in local policy. If the Local Workforce

Board has taken no action on a complete application after 30 days, the application will be automatically approved.

Registered apprenticeship programs are not subject to the eligibility criteria or application requirements. While registered apprenticeship programs are automatically eligible, not all registered apprenticeship sponsors may wish to be included on the list. Registered apprenticeship programs will automatically be included on the State list until they lose their registration or they indicate they do not wish to be included.

#### *Additional Eligibility Criteria for Local Areas*

The Local Workforce Boards may establish additional criteria for program eligibility 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 particular local area. Training providers should be aware that programs may be approved for some local areas and denied for others based on local criteria, and the approved local areas for each training provider will be listed as part of the ETPL.

#### *Continued Eligibility*

After the initial eligibility period of one full fiscal year, training providers must submit online applications through the website for continued program eligibility every two years. Applications for continued eligibility must show the training program is still authorized by the appropriate oversight agency to operate and must include the following (in addition to updating the information provided for initial eligibility):

- total number of participants enrolled in the program;
- total number of participants completing the program;
- total number of participants exiting the program;
- information on recognized post–secondary credentials received by program participants;  
and
- information on the program completion rate for such participants.

The NCWorks Commission, the state’s Workforce Investment Board, will use training provider performance data gathered in Program Year 2016 to establish a baseline for performance benchmarks for the continued eligibility for providers. Training providers that fall below the required performance thresholds will be removed from the Eligible Training Provider List.

- (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 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, resource staff is 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.

**(5) Describe the State’s criteria regarding local area transfer of funds between the adult and dislocated worker programs.**

The State has implemented policy for the transfer of local WIOA funds between the Adult and Dislocated Worker funding streams. The policy establishes procedures to manage transfers and to facilitate accurate reporting to the U.S. Department of Labor. The policy 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 will establish criteria, issued through a North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions Policy Statement, for determining when transfer of funds is necessary. 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 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.

**(c) Youth Program Requirements**

**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 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.**

The NCWorks Commission supports cost-efficient, collaborative efforts that result in comprehensive and innovative services that lead youth to academic improvement, high school graduation or High School Equivalency attainment, employment, military services, advanced or apprenticeship training, paid and unpaid internships, and/or post-secondary education. Local programs must link academic and occupational learning and develop measures of successful outcomes. Effective programs require the involvement of local groups providing input on the proposed program design, and coordinating the delivery of the youth services with local employers, NCWorks Career Centers and other youth services already available in the community.

Local programs have the discretion to determine what specific program services will be provided to a youth

participant, based on each participant's objective assessment and individual service strategy. Critical to the success is integrating a youth development strategy that focuses on a young person's assets, provides a variety of interventions and supports allowing the youth to grow, learn and mature— successfully transitioning to careers and productive adulthood. Youth development activities include leadership development opportunities that encourage responsibility, employability, and other positive social behaviors. It is expected that each youth will participate in more than one of the fourteen program elements required as part of any local youth program. The overall goal of the youth program is to help youth complete a high school diploma or equivalent and to prepare for a career pathway that will transition into skilled employment and/or postsecondary education.

Youth program outcomes should prepare youth for post-secondary educational opportunities, provide better linkages between academic and occupational learning, prepare youth for employment; and offer effective connections to intermediary organizations that provide strong links to the job market and employers. All youth must receive some form of follow-up services for a minimum period of 12 months, following the completion of participation in the program.

Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDB) will follow the procurement procedures set forth in their own local plan as established by each local area to ensure proper competition and transparency. Procurement of WIOA funded Youth Services requires the selection of youth providers through a competitive selection process. Each LWDB, with recommendations from its designated youth committee and in accordance with criteria outlined in the local WIOA Strategic Plan, is afforded the opportunity to identify providers of youth services that effectively address the needs of local youth.

Local Youth Committees who serve as a sub-committee to the board play a significant role in developing programs and services for youth. Their responsibilities include developing portions of the local plan related to eligible youth and making recommendations to the local workforce board regarding youth service providers. As part of their local plan, each local area will develop written criteria to identify effective youth activities and providers. The local boards will fund youth providers based on performance and program cost data provided by potential providers and based on criteria that may include those youth activities and providers that:

- Develop relationships between youth and caring adults
- Involve family members
- Build youth responsibility
- Develop youth citizenship and leadership skills
- Place high expectations on youth and staff
- Provide appropriate services based on age and needs of each youth
- Demonstrate involvement of the business/employer community
- Provide accessible facilities and provide accommodations for special needs
- populations, including individuals with disabilities
- Demonstrate prior successes in providing employment and training services to youth
- Prepare youth for success in employment
- Advocate for the youth perspective
- Demonstrate the connection between work and learning
- Provide comprehensive guidance and counseling

The criteria to solicit competitive proposals for the operation of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) Title I, Public Law 113-128, will ensure that Youth Programs are competitively procured and solicited for comprehensive year-round Youth Programs for out-of-school youth between the ages 16-24, and in-school youth between the ages of 14 and 21. Local Areas' youth program design must offer a unique opportunity to provide creative and innovative mix of services designed to address the academic, vocational, and employment needs of at-risk youth.

Targeted activities include:

1. Tutoring, study skills training, instruction, and evidence-based dropout prevention and recovery strategies that lead to completion of the requirements for a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent (including a recognized certificate of attendance or similar document for individuals with disabilities) or for a recognized postsecondary credential;
2. Alternative secondary school services, or dropout recovery services, as appropriate;
3. Paid and unpaid work experiences that have as a component, academic and occupational education, which may include:
  - a. summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year;
  - b. pre-apprenticeship programs;
  - c. internships and job shadowing; and
  - d. on-the-job training opportunities;
4. Occupational skill training, which shall include priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized postsecondary credentials that are aligned with in demand industry sectors or occupations in the local area involved, if the local board determines that the programs meet the quality criteria described in section 123;
5. Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
6. Leadership development opportunities, which may include community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors, as appropriate;
7. Supportive services;
8. Adult mentoring for the period of participation and a subsequent period, for a total of not less than 12 months;
9. Follow-up services for not less than 12 months after the completion of participation, as appropriate;
10. Comprehensive guidance and counseling, which may include drug and alcohol abuse counseling and referral, as appropriate;
11. Financial literacy education;
12. Entrepreneurial skills training;
13. Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services; and
14. Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to postsecondary education and training.

Local Boards must follow a procurement process that ensures compliance with the prescribed rules and regulations. At a minimum, the procurement process must ensure:

- solicitation methods that promote fair and open competition;
- written code of conduct that includes specific conflict of interest provisions to ensure that those who develop or issue a proposal are separate and distinct from those who are involved in the selection process;
- clear and accurate description of the services being procured; and
- specific contract time frame with the option to extend the contract for a specified period based on a provider's compliance with the terms of the contract.

In addition, each LWDB must use the following criteria in awarding contracts for youth services:

- 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;
- whether the organization leverages community-based resources, including partnerships with organizations that provide mentoring services and private-sector employment involvement;
- the use of an evidenced-based program model by the organization with a proven track record of success;
- the inclusion of rigorous, quantitative performance measures by the organization to confirm effectiveness of the program;
- 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 (See Table 1 on Next Page) to ensure that Federal investments in employment and training programs are accountable to job seekers, employers, customers, and taxpayers. There is a renewed system which will ensure access for all individuals, of every skill level, the opportunity to pursue the skills, training, and education they need to obtain employment that will lead to financial stability and economic security for themselves and their families. Employers will also have the assurance that trained and qualified workers will be available to fill their current and future openings.

**State WIOA Performance Indicators**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Adults/ Dislocated Workers</b>	<b>Entered Employment Rate</b>	The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit.
	<b>Employment Retention Rate</b>	The percentage of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the 4 <sup>th</sup> quarter after exit.
	<b>Median Earnings</b>	The median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit.
	<b>Credential Rate</b>	The percentage of participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation or within 1 year after exit.
	<b>Measureable Skills Gain</b>	The percentage of participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measureable skill gains toward such a credential or employment.
<b>Youth</b>	<b>Placement in Employment /Education/Training</b>	The percentage of participants who are in education or training services, or in unsubsidized employment during the 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit.
	<b>Retention in Employment/ Education/Training</b>	The percentage of participants who are in education or training services, or in unsubsidized employment during the 4 <sup>th</sup> quarter after exit.
	<b>Earnings</b>	The median earnings of participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the 2 <sup>nd</sup> quarter after exit.
	<b>Credential Rate</b>	The percentage of participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation or within 1 year after exit.
	<b>In-Program Skills Gain</b>	The percentage of participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measureable skill gains toward such a credential or employment.
<b>Employers</b>	<b>Indicators of effectiveness</b>	To Be Determined

**(2) 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, required and optional one-stop partner programs, and any other resources available.**

Through administrative oversight and monitoring of the 23 local Workforce Development Boards, the state ensures local area program design incorporates the availability of all Youth Program elements. The state has all 23 local Workforce Development Boards identify through Local and Regional Plan questions how the Program Elements will be made available. Once identified, as a required strategy of the individual's service strategy, whether it is by WIOA formula funds and/or through partnership, Local Workforce Development Boards must also identify the partnerships providing the service. Local areas may use WIOA youth funds to carry out the fourteen program elements either directly, in partnership, or by referral, that will assist youth in improving their educational attainment and employment opportunities.

Along with Core Partners and a variety of interested stakeholders, North Carolina plans a more cohesive partnership with the school systems' Career & Technical Education Departments, the university and community college systems & enhance involvement with employers to address/provide employment opportunities. It is strongly encouraged that local WIOA youth program operators have a presence within the NCWorks Career Centers as they house various partners (i.e., Vocational Rehabilitation, local Departments of Social Services, Community Colleges, and many others to include community based organizations.) These partners may prove beneficial in addressing persons with identified and unidentified disabilities, high school equivalency credentials, leadership development and supportive service needs.

Career Pathways for youth will be of importance in regards to occupational skills training. North Carolina will provide training through Career Pathways and Work Based Learning opportunities so that staff/partners/schools have a clear understanding of these elements and how they apply to youth. North Carolina will provide resources/training on how to assist youth to become career ready.

The State intends to achieve improved outcomes for Out of School Youth by implementing an increased focus in monitoring service and performance levels, and providing technical assistance to Local Workforce Development Areas. The State will increase participation in regular meetings with local area staff, youth leads, and service providers to offer guidance, technical assistance, and present best practices on topics which include outreach, at-risk youth, and disconnected youth, predicated on evidenced based research.

**(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.**

In their comprehensive plan, each workforce development board is required to provide a detailed 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 either through referral or through WIOA resources. Boards are required to establish policies and procedures for the delivery of these elements in their respective local areas.

The State's field services teams monitor local area implementation practices, on a quarterly basis, utilizing North Carolina's management information system, NCWorks Online, in addition to using face-to-face interviews using a comprehensive monitoring tool, to ensure programs are available to eligible youth.

- (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).**

North Carolina Local Workforce Development Boards are to use the following definitions when determining youth eligibility. In North Carolina, “requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment” is defined as all youth, including youth with a disability, who meet the criteria in either 1 or 2 below:

- In- School Youth and has:
  - poor attendance patterns in an educational program during the last 12 calendar months; or
  - been expelled from school within the last 12 calendar months; or
  - been suspended from school at least within the last 12 calendar months; or
  - below average grades; or
  - 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
  - a currently incarcerated parent(s)/guardian.
- Out-of-School Youth and has:
  - dropped out of a post-secondary educational program during the past 12 calendar months; or
  - Has a poor work history, to include no work history, or has been fired from a job in the last 6 calendar months; or
  - 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
  - currently incarcerated parent(s)/guardian.

Furthermore, North Carolina understands and provides guidance that in each local area, not more than 5% of the In-school Youth assisted may be made eligible using WIOA Section 129(a)(1)(C)(iv)(VII) as follows: (VII) An individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure or hold employment.

The 5% “Limitation” is calculated based on all In-School Youth served in the WIOA local youth program in a given Program Year. For example, if you serve a total of 40 In-School Youth, only 2 may be eligible using clause (VII) “requires additional assistance” ( $40 \times .05 = 2$ ).

- (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.**

North Carolina has the following law for attending school:

§ 115C-378. Children required to attend.

Every parent, guardian or other person in this State having charge or control of a child between the ages of seven and 16 years shall cause such child to attend school continuously for a period equal to the time which

the public school to which the child is assigned shall be in session. Every parent, guardian, or other person in this State having charge or control of a child under age seven who is enrolled in a public school in grades kindergarten through two shall also cause such child to attend school continuously for a period equal to the time which the public school to which the child is assigned shall be in session unless the child has withdrawn from school.

In North Carolina, schools also include home schooling, charter schools, alternative schools and private schools.

While the definitions above address secondary school attendance policies, North Carolina continues to focus its expanded scope beyond secondary education. As it relates to the definitions of WIOA Youth Attending and Not Attending School, North Carolina does consider attending school to be beyond and in addition to the scope of secondary education. Therefore, individuals enrolled in or attending colleges, universities (private or public), or other credential or degree skills training programs are to be considered Youth Attending school or In-School Youth for WIOA purposes except as where mentioned otherwise by WIOA.

However, North Carolina will following the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking clause, 681.230, for purposes of WIOA, the Department does not consider providers of Adult Education under title II of WIOA, YouthBuild programs, and Job Corps programs to be schools. Therefore, WIOA youth programs may consider a youth to be out-of-school youth for purposes of WIOA youth program eligibility if they are attending Adult Education provided under title II of WIOA, YouthBuild, or Job Corps, until otherwise notified by USDOL.

#### **(6) Definition of Basic Skills Deficient**

As included in WIOA Section 3(5)(B):

- (5) *BASIC SKILLS DEFICIENT.*—*The term “basic skills deficient” means, with respect to an individual—*
- (A) *who is a youth, that the individual has English reading, writing, or computing skills at or below the 8<sup>th</sup> grade level on a generally accepted standardized test; or*
  - (B) *who is a youth or adult, that the individual is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English, at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual’s family, or in society.*

North Carolina 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**

Not applicable to North Carolina

#### **(e) Waiver Requests (Optional)**

**States wanting to request waivers as part of their title I-B Operational Plan must include a waiver plan that includes the following information for each waiver requested:**

- (1) **Identifies the statutory or regulatory requirements for which a waiver is requested and the goals that the State or local area, as appropriate, intends to achieve as a result of the waiver and how those goals relate to the Unified or Combined State Plan;**

The North Carolina Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) is seeking a waiver from the requirements outlined in the WIOA at Sections 116 and 122, and at 20 CFR 677.230 and 20 CFR 680.400 thru 680.530, which require the collection and reporting of performance related data on all students participating in training programs listed on the State's Eligible Training Providers List (ETPL).

Under WIOA Section 116(d)(4)(A) and 20 CFR 677.230(a)(5), Eligible Training Providers must report performance data with respect to all individuals engaging in a program of study (or the equivalent). While DWS recognizes the value and importance of monitoring provider performance, requiring ETPs to produce data on all individuals instead of just WIOA-funded participants places an undue burden on ETPs to collect, enter, and report excessive data. This is especially burdensome when ETPs have many students of whom only a small percentage are WIOA participants. The US Departments of Labor (DOL) and Education acknowledge this burden in their response to comments regarding 20 CFR 677.230 in the preamble of the WIOA Final Rule by stating, "The Departments are cognizant of the reporting burden the ETP performance report places on ETPs and do not want to place additional burden on these entities," however, there was no change to the regulatory text.

Further, ETPs and DWS are concerned that providing data on all individuals engaging in a program of study (or the equivalent) instead of WIOA-funded participants only may conflict with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which protects the privacy of student education records. Generally, schools must have written permission from the parent or eligible student to release any information from a student's education record (34 CFR 99.30). Releasing student information on individuals who are not workforce system participants without their explicit consent may be in violation of federal law and compromise their personally identifiable information (PII). Additionally, requiring ETPs to provide data on all individuals instead of WIOA-funded participants may dissuade the institution from participating as a WIOA program provider, thereby significantly limiting consumer choice.

Under this waiver, ETPs will continue to collect and report performance data for all WIOA-funded participants in accordance with WIOA Section 116(d)(4)(A) and as specified at 20 CFR 677.230.

**(2) Describes the actions that the State or local area, as appropriate, has undertaken to remove State or local statutory or regulatory barriers;**

There are no state or local statutory or regulatory barriers to implementing the requested waiver. North Carolina regulations and policy statements are in compliance with current federal law.

**(3) The goals of the waiver and the expected programmatic outcomes if the request is granted;**

**• Ease undue reporting burden on ETPs**

Reporting performance data on all individuals engaging in a program of study (or the equivalent) consumes considerable time and expense. Reducing ETPs' reporting requirements to include only WIOA-funded participants would save considerable time and expense to allow ETPs to focus on education and training outcomes while still providing the required data on WIOA-funded participants.

**• Ensure protection of non-WIOA participants' PII**

Not reporting data for individuals who are not WIOA participants would reduce ETPs' liability for potential breach of those individuals' PII.

**• Programmatic Outcomes**

Reduction of the reporting burden on ETPs allows them to focus more time and resources on producing successful outcomes for WIOA-funded participants as well as for their non-WIOA students.

In addition, the waiver will provide the following:

- More available and varied training offerings for individuals utilizing ITAs via the public workforce system (greater customer choice).
- More training providers can lead to lower cost options.
- Greater utilization of ETPL by individuals pursuing training via ITAs.
- Stronger partnerships and relationships between training providers and the public workforce system.
- Enhanced ability of local boards to respond quickly and efficiently to immediate local job seeker and employer needs.

**(4) Describes how the waiver will align with the Department’s policy priorities, such as:**

- (A) supporting employer engagement;**
- (B) connecting education and training strategies;**
- (C) supporting work-based learning;**
- (D) improving job and career results, and**
- (E) other guidance issued by the Department.**

This waiver aligns with DOL’s policy priorities in that it connects education and training strategies by reducing the reporting burden on ETPs, thus allowing them to focus more time and resources on producing successful outcomes for WIOA-funded participants; and further protects the privacy rights of ETPs’ students who are not WIOA participants.

**(5) Describes the individuals affected by the waiver, including how the waiver will impact services for disadvantaged populations or individuals with multiple barriers to employment.**

This waiver is intended to reduce the reporting burden on ETPs while still requiring them to report all required performance data for all WIOA-funded participants.

Through this waiver, ETPs will be more willing to submit data on their WIOA-funded students and to remain in the ETP program, thus allowing the North Carolina workforce system to continue delivering essential training services that meet the needs of employers, job seekers, and workers.

**(6) Describes the processes used to:**

- (A) Monitor the progress in implementing the waiver;**

The Division of Workforce Solutions (DWS) will continue to collect data from ETPs on their WIOA-funded students and to submit that data via DWS’ annual report to DOL.

- (B) Provide notice to any local board affected by the waiver;**

Concurrent with the submission of this waiver request, the state will notify all 23 local Workforce Development Board directors of the state’s intent of this request. Upon approval of the waiver, North Carolina will issue a Policy Statement notifying all local Workforce Development Boards that this practice will be implemented effective July 1, 2018.

- (C) Provide any local board affected by the waiver an opportunity to comment on the request;**

Local Workforce Development Boards will be able to contact the Division of Workforce Solutions prior to submission of the State Unified WIOA Plan modification to discuss and have input on the waiver request. All local boards will also have access to the draft Unified Plan and opportunity to comment during the public review and comment period.

- (D) Ensure meaningful public comment, including comment by business and organized labor, on the waiver;**

This waiver request will be included in the Unified Plan submission and subject to public comment within Plan guidelines and the WIOA requirements.

- (E) Collect and report information about waiver outcomes in the State's WIOA Annual Report.**

North Carolina will collect and report information about waiver outcomes in the State's WIOA Annual Report.

- (7) The Secretary may require that States provide the most recent data available about the outcomes of the existing waiver in cases where the State seeks renewal of a previously approve waiver.**

**Outcomes of Existing Waivers: Not applicable.**

**Title I-B Assurances**

<b>The State Plan must include assurances that:</b>	
1.	The State has implemented a policy to ensure Adult program funds provide a priority in the delivery of career and training services to individuals who are low income, public assistance recipients or basic skills deficient;
2.	The State has implemented a policy to ensure local areas have a process in place for referring veterans with significant barriers to employment to career services provided by the JVSG program's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist;
3.	The State established a written policy and procedure that set forth criteria to be used by chief elected officials for the appointment of local workforce investment board members;
4.	The State established written policy and procedures to ensure local workforce investment boards are certified by the governor every two years in accordance with WIOA section 107(c)(2);
5.	Where an alternative entity takes the place of a State Board, the State has written policy and procedures to ensure the alternative entity meets the definition under WIOA section 101(e) and the legal requirements for membership;
6.	The State established a written policy and procedure for how the individuals and entities represented on the State Workforce Development Board help to determine the methods and factors of distribution, and how the State consults with chief elected officials in local areas throughout the State in determining the distributions;
7.	The State will not use funds received under WIOA Title I to assist, promote, or deter union organizing in accordance with WIOA section 181(b)(7);
8.	The State distributes adult and youth funds received under WIOA equitably throughout the State, and no local area suffers significant shifts in funding from year-to-year during the period covered by this plan;
9.	If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I;
10.	The State agrees to report on the impact and outcomes of its approved waivers in its WIOA Annual Report.
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);

## **Wagner-Pevser Act Program**

### **(a) Employment Service Professional Staff Development**

- (1) 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.**
- (2) 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.**

DWS will utilize professional development activities for Employment Service staff using the NCWorks Training Center whose primary mission is to provide high-quality, affordable, easily accessible training and professional development services for North Carolina's workforce system.

The NCWorks Training Center achieves its mission by providing a variety of training options tailored to meet the dynamic needs of the Division of Workforce Solutions, NCWorks Career Center staff, the state's 23 local Workforce Development Boards and staff of partner agencies. These efforts and services help ensure all staff and partners are well-trained with current skills and knowledge relevant to workforce trends. This is accomplished through workshops by professional, peer and in-house trainers in both face-to-face sessions and online webinars and tutorials. The NCWorks Training Center also provides a vast list of supportive services including: meeting and conference preparation, and planning and other customized event services as requested.

The NCWorks Training Center is located in a self-contained facility and boasts two well-equipped classrooms. A recent addition of 24 laptop computers has allowed either room to function as a computer lab, affording more versatility for students and visitors of the Center. The NCWorks Training Center team is comprised of five diverse and highly skilled staff members who continually strive to stay current on workforce trends and issues, at the state and national levels, and to use this knowledge to design, coordinate, plan, and facilitate training.

Records of these events are retained and managed through the Training Registration and Information Network (TRAIN). This comprehensive system is managed by Training Center and Division staff and collects and retains client records, maintains data for easy reporting, stores student transcripts, and manages event and training registration.

The NCWorks Training Center was readily available with logistical planning of events, registration, data collection, supportive services, and training delivery and successfully increased and improved its online presence and accessibility of training through 79 live and recorded webinars on a variety of on demand topics. The NCWorks Training Center continues to provide workforce development professionals a globally recognized credentialing opportunity through the Career Development Facilitator (CDF) course. This 120-hour course uses the National Career Development Association's curriculum and standardizes the knowledge and experience of workforce development professionals and others in career development services. The instructional format blends traditional classroom, web-based distance learning, and independent project completion. This course provides a unique opportunity for workforce professionals from varied perspectives of the career field to network, share ideas and resources, and develop new partnerships to benefit the public.

Each year, the NCWorks Training Center staff host the *NCWorks Partnership Conference*. This event offers opportunities for attendees to participate in more than 65 workshops provided by professional trainers from around the country and peers from around the state. Attendees included frontline staff of NCWorks Career Centers, Workforce Board Directors and staff, private sector business representatives, staff and management of government agencies, and non-profit organizations.

DWS also used the train-the-trainer model with ten Regional Representatives across the state who are subject matter experts in Employment Service and Unemployment Insurance policy. As appropriate, training is developed and distributed to NCWorks Career Center staff in a manner that is efficient and consistent across the state.

The Division of Workforce Solutions and the Division of Employment Security continue to collaborate on ways to provide significant assistance to individuals requesting help in filing for unemployment insurance compensation. State office staff from both Divisions meet quarterly to discuss unemployment insurance policy, keep abreast of program changes and discuss concerns. Changes or corrections to unemployment insurance procedures 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.ncesc.com](http://www.ncesc.com)) or by calling the Customer Call Center (1-888-737-0259). Individuals are able to access the computers and telephones in the NCWorks Career Resource Center, with or without assistance from NCWorks Career Center staff, to file a claim.

Guidance and information is provided using the “Getting Answers About Unemployment Insurance” form which includes information such as:

- How to File a Claim
- Where to call concerning claim questions
- Filing a Weekly Certification
- What to do if my weekly payment does not arrive
- What to do if my debit card does not arrive or is lost
- Where to call if I have questions regarding my appeal
- What to do if I am notified of an overpayment on my claim

- (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. Center staff are well versed in UI and can answer general questions about the program and the level of benefits available to recipients in North Carolina. 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.

- (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 report for their reemployment appointment. Each claimant is notified by mail of a specific mandatory reemployment appointment and to report to their nearest NCWorks Career Center. During this appointment claimants receive an orientation of employment services to provide an awareness of services offered. This is essential in allowing the claimant to take advantage of services he/she views as beneficial. Labor exchange services are also extended to claimants through the mandatory registration in NCWorks Online. This ensures that claimants are registered for work. Through the job matching system, assistance is

provided to find employment. Employers registered in NCWorks Online have access to the claimants resume and qualifications.

During the reemployment visit, the NCWorks Career Center staff determines if claimants are meeting the work test requirements. The requirements include: 1) the claimant is out of work due to no fault of their own; 2) the claimant has not returned to work; and 3) the claimant is able, available and actively seeking employment. If appropriate during this visit, staff discuss job referrals, Job Development Contacts (JDCs), referrals to workshops (e.g. resume writing, job seeking skills, keeping a job, etc.) and look for opportunities to make referrals for applicable training programs.

- (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:**
- (1) **Coordination of and provision of labor exchange services for UI claimants as required by the Wagner-Peyser Act;**
  - (2) **Registration of UI claimants with the State’s employment service if required by State law;**
  - (3) **Administration of the work test for the State unemployment compensation system, including making eligibility assessments (for referral to UI adjudication, if needed), and providing job finding and placement services for UI claimants; and**
  - (4) **Provision of referrals to and application assistance for training and education programs and resources.**

The Division of Workforce Solutions 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 in NCWorks Career Centers meet face-to-face 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.

- (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—**
- (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.**
    - (A) **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.**

1. The following are North Carolina’s five most labor intensive crops:  
Tobacco Harvest (July, Aug., Sept., Oct.) -Statewide  
  
Sweet Potato Harvest (Aug., Sept., Oct., Nov.) – Northeast, Southeast, Piedmont  
  
Blueberry Harvest (May, June, July) – Southeast

Pickle Cucumber Harvest (June, July, Sept., Oct.) – Northeast, Southeast  
Christmas Tree Harvest (Nov., Dec.) - Western

2. North Carolina is a farm labor demand state primarily for the period from April through November. Staff in NCWorks Career Centers are committed to serving the agricultural industry in the state by recruiting North Carolinians for agricultural job openings, with the goal of full utilization of all local and intrastate (within North Carolina) workers whom desire agricultural employment. As needed, interstate or migrant farm workers and H-2A temporary foreign guest workers are brought in using the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) to supplement the existing workforce in agriculture.
3. Local seasonal and year round farm workers are permanent customers with whom Division of Workforce Solutions staff serve throughout the year. Migrant and H-2A workers will be in North Carolina in varying numbers much of the year, primarily for harvest operations. Additionally, migrant and H-2A workers are brought in to supplement local workers in transplanting operations. H-2A workers should comprise a larger percentage of the agricultural workforce during the next four years due to an increased number of Farm Labor Contractors (FLC's) using the program.

- (B) 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).**

Throughout North Carolina MSFWs generally live in rural isolated areas of the state. They have a number of barriers to employment to include transportation, childcare, limited English speaking abilities, limited education, and job training limitations. All of these barriers are major reasons for their lack of economic mobility. The State's estimated 100,000 farm workers during peak harvest season reveals that approximately 95% are of Hispanic/Latino origin, primarily from Mexico, and many are primarily monolingual in Spanish.

- (2) Outreach Activities. 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:**

- (A) Contacting farmworkers who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by the employment service offices.**

Outreach will be conducted primarily through personal contact. State laws and ETA policy on right of access will be adhered to in making contacts. Outreach workers, as well as other agricultural services staff, will visit living areas, work sites, and local labor centers to explain the full range of services provided by NCWorks Career Centers and other partner agencies. Unemployed and underemployed farmworkers will be advised of agricultural and non-agricultural job opportunities. Outreach workers will meet migrant crews upon arrival in the area to prepare crew manifests and to escort them to assigned camps. Outreach workers will also provide information on and refer MSFWs to supportive services, as well as assist in securing aid such as food stamps, clothing, blankets, health supplies, and migrant shelter when needed.

All media, including Hispanic radio, TV, and newspapers, will be utilized, as funds allow, to ensure positive recruitment of agricultural workers and to ensure enhanced outreach services. Pamphlets will be distributed in Spanish and English at churches and other public gathering places.

- (B) 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.**

In compliance with Federal Regulations 20 CFR 653.107, 653.113, 655 Subpart B and 658 Subpart B, training for outreach worker activities will be provided by the following Wagner-Peyser funded staff: Agricultural Field Supervisors, Ag. Employment Consultants, and the State Monitor Advocate. Training will consist of basic orientation to the full range of employment services, Unemployment Insurance (UI) program, application and order-taking, recruitment and referral procedures, complaint processing procedures, recognition of apparent violations, farm worker's rights, supportive services, coordination of outreach efforts with other community-based organizations, completion of outreach logs and reports, and MSFW outreach contacts. Outreach staff will also receive training in computer usage so that they will be able to access NCWorks Online automated services via desktop or notebook computers. The Monitor Advocate will perform a general review of the training provided, with special emphasis on the portion of the training that addresses processing complaints and apparent violations.

- (C) Increasing outreach worker training and awareness across core programs including the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program and the training on identification of UI eligibility issues.**

As referenced above, outreach workers will receive training concerning all programs that could benefit the MSFW.

- (D) Providing State merit staff outreach workers professional development activities to ensure they are able to provide high quality services to both jobseekers and employers.**

All state merit outreach staff will be provided access to necessary information from a variety of sources of professional development, including trainings, conferences, webinars, etc.

- (E) Coordinating outreach efforts with NFJP grantees as well as with public and private community service agencies and MSFW groups.**

As a partner in the state's NCWorks Career Center system, Telamon Corporation, the National Farmworkers Jobs Program (NFJP) operator, provides/offers basic core services to the greater population and a wide variety of education and job training programs that are developed for migrant and seasonal farmworkers, adults and youth according to their needs, interests and experience. Telamon Corporation provides WIOA employment and training services to eligible migrant and seasonal farmworkers, adults and youth. All Telamon staff are co-located in the NCWorks Career Centers in the service areas. This collaboration ensures the universal access for farmworkers to the workforce system. Being a partner with Telamon allows local NCWorks Career Centers, including all other local partnering service providers, the opportunities for enhancing core services of recruitment, referrals, and job placements. Equally important; the bilingual English/Spanish speaking abilities and expertise of full time co-located Telamon staff in seven NCWorks Career Center locations is essential to providing an array of intensive services.

Agricultural Employment Consultants (AECs) work with community-based organizations and other service providers who can help MSFWs obtain supportive services such as classes in English as a second language, school programs for children, etc. AECs are encouraged to attend area migrant council meetings and where a council with other service providers does not exist, attempt to create one.

**(3) Services provided to farmworkers and agricultural employers through the one-stop delivery system. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for:**

**(A) Providing the full range of employment and training services to the agricultural community, both farmworkers and agricultural employers, through the one-stop delivery system. This includes:**

**(i). How career and training services required under WIOA Title I will be provided to MSFWs through the one-stop centers;**

All NCWorks Career Centers provide core, intensive and training services. Staff will determine the service needs of the MSFW customers and either provide those services or direct these customers to staff who can provide the needed services. Bilingual English/Spanish speaking staff within NCWorks Career Centers are key to successfully servicing North Carolina's increasing numbers of Hispanic/Latino job seekers, farmworkers, and employers who depend increasingly on a diverse workforce. The Division of Workforce Solutions has 43 permanent employees who speak Spanish fluently. These employees are strategically located to serve all NCWorks Career Centers, especially those offices that have been designated by the U.S. Department of Labor as significant in serving Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker (MSFW) customers.

**(ii). How the State serves agricultural employers and how it intends to improve such services.**

Agricultural employers who are expected to utilize MSFWs will be identified through coordination with various providers of workforce development services, Agricultural Soil Conservation Service offices, Agricultural Extension Service offices, the North Carolina Farm Bureau, and various growers' associations. Services to these employers will be marketed by performing the following activities: (a) approximately 5,000 employer visits, (b) promotional telephone contacts, and (c) staff participation in grower's meetings and training seminars. Staff will continue to organize Farm Labor Contractor Workshops in association with the U. S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division and the North Carolina Department of Labor to educate, train and assist Farm Labor Contractors on compliance with various state and federal regulations.

**(B) Marketing the employment service complaint system to farmworkers and other farmworker advocacy groups.**

As discussed in Question (1)(B), the training of outreach workers includes an understanding of the state's employment service complaint system. This knowledge is shared freely with the MSFWs.

**(C) Marketing the Agricultural Recruitment System to agricultural employers and how it intends to improve such publicity.**

Agricultural Employment Consultants and temporary Agricultural Outreach Specialists are strategically assigned to NCWorks Career Centers for the purpose of providing labor exchange services to agricultural employers. Collectively, this staff reaches out to agricultural employers and workers in rural areas throughout North Carolina, assisting employers in their pursuit of agricultural workers and helping workers in their search for jobs. Annual training on the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) ensure that staff will continue to promote the ARS to employers and utilize the clearance order system.

**(4) Other Requirements.**

- (A) Collaboration. Describe any collaborative agreements the state workforce agency (SWA) has with other MSFW service providers including NFJP grantees and other service providers. Describe how the SWA intends to build upon/increase collaboration with existing partners and in establishing new partners over the next four years (including any approximate timelines for establishing agreements or building upon existing agreements).**

The annual Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions and Telamon Corporation has been executed for 2015-2016. Additionally, for several years a Cooperative Outreach Services Agreement has been in place between these two entities to co-fund six MSFW temporary outreach staff during the primary growing season. The use of these bi-lingual English/Spanish speaking staff has been a very successful collaboration.

The Division of Workforce Solutions continues to expand relationships with other groups that provide services to MSFWs.

- (B) Review and Public Comment. In developing the AOP, the SWA must solicit information and suggestions from NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other interested organizations. In addition, at least 45 calendar days before submitting its final AOP, the SWA must provide a proposed plan to NFJP grantees, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other organizations expressing an interest and allow at least 30 days for review and comment. The SWA must: 1) Consider any comments received in formulating its final proposed AOP; 2) Inform all commenting parties in writing whether their comments have been incorporated and, if not, the reasons therefore; and 3) Transmit the comments and recommendations received and its responses with the submission of the AOP.**

- i.** The AOP must include a statement confirming NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations and other interested employer organizations have been given an opportunity to comment on the AOP. Include the list of organizations from which information and suggestions were solicited, any comments received, and responses to those comments.

Comments, suggestions, and feedback on the draft state Unified Plan was solicited from the following organizations:

Telamon Corporation, N.C. Department of Labor Agricultural Safety and Health Bureau, N.C. Migrant Education, Farm Bureau Federation of N.C., N.C. Rural Economic Development Center, Governor's Council for Hispanic/Latino Affairs, N.C. Cooperative Extension Services, Legal Services of N.C., Farmworker Unit Farmworker Advocacy Network (FAN), N.C. Agromedicine Institute, U.S. Department of Labor - Wage and Hour Division, N.C. Justice Center, Elpueblo, Down East Partnership, Wayne County Extension Farmworkers Health and Safety Education, Rural Advancement Foundation, NC FIELD, AFL-CIO Farm Labor Organizing Committee, and N.C. Council of Churches.

No comments were received on the Agricultural Outreach Plan.

- (C) Data Assessment. Review the previous four years Wagner-Peyser data reports on performance. Note whether the State has been meeting its goals to provide MSFWs quantitatively proportionate services as compared to non-MSFWs. If it has not met these goals, explain why the State believes**

**such goals were not met and how the State intends to improve its provision of services in order to meet such goals.**

Year after year, North Carolina continues to meet the MSFW Equity Performance Standards. All five of the Equity Service Indicators of Compliance and all seven of the Minimum Service Indicators, required by the U.S. Department of Labor at 20 CFR 653.109, are met annually in the Migrant Indicators of Compliance statewide report. The agency is fully committed to providing high quality customer service to employers, MSFW applicants, partners, and the agricultural community to help meet the goals of this plan.

- (D) Assessment of progress. The plan must include an explanation of what was achieved based on the previous AOP, what was not achieved and an explanation as to why the State believes the goals were not achieved, and how the State intends to remedy the gaps of achievement in the coming year.**

While all goals from the previous Agricultural Outreach Plan were met, the Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions is continuously seeking ways to improve services and expand partnerships. Excellent customer service to both the MSFW and employer groups is extremely important and will always be the focus of the division's agricultural activities.

- (E) State Monitor Advocate. The plan must contain a statement confirming the State Monitor Advocate has reviewed and approved the AOP.**

The State Monitor Advocate has reviewed and approved the AOP and has offered valuable suggestions, which will be incorporated into the final AOP.

**Wagner-Peyser Assurances**

<b>The State Plan must include assurances that:</b>	
1.	The Wagner-Peyser Employment Service is co-located with one-stop centers or a plan and timeline has been developed to comply with this requirement within a reasonable amount of time. (sec 121(e)(3));
2.	The State agency is complying with the requirements under 20 CFR 653.111 (State agency staffing requirements) if the State has significant MSFW one-stop centers;
3.	If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I; and
4.	State agency merit-based public employees provide Wagner-Peyser Act-funded labor exchange activities in accordance with Department of Labor regulations.

## **Adult Basic Education and Literacy Programs**

### **(a) Alignment of Content Standards**

**Describe how the eligible agency will, by July 1, 2016, align its content standards for adult education with State-adopted challenging academic content standards, as adopted under section 1111(b)(1) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (20 U.S.C. 6311(b)(1)).**

The North Carolina Community College System College and Career Readiness Adult Education Standards were originally aligned to the N.C. Department of Public Instruction's state adopted content standards. The process involved developing and field testing by adult educators from across the state during 2007 to 2010. With the introduction of the College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) in April 2013, the NCCCS College and Career Readiness Adult Education Standards were reviewed and aligned to reflect these new standards. The fundamental goal of NC standards is to provide a coherent approach to instruction and assessment so that all learners have equal opportunity to reach their academic and career goals. These standards ensure instruction across all NC providers meet the academic rigor and provide consistent content to prepare students to transition to postsecondary education, occupational training programs, and or employment. The standards provide a clear outline of what a learner needs to be able to do within a specific content area. The process of developing these standards was highly participatory and involved input from many adult educators across the state.

The standards project began in 2007 with statewide implementation in 2011. The Appalachian State University Adult Basic Skills Professional Development Project (ABSPD) facilitated the development.

Phase 1, 2007: Teams of adult educators met to write the first draft of the reading and writing content standards and then continued to provide review, feedback, and comments for improvement. These teams consulted a variety of resources from other states and the standards were informed by those states' existing standards. The writing teams included local and state Adult Basic Skills educators from a variety of disciplines.

Phase 2, 2008-2009: Forums were held at three sites across the state for review and feedback. Each reviewer was given review forms and a draft copy of the standards document so that adult educators from their program could also complete reviews and mail them to ABSPD. The edits and suggestions received during this phase were integrated into a third draft. Additionally, teams of adult educators met to write the first draft of the mathematics and technology content standards. These team members continued to provide review, feedback and comments for improvement. In 2009, ABS educators reviewed the mathematics and technology content standards and provided feedback via an online survey.

Phase 3, 2010: Development of teaching activities to correspond to each benchmark was begun in January 2010. All Adult Basic Skills program and Community—based Literacy organization directors were invited to send a Certified Resource Specialist to Advance Institute in May to begin the piloting process for the NC ABE Reading and Writing Content Standards. The Certified Resource Specialists developed additional real—life applications and an implementation plan for their programs. Professional development for trainers was held in Fall 2010. Revisions were made and online and face-to-face training was designed.

Phase 4, 2011: Statewide implementation training began across the state. Instructor training continues through the Applying Content Standards: GPS for Success training offered by the North Carolina Community College System College and Career Readiness Department and the Adult Basic Skills Professional Development Project at Appalachian State University.

Phase 5, 2013-2014: The standards were revised and given a new name, North Carolina Community College System Adult Education Standards. The standards are now aligned with College and Career Readiness Standards for Adult Education released by the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE), US Department of Education in April 2013. The North Carolina Adult Education Content Standards document now includes standards for grade level equivalencies from beginning level through adult secondary education. The standards are housed on the Adult Basic Skills Professional Development (ABSPD) website: <http://www.abspd.appstate.edu>. Professional development on how to use the standards is offered through a training, Applying Content Standards: GPS for Success.

Phase 6, 2016-2020: NC will focus on providing training and professional development opportunities to faculty on how to align curriculum to content standards. New training will be developed for contextualized instruction aligned to content standards.

### English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS)

In 2016, to address English language learners needs, OCTAE disseminated the English Language Proficiency Standards for Adult Education (ELP). The ELP standards support the development of academic language as key for preparing adults learning English for college and careers. They outline the language demands needed to access or meet the CCR standards. In summary, these standards outline the need and suggest a process for using the standards to develop English language skills needed to build knowledge across academic areas. North Carolina will develop a series of professional development for faculty to understand how the standards are organized and how to use them to meet needs of English language learners. North Carolina has aligned its content standards for adult education with N.C. Department of Public Instructions' state-adopted content standards. The North Carolina Community College System College and Career Readiness Adult Education Standards were originally developed, refined, and field tested by adult educators from across the state during 2007 to 2010.

**(b) Local Adult Education and Literacy Activities**

**Describe how the State will, using the considerations specified in section**

**231(e) of WIOA, fund each eligible provider to establish or operate programs that provide any of the following adult education and literacy activities identified in section 203 of WIOA, including programs that provide such activities concurrently. The Unified State Plan must include at a minimum the scope, content, and organization of these local activities.**

Adult education; Literacy; Workplace adult education and literacy activities; Family literacy activities; English language acquisition activities; Integrated English literacy and civics education; Workforce preparation activities; or Integrated education and training that—

1. Provides adult education and literacy activities, concurrently and contextually with both, workforce preparation activities, and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster, and
2. Is for the purpose of educational and career advancement.

North Carolina will provide funding to eligible providers to offer the following:

Adult education is an academic instruction and education services below the post-secondary level that increase the an individual 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) is a program of instruction assist immigrants and other individuals who are English language learners in— (A) improving their— (i) reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension skills in English; and (ii) mathematics skills; and (B) acquiring an understanding of the American system of Government, individual freedom, and the responsibilities of citizenship.

Workplace Adult Education and Literacy Activities are offered in collaboration with an employer or employee organization at a workplace or an off-site location that are designed to provide adult education and literacy activities to improve the productivity of the workforce.

Family Literacy programs provide activities that are of sufficient intensity and quality, to make sustainable improvements in the economic prospects for a family and that better enable parents or family members to support their children’s learning needs, and that integrate all of the following activities: (a) Parent or family adult education and literacy activities that lead to readiness for postsecondary education or training, career advancement, and economic self-sufficiency; (b) Interactive literacy activities between parents or family members and their children; (c) Training for parents or family members regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full partners in the education of their children; and (d) An age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences.

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, means a 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.

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.

NCCCS will allocate AEFLA funds for multiyear awards for three years with a re-application process for continued funding in year two and three for grantees in have met the state's negotiated performance outcomes and 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.

Per Section 231(e) of WIOA, the application will be designed to ensure programs address and describe how they will meet the required 13 considerations 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.

## SPECIAL RULE

Each eligible agency awarding a grant or contract under this section shall not use any funds made available under this title for adult education and literacy activities for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are under the age of 16 and are enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under State law, except that such agency may use such funds for such purpose if such programs, services, or activities are related to family literacy activities. In providing family literacy activities under this title, an eligible provider shall attempt to coordinate with programs and services that are not assisted under this title prior to using funds for adult education and literacy activities under this title for activities other than activities for eligible individuals.

(c) **Corrections Education**

**Describe how the State will establish and operate programs under section 225 of WIOA for corrections education and education of other institutionalized individuals, including how it will fund, in accordance with the requirements of title II subtitle C, any of the following academic programs for:**

**Adult education and literacy activities;**

**Special education, as determined by the eligible agency;**

**Secondary school credit;**

**Integrated education and training;**

**Career pathways;**

**Concurrent enrollment;**

**Peer tutoring; and**

**Transition to re-entry initiatives and other post release services with the goal of reducing recidivism.**

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.

Describe how the State will establish and operate programs under section 225 of WIOA for corrections education and education of other institutionalized individuals, including how it will fund, in accordance with the requirements of Title II, subtitle C, any of the following academic programs for: a. Adult education and literacy activities; b. Special education, as determined by the eligible agency; c. Secondary school credit; d. Integrated education and training; e. Career pathways; f. Concurrent enrollment; g. Peer tutoring; and h. Transition to re-entry initiatives and other post release services with the goal of reducing recidivism.

The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) will use no more than 20 percent of the 82.5 percent of the state grant allotment to fund local programs for activities listed under Section 225 of WIOA. NCCCS will allocate AEFLA funds for multiyear awards for three years with a reapplication process for continued funding in year two and three for grantees 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.

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. NCCCS will fund: 1. Adult education and literacy activities (ABE, ASE, ELA.), 2. Integrated

education and training. 3. Concurrent enrollment, 4. Transition to re-entry initiatives and other post release services with the goal of reducing recidivism. NC Community College system will not fund Career Pathways, Peer Tutoring, Special Education, Secondary school credit.

On average, NCDPS admits over 38,000 offenders. Historically, approximately 34% of adults enter a North Carolina prison without 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. NCCCS will 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, to ensure direct and equitable access for all eligible providers. All providers will use the same competitive process and application for sections 231, 225 and 243. The 13 considerations in section 231(e) will be used as evaluative criteria.

**(d) Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Program**

**Describe how the State will establish and operate Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education programs under Section 243 of WIOA, for English language learners who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries.**

Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IEL/CE) is defined as “education services provided to English language learners 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 basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens in the United States. Such services shall include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation, and may include workforce training.” NCCCS provides IEL/CE by requiring programs to provide Civics Education that instructs on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation integrated with literacy and English language instruction. Instruction may also include workforce preparation activities and workforce training. Services must be provided to English language learners including those who are professionals with degrees or credentials in their native countries.

Programs funded under WIOA section 243 will be required to create a program whose purpose is for educational and career advancement and instruction in English Language activities are based on NC Content Standards and contextualized to the identified occupation. Programs must demonstrate that instruction includes: Literacy and English language activities, workforce preparation and occupational training and that services are coordinated to be offered concurrently. Instruction must be contextualized to the identified occupation and with a single set of learning objectives. Programs must provide a program schedule demonstrating coordinated instructional services, sufficient intensity and duration and sample lesson plans to document contextualized instruction. Consideration will be given to: 1. Whether the program has a demonstrated need for English language acquisition programs and civics education programs 2. Whether the program uses credentialed instructors or who or have degrees or coursework in teaching English to Speaker of Other Languages (TESOL) 3. Whether the activities use technology, including distance learning, to increase the amount of quality learning.

NCCCS will 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, to ensure direct and equitable access for all eligible providers. All providers will use the same competitive process and application for sections 231, 225 and 243. The 13 considerations in section 231(e) will be used as evaluative criteria.

**Describe how the State will fund, in accordance with the requirements of title II, subtitle C, an Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program and how the funds will be used for the program.**

NCCCS will 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, to ensure direct and equitable access for all eligible providers. All providers will use the same competitive process and application for sections 231, 225 and 243. The 13 considerations in section 231(e) will be used as evaluative criteria.

(e) **State Leadership**

**Describe how the State will use the funds to carry out the required State Leadership activities under section 223 of WIOA.**

Below is a description of how North Carolina will use the funds to carry out the required State Leadership activities under 223 of WIOA.

Priorities

(A) Provide leadership and guidance in the development of effective program models and procedures (B) Conduct effective monitoring which focuses on continuous improvement and on building capacity through the sharing of best practices (C) Deliver high quality, responsive support to the field through strategic technical support and professional development (D) Furnish accurate, consistent, and timely information, including data reports, in order to maximize provider effectiveness

State leadership funds will be used to provide support and services to providers. Title II funds will continue to support local providers in their provision of adult education and literacy services to low skill individuals in order to strengthen the foundation for their workforce success.

1. Align adult education and literacy activities with other core programs and community partners for consistency of services as part of NCWorks, the state's workforce development network and service approach. Providers will focus their alignment efforts around providing access to educational and transition services for adult learners with low literacy skills so that they may have the necessary foundation for workforce success. State leadership funds will be used to provide technical assistance and professional development activities to providers concerning integrated education and training strategies, workforce preparation activities, transition services, contextualized instruction, transitioning students with disabilities, and targeted services for ELLs. Other alignment activities will include creating an online resource hub for dissemination or research based practices and models for effective program services.

2. Expand the high quality professional development system for instructors to include online cohort based modules that will allow for better access. The professional development priorities have been identified through state-wide program self- assessment, on-site monitoring, and analysis of local plans and performance outcomes. At the state level, a highly qualified, cross- functional staff will carry out and coordinate the professional development activities required to implement the requirements of WIOA and the thirteen considerations. Professional development aimed at improving quality of instruction is provided through a partnership with Appalachian State University's Adult Basic skills Professional Development Department. This partnership provides a research-based platform to provide ongoing professional development for instructional staff. A series of credentials have been developed which provide training specifically in core instructional strategies like contextualizing instruction, using the NC Adult Education Content Standards, and integrating technology into the classroom. Courses leading to a credential are also offered in Adult Secondary Education content areas, English Language Acquisition, and in the essential components of evidence-based reading instruction.

3. Deliver equitable and consistent technical assistance through state level subject area specialists. This technical assistance will include providing current research on evidence-based practices in reading, writing, mathematics, English language acquisition and related instructional strategies related to content, employability skills, integrated education and training, instructional technology, partnership development, and core program alignment. It will be conducted through regional meetings, webinars, and on-site visits. Additionally, best practices will be disseminated through an online resource center and periodic webinar updates highlighting best practices.

4. Monitor and evaluate the quality and improvement of adult education and literacy services for eligible individuals. This process will include data analysis as well as onsite monitoring regarding administrative and instructional best practices as outlined in the thirteen considerations. 5. Expand the implementation of the NC Adult Education Content Standards consistently across all providers. This expansion will be supported through

the provision of a training course on use of the content standards in lesson planning. This training will serve as the foundation for creating an online repository of content standard's lesson plan for reading, writing, and math and for ELL.

**Describe how the State will use the funds to carry out permissible State Leadership Activities under section 223 of WIOA, if applicable.**

*Permissible State Leadership Activities*

1. Develop content and service delivery models for integrated education and training and bridge programming to align with the services of other core partners.
2. Increase learning opportunities through the use of online technology and digital resources for both students and adult education and literacy staff.
3. Create an online resource center to disseminate best practices.

**(f) Assessing Quality**

**Describe how the eligible agency will assess the quality of providers of adult education and literacy activities under title II and take actions to improve such quality, including providing the activities described in section 223(a)(1)(B) of WIOA.**

The North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) will assess the quality of all sub-grant recipients through a variety of continuous program monitoring and oversight activities. In order to empower adult education and family literacy providers to effectively serve individuals and communities, the NCCCS office will develop a Basic Skills Quality Checklist to identify quality indicators, based on evidence-based best practices and the thirteen considerations. This tool will provide the framework to identify strengths and weakness as well as the level and type of support each sub-grant recipient needs from the NCCCS office. To assist in building stronger adult education and family literacy programs in North Carolina, the NCCCS office will conduct ongoing programmatic and data reviews, plus quarterly and annual evaluations with sub-grant recipients. Quality will be evaluated through monitoring visits, performance reports, and on-site program reviews. Additionally, assessment will measure the effectiveness of the state and local providers in achievement of core indicators and levels of student improvement as negotiated with the U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE).

Programs must provide student progress measures obtained from all students who have attended at least 12 hours of instruction. Documented progress of student performance measures must include at a minimum: Literacy skill level improvements in reading, writing, and speaking the English language, problem solving, numeracy, and other literacy skills as measured through Measurable Skills Gains, employment rates in the second and fourth quarter after exit, attainment of secondary school diploma and enrollment in postsecondary education/training or employed within one year after exit, and attaining a post-secondary credential while enrolled or one year after exit.

Additionally, all sub-grant recipients are responsible for maintaining the privacy of the data for learners of all ages who participate in their programs. The NCCCS team will evaluate the overall viability of all sub-grant recipients – both from fiscal and programmatic perspectives. The NCCCS team will also develop and provide technical assistance trainings for programs that struggle to meet goals and objectives. If a sub-grant recipient fails to meet performance goals or other programmatic requirements, the NCCCS office will take specific action to assist the program in improving the quality of the program.

NCCCS will use the following two plans to take action to improve the quality of the adult education and family literacy activities.

1. Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) – A PIP will be required for programs which are identified as low-performing when compared to the State performance on federal or State benchmarks. The PIP will include specific action steps related to performance. NCCCS will provide support and assistance to programs, which may include targeted professional development, face-to-face trainings in specific areas of challenge, and technical assistance visits.

2. Corrective Action Plan (CAP) – A CAP will be implemented with programs that are out of compliance with State and/or federal policies. NCCCS will provide technical assistance throughout the corrective action process, and by the end of a designated timeframe, programs should be able to correct the identified issues and end their respective CAP. As a part of both plans, the NCCCS office will provide ongoing technical assistance, professional development, and other support until the required steps of the plans are completed. The type of technical assistance, professional development, and other support will be based upon the specific area(s) of deficiency or need for the individual program.

Quality Assessment Review Activities through the evaluation and monitoring process, NCCCS will monitor the goals and objectives for achieving measurable skill gains, transitioning into post-secondary programs or training, and/or employment.

The following activities are part of the NCCCS Quality Assessment Review process:

1. Ongoing Desktop Monitoring – Ongoing monitoring will include data validations through the information management system conducted by the Program Quality and Accountability team within the NCCCS team.
2. Quarterly Data Review-Programs will submit quarterly data and these data will be reviewed for progress in meeting federal reporting and performance measures.
3. Annual Performance Review – Programs will submit an annual performance data that will be used to evaluate the effectiveness for the program year as measured by NRS performance measures.
4. On-Site Review-NCCCS will conduct on-site reviews of 25% of sub-grant recipients each year.

Programs determined to be high risk may also receive an on-site review. A data risk assessment will occur annually for each program. An evaluation system will be developed to measure the effectiveness of both the professional development offerings and technical assistance provided by NCCCS. All professional development and technical assistance will be systemically evaluated. An impact analysis of this data will be performed each quarter assessing instructor credential attainment to student measurable skill gain. NCCCS will also examine program data to gauge the impact of professional development and technical assistance conveyed to individual programs. This systematic evaluation will provide a holistic lens through to view the impact of the instructor credentialing system and provider technical assistance.

Certification and Assurances

Ault Basic Education and Literacy Programs

<b>States must provide written and signed certifications that:</b>		
1.	The plan is submitted by the State agency that is eligible to submit the plan;	
2.	The State agency has authority under State law to perform the functions of the State under the program;	
3.	The State legally may carry out each provision of the plan;	
4.	All provisions of the plan are consistent with State law;	
5.	A State officer, specified by title in the certification, has authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the plan;	
6.	The State officer who is submitting the plan, specified by the title in the certification, has authority to submit the plan;	
7.	The agency that is submitting the plan has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan; and	
8.	The plan is the basis for State operation and administration of the program;	
<b>The State Plan must include assurances that:</b>		
1.	The eligible agency will expend funds appropriated to carry out title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) only in a manner consistent with fiscal requirements under section 241(a) of WIOA (regarding supplement and not supplant provisions);	
2.	The eligible agency will ensure that there is at least one eligible provider serving each local area, as defined in section 3(32) of WIOA;	
3.	The eligible agency will not use any funds made available under title II of WIOA for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are not "eligible individuals" within the meaning of section 203(4) of WIOA, unless it is providing programs, services or activities related to family literacy activities, as defined in section 203(9) of WIOA; and	
4.	Using funds made available under title II of WIOA to carry out a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution, the eligible agency will give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program.	

## VI. Program-Specific Requirements for Core State Plan Programs

**The State must address all program-specific requirements in this section for the WIOA core programs regardless of whether the State submits either a Unified or Combined State Plan.**

### **Vocational Rehabilitation**

**The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA:**

- (a) **Input of State Rehabilitation Council**. All agencies, except for those that are independent consumer-controlled commissions, must describe the following:
- (1) **input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council, including input and recommendations on the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, recommendations from the Council's report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other Council reports that may have been developed as part of the Council's functions;**
  - (2) **the Designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; and**
  - (3) **the Designated State unit's explanations for rejecting any of the Council's input or recommendations.**

### **Input and Recommendations from the North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council**

In North Carolina, the VR program is authorized under two separate grants, one for the provision of VR services to the general population of individuals with disabilities, and one for VR services for the blind and visually impaired. These programs are administered by NC DHHS Divisions of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) and Services for the Blind (DSB), with each having its own State Rehabilitation Council (SRC).

### **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

For DVRS, 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. The SRC has facilitated Spring and Fall listening forums in various locations across the state. In recent years, listening forums have been held as follows: March 2016 - Wilson, NC; September 2016 - Fayetteville, NC; March 2017 – Hickory and September 2017 – Greenville, NC. 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. DVRS policy changes or revisions since the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, July 1, 2014 include: Pre-Employment Transition Services Policies and Procedures; the requirement to develop an individualized plan for employment for a VR client within 90 days of eligibility determination,

with certain exceptions; extension of eligibility or IPE development extension documentation requirements; competitive integrated employment closure standards and review processes; medical technologies or consultations including FES devices; hepatitis C treatments; sponsorship of GED testing fees; phase-out of transitional employment services; post-secondary learning support services and rates; moped-related policies; subpoena policy; revised internship policy; consent for release of resume electronically; voter registration; clarification of the request for quote (RFQ) and purchasing process for durable medical equipment and non-medical equipment purchases, and equipment and vehicle repairs; invoice processing and sponsorship of prescription medication; sponsorship of vocational evaluations and community based assessments for work adjustment and supported employment services; client financial need survey requirements; sponsorship of individual placement and supports (IPS) model supported employment; adjustment to the supervisory approval required for case service authorizations of \$500 or less; sponsorship of post-secondary academic training; required verification of client identity and employment eligibility prior to the development of an individualized plan for employment; and revisions to the process for client self-employment evaluation and direction setting.

**Other recommendations DVRS received from the North Carolina State Rehabilitation Council:**

In March, 2017, the SRC developed an updated strategic plan (2017-19) comprised of five 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 five goals are:

- 1) To sustain service capacity of the NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- 2) To ensure individualized services planning is client driven
- 3) To improve marketing, communication and outreach
- 4) To improve the efficiency of the vocational rehabilitation process
- 5) To improve or create transportation options for vocational rehabilitation consumers

Recommendation 1: In support of their strategic plan pertaining to improved marketing, communication, outreach and legislative advocacy to ensure service capacity is sustained, the Council recommended again this year for the Division to prepare for their distribution, customized reports for each NC legislative district featuring the beneficial return on investment that the VR program has on consumers and on the economy of each district within NC. The DVRS Planning and Evaluation unit will continue to support this request, revising the customized reports based on input and also added success stories to provide a human element to the data presented. The reports will be prepared and distributed to NC Legislators during the short session.

Recommendation 2: 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 twice annually collecting input from various communities across the state and to strongly encourage staff attendance at such sessions whenever possible. DVRS will continue to actively support jointly

conducted input sessions twice annually canvassing various communities across the state focusing on how the VR program is addressing consumers' 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 extending the survey to clients in active status and employing a weighted sampling method to maintain costs and better ensure representation across disability types, minority status, age, and gender. The Division supports this recommendation and will adjust its sampling practices, contracts, and purchase orders accordingly.

Recommendation 7: Whereas the Council acknowledges the importance that reliable transportation solutions serve in assisting consumers in preparing for, obtaining, and maintaining employment, the Council recommends the Division to actively explore partnerships focusing on creative transportation solutions that will better meet the needs of all individuals with disabilities within the state. The Division also acknowledges the significance of this need and supports this recommendation. The Division director serves on a council with NC Division of Transportation that is working to address these needs at the systems level; while other means of individualized solutions are also being explored.

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

The SRC for the DSB conducted two focus groups in Winston-Salem NC and in Wilmington, NC. The Council held two public hearings in Raleigh, NC and in Statesville, NC during federal fiscal year 2014 for the collection of information to be used in the development of the federal fiscal year 2015 State Plan. However, these have traditionally been poorly attended and a decision was made to find additional ways to reach blind and visually impaired citizens across the state. The SRC met on Thursday, June 12, 2014, and the Unified State Plan was reviewed and approved by the Council for federal fiscal year 2015. The council also met in March, June, September and December of 2016 & 2017. The meeting on June 16, 2017, at the suggestion of the SRC members, was held at the Industries for the Blind in Asheville and a special focus group question and answer session was held with employees with visual impairment, blindness and deaf-blindness. At their inquiry, information was shared with them regarding DSB VR, ILR and ILS services and how they can access those services. Many of the employees there obtained information regarding how they might access services in the future. There were over 20 persons with visual impairment and blindness at this meeting from the community. Therefore, this has proven to be a good way of reaching those in the community and the SRC stated that they would look for ways like this in the future to reach more people.

The Council asked for clarification to the transition programs that the DSB has with the 13 local education agencies and the services being provided to other transition aged consumers being served by Community Rehabilitation Counselors. Agency response: All 100 counties are being served with transition services, but in some locations, there are specific dedicated Rehabilitation Counselors serving this aged population while in other areas, our community Rehabilitation counselors provide these services. The Council approved the Division's Priorities and Goals for federal fiscal year 2015 without modifications.

The State Rehabilitation Council members conducted two focus groups in Winston-Salem NC and in Wilmington, NC. The Council held two public hearings in Raleigh, NC and in Statesville, NC during federal fiscal year 2014 for the collection of information to be used in the development of the federal fiscal year 2015 State Plan. The State Rehabilitation Council met on Thursday, June 12, 2014, and the State Plan was reviewed and approved by the Council for federal fiscal year 2015.

The Council asked for clarification to the transition programs that DSB has with the 13 local education

agencies and the services being provided to other transition aged consumers being served by Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. The response from DSB is that all 100 counties are being served with transition services, but in some locations, there are specific dedicated DSB Vocational Rehabilitation staff that serve the transition population (Transition Rehabilitation Counselors and Community Employment Specialists) while in other areas, DSB general Vocational Rehabilitation provide these services.

The DSB State Rehabilitation Council approved the DSB VR Program's Priorities and Goals for federal fiscal year 2015 without modifications. DSB finalized their VR program's portion of the Plan, which was submitted and approved.

In 2014-2015, DSB also introduced WIOA to the SRC and reviewed how it would affect programs and services for NC. Some of these changes included the focus on students with disabilities and pre-employment transition services, supported employment for youth and services to those with most significant disabilities, the re-defining of competitive integrated employment and that definition's effects on community rehabilitation centers, strengthening partnerships with the one stop centers and LEAs and more. The SRC agreed that this was a lot of change, but that it is expected to be to the benefit of the clients we serve.

In 2016 and 2017, DSB has been faithful to share with the SRC any general changes secondary to WIOA in policy and procedure and gather their input on how these changes might affect our clients and how they should be implemented. The SRC has reviewed policies regarding: Pre-employment Transition Services, Supported Employment, Competitive Integrated Employment, Transition Services, etc.

**(b) Request for Waiver of Statewideness**

**When requesting a waiver of the statewideness requirement, the designated State unit must identify the types of services to be provided by the program on a non-statewide basis. The waiver request must also include written assurances that:**

- (1) a local public agency will provide the non-Federal share of costs associated with the services to be provided in accordance with the waiver request;**
- (2) the designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and**
- (3) requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.** This attachment will not apply to the North Carolina VR Programs for the program years covered under the State Unified Plan.

**(c) Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System**

**Describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system with respect to:**

- (1) Federal, State, and local agencies and programs;**
- (2) State programs carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;**
- (3) Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture;**
- (4) Noneducational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and**
- (5) State use contracting programs.**

**Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

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 Medical Assistance; Division of Services for Deaf and Hard of Hearing; Office of Long-Term Services and Supports; 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 American Heart Association, and the North Carolina Arthritis Foundation are examples of consumer and advocacy groups for individuals with disabilities with which the Division has maintained agreements to facilitate the maintenance of the highest feasible level of communication and coordination in the joint development and implementation of operational methods including, where applicable:

- Assisting consumers, their families, and advocates in accessing services from DVRS and from the other agencies and entities;
- Referral of individuals who have disabilities and especially those who have severe disabilities to DVRS for services;
- Referral by DVRS to other agencies or entities for the various supportive services and assistance available;
- Determination of the responsibility of each agency or entity in making referrals, in serving individuals jointly, and in identifying resources;
- Provision of educational information regarding the services, including equipment and assistive technology, available and eligibility criteria of the Division and of the other agency or entity;
- Joint training of staff in areas pertaining to services available and procedures of DVRS and the other agency or entity;
- Shared funding DVRS positions and program costs and the co-location of DVRS staff with staff from the other agency or entity where co-location would be effective and feasible;
- Developing means to promote greater awareness and greater utilization of the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- Provision for the sharing of information between agencies as required by law or upon receipt of client permission and with regard to maintaining confidentiality;
- Establishing an evaluation system to determine levels of competency of paraprofessionals such as interpreters for the deaf who wish to serve as vendors for DVRS;
- Enhancing post-secondary training supports to assist in the transition to employment;
- Improving the public image of the employment capabilities of individuals in various disability groups;
- Assessing the effectiveness of the cooperative agreements;
- Jointly promoting improvement in the quality of life through comprehensive approaches to the improved health of consumers jointly served and through services to family members;
- Jointly promoting ethical research practices to develop improved medical and other disability related interventions;
- Promoting systems change through collaborative projects;
- Expanding services and community resources for unserved and underserved groups;
- Promotion of collaboration at the community office level offices between the Division and other

agencies and entities;

- Through joint planning councils, providing joint input from the Division and from other agencies and entities for budgeting, service delivery, and policy changes for block grants, special demonstration projects, and other grants;
- Providing input regarding formulation of vocational services provided by other agencies and entities.

Additionally, DVRS local Vocational Rehabilitation, Independent Living Program and NC Assistive Technology Program staff work with the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) in North Carolina to coordinate services for specific individuals and to address areas of broader systemic impact such as community education/awareness and outreach to various disability groups. The CILs are consumer-controlled, cross-disability, community-based non-residential, private non-profit organizations that provide programs and services for people with all types of disabilities and their families. The goal of CILs is to promote and support opportunities for people with disabilities to fully participate in an integrated community and search for the possibilities to live as they choose. These centers are funded through Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. Information and referral, independent living skills training, advocacy, and peer counseling are the four core services each center provides. In addition to these core services, the centers may provide additional services which are tailored to serve individuals with disabilities in their service area.

The Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) is an independent non-profit council (not an entity within a state agency) that is established under Section 705 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. The majority of its members are individuals with disabilities. The SILC is responsible for jointly developing and endorsing the State Plan for Independent Living in conjunction with the designated state unit (DVRS and 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).

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.

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

DSB has established cooperative and collaborative working relationships with various federal, state and local agencies and organizations in our mission to help blind, visually impaired and deaf-blind citizens of North Carolina receive the most comprehensive and beneficial services and supports available to facilitate their vocational and independent living goals. Many of the agencies and organizations with whom DSB collaborates are carrying out activities under the Statewide Workforce Investment System.

DSB has a cooperative agreement with the DPI (Department of Public Instruction). The agreement with DPI establishes coordination for the provision of educational and transitional services to students with

visual impairments.

DSB has a cooperative agreement with the University of North Carolina System (UNC). DSB partners with UNC's Department of Allied Sciences in support of the university's rehabilitation counseling program. This includes the programs on campuses of UNC-Chapel Hill, Winston-Salem State University, A&T State University, East Carolina University, and North Carolina Central University campuses. The Division provides clinical experiences for students in the program through DSB district offices and the residential rehabilitation facility. DSB and UNC mutually plan and schedule student assignments. The Division provides students training and supervision, mentoring, constructive feedback and formal evaluations. Students are also provided office and work space, use of computers and other office equipment and technology, and exposure to other professions in the field rehabilitation such as, orientation and mobility, low vision, social work and medical eye care. UNC provides DSB staff opportunities to participate in clinical education conferences and meetings. This collaborative relationship also creates potential employment opportunities for students upon the completion of their education.

DSB has informal collaborative relationships with other organizations and consumer and advocacy groups that are not carrying out activities under the Statewide Workforce Investment System such as the Governor Morehead School, NC Association of Blind Students, Governor Morehead School Alumni Association, NC Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, North Carolina Lions Inc., NC Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired and Prevent Blindness NC, 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.

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.

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. As of 2017, DSB does sponsor specific client services through several community rehabilitation programs that provide training services to DSB consumers through contracts with entities such as the Haywood Vocational Services or OE Enterprises for the provision of pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS).

#### **(d) Coordination with Education Officials**

##### **Describe:**

- (1) The designated State unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for**

**employment for the students.**

**(2) Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to:**

- (A) consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services;**
- (B) transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;**
- (C) roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;**
- (D) procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.**

### **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

**(1) The designated State unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students.**

The NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and NC Division of Services for the Blind are currently renewing their state level memorandum of agreement (MOA) with DPI. The revised MOA will reflect the updated 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 will also specify the manner in which Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) will be coordinated and provided within NC schools as well as how students with disabilities, including those who are potentially eligible for VR services, will be identified and served in compliance with federal regulations. The DVRS and DSB Program Specialists for Transition Services compile annual reports for DPI, as requested according to our MOA, summarizing VR activity for the state fiscal year.

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

### ***Plans for Coordination with Education Officials***

DVRS plans to maintain and strengthen its programmatic relationships with school transition services

through its continued active participation by the Division's Transition Program Specialist on the State Capacity Building Team for Transition. This team, including 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 in the Spring of 2016 to focus on the role of the VR Counselor in the IEP process.

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

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

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

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

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

By enhancing and incorporating new programs that promote and support work-based experiences, the Division will continue its commitment to students in pursuit of a high school diploma through the Occupational Course of Study (OCS), a pathway established by the NC Board of Education for students with IEPs to achieve a high school diploma by completing occupational coursework and work experiences. DVRS has recently revised policies for In-School Work Adjustment services to students with significant or most significant disabilities. The service is coordinated through school-based agreements to incentivize a student's participation in school-coordinated work experiences by providing guidance and counseling as well as an incentive payment to students for improvements in work behaviors and attitudes. The Division

continues to offer internship and OJT services to students, but hopes to increase utilization and improve feasibility for students, schools, and partnering businesses through policy and procedure revisions and collaboration with workforce system partners. Other PETS programs/services under consideration are intended to address students' expectations around pursuing employment and to improve their preparedness for participating in additional rehabilitation services, such as training and placement.

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

### ***Development and Approval of Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for Transitioning Students***

The Division's casework policies addressing the provision of transition services defines transition services as a coordinated set of activities for a student designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. Furthermore, DVRS policy states that the coordinated set of activities must be based upon the individual student's preferences and interests, and must include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. Finally, DVRS casework policies require that transition services must promote or facilitate the achievement of the employment outcome identified in the student's individualized plan for employment. In order to plan effectively for the transition needs of students with disabilities in collaboration with other agencies and organizations, DVRS rehabilitation counselors are expected to be active participants addressing the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meeting transition issues when possible. Counselors are expected to participate both directly in IEP meetings and indirectly by other means in planning for the needs of VR consumers. A copy of the transition portion of the IEP is required to be maintained in the case record. Prior to developing the IPE, the VR counselor reviews the Individual Transition Plan (ITP) component for the Individual Education Plan and records any relevant ITP objectives as part of the IPE. The intent of this review is to coordinate educational programming and vocational programming for the benefit of the VR consumer. Additionally, the Division's policy stipulates that the development of the IPE with a student must be based on interests, aptitudes, capabilities, strengths and informed choice. The job choice on the IPE for a student in transition may indicate a family of jobs rather than a specific job code, for example, Health Care Worker, Office Work, and Protective Services such as police, firefighter, or security guard. DVRS policy does require career exploration to be provided and documented in order to determine a more specific goal, and this process and expectation has been further emphasized by recent policy revisions concerning development of the IPE within 90 days of the VR eligibility determination. Amended job choices, including amendments at closure, must be accompanied by documentation reflecting the process and services that had an impact on the final job choice, including job shadowing, job sampling, guidance and counseling. Moreover, DVRS casework policy stipulates that the development and approval of an individualized plan for employment must be completed as early as possible during the transition planning process but, at the latest, by the time each student determined to be eligible for 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;**
  - (B) transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency**

**that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;**

**(C) roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;**

**(D) procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.**

In order to ensure effective facilitation of the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, DVRS maintains both a joint formal agreement with the Exceptional Children and Career Technical Education Divisions of DPI and also maintains 99 separately held TPCAs with local education agencies (LEA's) or school programs. The agreement with DPI will be revised upon issuance of the final regulations for Title IV to account for new mandates concerning PETS, serving the "potentially eligible," Section 511 impacts on contracted services between schools and programs operated under a subminimum wage certificate, and many other new requirements. Additionally, in that the agreement is not only with the Exceptional Children's division of the SEA, but also the Career and Technical Education division, NC DVR hopes to leverage partnerships that create more opportunity for students with disabilities to advance along a career pathway and to participate in work-based experiences beginning in high school. Within the current formal interagency agreement between DVRS and DPI, mutual interagency responsibilities include:

- Mutual participation of appropriate personnel in the development of the transition component of the Individualized Education Program and the Individualized Plan for Employment for students with disabilities.
- Designation of an individual from Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Exceptional Children and Career Technical Education Divisions to serve as liaison with each other to represent the services of the two agencies.
- Exchange of information deemed pertinent and of mutual concern regarding service delivery.
- Interagency cooperation in transition planning for students with disabilities.
- A mutual system to be developed and maintained to ensure that appropriate referrals are made to each party.

**(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 description of DVRS responsibilities pertaining to this area

Within the current formal interagency agreement, the DVRS has responsibility to ensure the provision of an appropriate program of VR services to each perspective VR client by:

- Providing administrative, technical and consultative services when needed through local, regional and state VR services' staff to local school administrative units serving students with disabilities in transition programs. DVRS' Program Specialist for Transition Services and the state Program Consultant for Intellectual Disabilities and Secondary Education with DPI, cooperatively provide programmatic information, training and support to local school systems and to VR transition staff to maintain and enhance the quality of transition services for successful post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. The DVRS specialist provides regular technical support to schools by participating in and presenting at transition training institutes regarding transition services and adult service agencies. The DVRS specialist also visits and provides consultation and training to local schools with transition teachers, coordinators, job coaches, and other professionals.
- Screening students with disabilities referred to DVRS by the local school administrators to determine eligibility for VR services. Eligibility for VR services is based on the presence of a

physical or mental impairment which for the individual constitutes a substantial impediment to employment. The student must require VR service to prepare for, secure, retain or regain employment. The determination of eligibility for VR services provided by DVRS is the sole responsibility of DVRS and is not delegated.

- Administering all aspects of the DVRS VR program services including the determination of eligibility, diagnostic and evaluation services, rehabilitation planning, transition services and the provision of a program of VR services. Some services are subject to the student's financial eligibility and/or comparable benefits.
- Providing vocational assessment trial work and adjustment services to students with disabilities who have an identified need and meet eligibility requirements.
- Providing appropriate data to the Exceptional Children Division about the number of school age students served by DVRS, by disability, age, types of services provided and post-school employment outcome through annual reporting.
- Promoting the development of cooperative agreements between DVRS and local school administrative units that include the following components: Roles of each agency; Financial responsibilities; VR staffing and supervision by the DVRS; Procedures for outreach, referral, liaison staff between the parties, eligibility, delivery of services, dispute resolutions, sharing of appropriate client information and student involvement; Joint staff development and training; Services to students with disabilities who are not receiving special education services; Assurances of compliance with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 105-17), Carl Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act (P.L. 105-332), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended; and, with the local educational agency (LEA), provide and implement an ongoing evaluation of the cooperative efforts with a formal annual review of the proposed budget and any necessary interagency agreement updates.

#### A description of Exceptional Children Division's responsibilities pertaining to this area

Through the formal interagency agreement in place, the Exceptional Children Division of the DPI has the following responsibilities with respect to the provision of technical assistance and consultation with local educational agencies:

- Provide technical assistance to local school administrative units to ensure access for students with disabilities in appropriate Career and Technical Education Programs based on recommendations of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Team.
- Assist local school administrative units in the planning, development and implementation of transition services for students with disabilities.
- Inform local school administrative units of services available from DVRS and promote referral generation.
- Promote the provision of psychological, vocational, therapeutic (e.g., speech-language, occupational and/or physical therapy services), assistive technology, and work adjustment services and educational assessment in collaboration with local educational agencies (i.e., school districts) for students with disabilities having an identified need.
- Promote the development of cooperative agreements between Vocational Rehabilitation Services and local school administrative units in keeping with 34 C.F.R. Section 361.38 Protection, Use, and Release of Personal Information.

#### A description of Career Technical Education Division's responsibilities pertaining to this area

Through the formal interagency agreement in place, the Career Technical Education Division of the NC DPI has the following responsibilities with respect to the provision of technical assistance and consultation with local educational agencies:

- Provide needed consultation to ensure the initiation of cooperative career/technical education and internship programs for students with disabilities involved in local school administrative units and other state agencies.
- Provide consultative services to local school administrative units and other state agencies and institutions to ensure initial placement and maintenance of eligible students with disabilities in Career and Technical Education Programs.
- Provide needed consultation to ensure the initiation of cooperative career/technical education and internship programs for students with disabilities involved in local school administrative units and other state agencies.
- Provide consultative services to local school administrative units and other state agencies and institutions to ensure initial placement and maintenance of eligible students with disabilities in Career and Technical Education Programs.
- Promote the provision of vocational/technical assessment services, career-decision making training, vocational instruction, and transition planning for students with disabilities in local school administrative units.
- Promote career/technical education counseling, cooperative work experience, internships and job placement of students with disabilities by local school administrative units.
- Assist local school administrative units in the planning, development, collection of data, and implementation of transition services for students with disabilities.

**(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 current interagency agreement between DVRS and the state education agency stipulates that transition planning for students with disabilities will be a cooperative effort. Furthermore, the agreements specifically require mutual participation of appropriate personnel in the development of the transition component of the Individualized Education Program and the Individualized Plan for Employment for students with disabilities. The sharing of Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs) at the local level is strongly encouraged. DVRS VR counselors are required to review a student's transition component of the IEP and incorporate, as appropriate, a description of relevant objectives in the IPE. Furthermore, a comprehensive evaluation will be completed by the State agency on each eligible individual, to the degree necessary, to determine the vocational goal and scope of VR services to be included in the IPE. The agreements state that the student with the disability is expected to fully participate in the development of the plan and any plan amendments. The agreements specify that the DVRS VR counselors will provide the individuals with information sufficient to make an informed choice among alternative goals, objectives, services, entities providing such services and methods to procure such services. Additionally, the agreement requires that the VR counselor is to review the IPE with the individual or his/her representative at least once each year.

**(c) *Roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services***

Summary of Roles and Responsibilities of DVRS under the current agreement:

- Provide a program of VR services to eligible individuals referred by the third party and to other individuals found eligible for services.
- Collaborative development of the transition component of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for students with disabilities.
- Provide effective and appropriate supervision of the VR activities and VR staff assigned to provide the services.

- Provide administrative and consultative support, in the area of its program responsibilities, to the local education agency.
- Share statistical and fiscal reports to other parties as deemed mutually necessary to ensure open communication and good administrative practices. As part of the agreement, DVRS Rehabilitation Counselors will provide individuals with information sufficient to make an informed choice among alternative goals, objectives, services, entities providing such services and methods to procure such services. The counselor is to review the IPE with the individual or his/her representative at least once each year. The VR counselor will provide each eligible individual an IPE Handbook wherein there is an appeals process outlined. Information pertaining to the Client Assistance Program (CAP) is included in the handbook. The VR counselor agrees not to close an individual's record as having achieved a successful employment outcome until the person exits school and is determined that the individual has successfully completed the IPE.
- Conduct an annual survey of students in the school system.
- The VR counselor will place major emphasis on students who are juniors, seniors, or potential dropouts.
- Screen referrals from other sources within the school system to enable students with disabilities who do not have an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) to be considered for VR services.
- Mutually agree to utilize appropriate staff development personnel in the planning and implementation of joint inter-disciplinary team training and/or staff development for purposes of effectively providing transitional services to students with disabilities.
- Liaison personnel appropriate and qualified for the provision of transitional services, recommending needed changes and implementing the agreement will be appointed by the administrative units of the parties named in the agreement with the educational agencies.

#### Summary of financial responsibilities of each agency

The current interagency agreement between DVRS and Education Agencies including the NC Department of Public Instruction and Local Educational Agencies/School Boards stipulate the financial responsibilities of each party. Financial responsibilities of respective parties are described in more detail within the TCPAs between DVRS and the LEA's, since this satisfactorily addresses the need. Summary of financial responsibilities of DVRS under the agreements:

- Provide Federal funding in the amount of 78.7% of the agreed-upon annual budget depending on the availability of Federal funds and the program arrangements.
- Maintain accounts and supporting documents that will permit an accurate determination at any time of the status of State and Federal participation of expenditures incurred in operation of the rehabilitation program.

- Assume responsibility, within the limitation of resources, for the cost of services included in the student's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) according to DVRS' established policies and fee schedule.
- Within the limitations of available resources, provide case service funds necessary to the delivery of VR services
- Accept financial responsibility for the cost of DVRS' portion of cooperative training efforts and maintain proper accounts and records of these activities. Summary of financial responsibilities of the Educational Agency partners under the agreements:
- Parties entering into an agreement contribute to DVRS an annual cash amount of 21.3% of the agreed-upon annual budget. Whereas DVRS must provide funds equal to the State's share of planned expenditures as specified in the Federal Act. The local per centum match funds are to consist totally of non-Federal funds that have not or will not be used to match Federal funds other than Federal Vocational Rehabilitation funds used in this program. Any contribution of funds is made available for expenditure at the sole discretion of the DVRS. It is understood that such funds must be spent for rehabilitation services and for the administration of those services; that expenditures must be made under the approved agency State plan; and that expenditures must be made under the control and supervision of the DVRS.
- Provide all individuals determined eligible for VR services with those services that are its legal and traditional responsibility, e.g., assistive technology required and included in an individual's IEP, without cost to the DVRS. The cooperative program is utilized to provide services which represent new services or new patterns of services when compared to existing services.
- Provide and maintain adequate facilities and office space that is accessible to both staff and individuals with disabilities, private for individual counseling, with conditions that are conducive to confidentiality and counseling.
- Accept fiscal responsibility for the cost of their party's portion of cooperative training efforts and maintain proper accounts and records of these activities.

**(d) Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services**

DVRS ensures that students with disabilities who are not receiving special education services have access to and can receive VR services, if appropriate, by ensuring outreach to and identification of these students. Outreach to these students occurs as early as possible during the transition planning process and must include, at a minimum, a description of the purpose of the VR program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals. DVRS VR counselors are required to contact persons in the schools responsible for coordinating services to students under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and 504 plans and are instructed to conduct high school surveys in order to identify eligible students with disabilities. The Program Specialist for Transition Services has put forth effort at the state level to formulate relationships with pertinent staff with DPI to ensure strong working knowledge of DVRS and to encourage staff development programs to include a VR component. The importance of completing outreach to students through non-traditional means to identify students is emphasized in the Division's casework policy. Furthermore, in order to generate appropriate referrals, DVRS counseling staff members are encouraged to contact other resource personnel within the local schools including social workers, school nurses, occupational, physical and speech therapists. One of the primary goals of the Division's provision of transition services is to work with youth with disabilities who are at risk of dropping out of school. Factors to consider for "potential dropout" referrals include: (a) verbal indications by the student of intent to leave school, (b) students with disabilities failing half of course work, and (c) students in danger of not receiving course credits due to excessive absences. DVRS will be revising policies as the Title IV regulations are finalized to further define the point at which PETS and transition services to eligible clients may begin in order to ensure that PETS services are available to students at the age at which the student is eligible to receive transition

services in NC under IDEA. There are differences in available staff and in numbers of students with disabilities in LEAs and DVRS, which impacts the methods by which the Division will approach this goal, but the Division is committed to using innovative programs and methods to meet its mandates.

#### Other Evidence and Historical Information on Collaboration with Education Officials

Since 2003, the Division's Transition Specialist and a school counselor have served together with NC Department of Public Instruction representatives and others to form a statewide capacity building team to develop and provide coordinated transition activities for students with disabilities to achieve better results with post-school outcomes, including obtaining employment or attending post-secondary education. The Division's VR staff participates in an annual Exceptional Children's Conference and regularly scheduled cross training regarding the provision of services at the local level. Specialized cooperative training activities, workshops and conferences have existed over the years and will continue to occur periodically, including both Vocational Rehabilitation staff and educators in conjunction with the requirements of the state's Comprehensive Plan.

DVRS remains active with several organizations serving transitioning youth. With a regular presence on our State Transition Team, grant efforts such as Reaching the Summit of Success, Post-Secondary Education Alliance, and NC Division of Career Development and Transition, DVRS is well represented in our state. DVRS will host transition training in Spring 2016 that will include presentations by many of our partnering agencies and will focus on policy changes and program development as a result of WIOA. Our Program Specialist for Transition Services continues to provide extensive outreach to our transition counselors and provides in service training as requested to ensure consistency, encourage creativity in service delivery, and to provide updated information. In addition to improving Pre-Employment Transition Services offerings, the Division continues to expand Project SEARCH™ in NC, with a total of fourteen (14) sites supported this year.

Additionally, the Division continues to be a stakeholder in NC's College Supporting Transition, Access and Retention (STAR) program, which provides transition services to secondary students with learning and executive functioning disabilities as they transition to their early years of college. We look forward to continued innovation and partnerships that will improve the quality of transition services to transition-aged youth.

#### **Division of Services for the Blind**

DSB currently offers a wide variety of services to students with visual impairments or blindness in transition to the world of work. Each student served by the DSB VR program must have an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) approved by a qualified DSB rehabilitation counselor. The exception to this requirement applies for the receipt of Pre-Employment Transition Services, which are made available to potentially eligible students with disabilities. The IPE incorporates transitional elements of the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), along with the student's plans for transitioning from secondary school to employment. DSB transition staff and VR counselors are expected to participate in student IEP meetings pertaining to transition matters. Local school systems provide students services that are within its legal responsibility and customary practice. These services are provided without cost to the Division. DSB provides transitional and supportive services that are not available through the local school systems. All costs for services for which a student is found eligible is paid for through DSB VR case service funds.

A formal cooperative agreement exists with the NC Department of Public Instruction, which consists of 115 local education agencies (LEA's), 128 charter schools, 1 regional school and 2 education entities. The emphasis of the Memorandum of Agreement with DPI is on students who are blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired, being served by local education agencies (LEA's) and the schools who are of transition age (14 to 21) and who need VR services to become employed. This agreement acknowledges the role of DSB in providing these services and encourages local LEA's and schools to develop working relationships with the staff who cover their corresponding areas and encourages referring students, sharing information and facilitating joint involvement in IEP meetings. DSB shares information about the transition program and provides technical assistance and consultation to DPI, LEA's, and schools regarding accommodations and assistive technology that will help facilitate the education and VR of students who are blind, deaf-blind, or

visually impaired.

DSB has agreements with twelve LEA's and one regional school across the state. These agreements designate cost sharing of transition staff positions (rehabilitation counselor and community employment specialist), the duties of these positions and the services to be provided by both parties in meeting the needs of transition age students. The school systems with whom DSB continues to have agreements are Brunswick County, Charlotte-Mecklenburg County, Cumberland County, Edgecombe County, Guilford County, New Hanover County, Onslow County, Pender County, Pitt County, Wake County Schools, Wilson County, Winston-Salem-Forsyth County Schools and the Governor Morehead School for the Blind.

While DSB's goal is that ultimately all eligible students will be served by specialized transition counselors through formal cooperative agreements with the schools, DPI and local LEA budgetary restraints have prevented expansion of cost sharing for transition positions. Studies have demonstrated that students, who are blind, deaf-blind or visually impaired benefit from earlier identification and referral to the transition counselors and access to available services and supports. Such partnerships enable the counselor to develop stronger working relationships with the students, family and the school staff with greater knowledge of the available resources and supports within the school district. Opportunities to participate more fully in the student's individualized education planning process are also more readily available.

DSB shares information about the transition program and provides technical assistance and consultation to DPI, LEA's, and schools regarding accommodations and assistive technology that will help facilitate the education and VR of students who are blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired.

DSB has also enlarged the transition rehabilitation services presently offered for students 14-21 years of age in North Carolina who are blind, deaf-blind, or visually impaired by adding specific Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS): (1) Student Counseling on Transition/Higher Ed Training Opportunities-Required Student Workplace Readiness Training; (2) Student Self-Advocacy Training; (3) Student Job Exploration Counseling; (4) Student Job Exploration Counseling Materials; and Student Work Based Learning Experience Maintenance. These services are provided to all students with visual impairments, blindness, or deaf-blindness whether they are eligible or potentially eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

Transition students are served by DSB general vocational rehabilitation counselors in schools where DSB does not have formal cooperative agreements with the LEA's. Vocational rehabilitation counselors develop and cultivate working relationships with school systems by educating them about the transition and vocational services available through DSB and providing technical assistance and consultation pertaining to the needs of and resources available to transition students. DSB has trained and commissioned 7 Pre-Employment Transition Services Associate positions which 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 parent and teachers to assess need and desire for services, provide Pre-ETS services directly and document all activities regarding service provision. If desired, this position can also refer students to a VR Counselors so that they can then apply for a full program of VR services leading to competitive integrated employment.

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 deaf-blind. While most students do attend public schools due to the resources of specialized teachers for persons with visual impairments, DSB recognizes the importance to reach students enrolled in these programs.

DSB will continue its outreach efforts and collaboration with school districts to develop and implement formal cooperative agreements and transition programs in other locations throughout the state.

### **(e) Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations**

**Describe the manner in which the designated State agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-profit VR service providers.**

#### **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

Private non-profit providers of rehabilitation services are necessary and valuable partners in the delivery of the array of services needed by the individuals eligible for VR services within the state. DVRS routinely seeks out such partnerships especially in geographic areas where additional services and/or service provider choices need to be established. DVRS establishes and maintains contracts or agreements with over 120 private for profit and non-profit VR service providers providing an array of services to DVRS consumers. One hundred two (102) 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 ultimate goal of competitive employment. During federal fiscal years 2014 nearly all supported employment and work adjustment services provided through community rehabilitation programs were transitioned from a fee for services hourly rate payment system to a milestone payment system. Additionally, performance-based cooperative agreements engaging non-profit organizations encompass brain injury support services, multiple (currently 14) Project SEARCH™ sites and the provision of 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 subcommittee and through feedback solicitations made via web-based feedback mechanisms.

In federal fiscal year 2017, DVRS phased out transitional employment programs as new legislation prohibited the successful closure of an individual employed in transitional employment. Consumers were encouraged to consider Individual Placement and Support Services as an alternate employment service.

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 Division's vendor approval process, by which a candidate service provider demonstrates its ability to provide services that meet established standards while fully compliant with all applicable state and Federal requirements. Site reviews are conducted to ensure that programs and services are accessible to individuals served by DVRS. Service rates are based largely on program costs, rates that have been established through researching regional market rates, or through competitive processes. Contracts are implemented through the Division's Center of Excellence Committee (COE), which is a committee established by the NC 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.

#### **Division of Services for the Blind**

DSB purchases supported employment services, extended services, and community based work adjustment services from Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP) for individuals who will require the assistance of a job coach to find a job, to learn the duties of the job, to develop acceptable work habits, and to provide long term support to ensure the individual is able to retain the job if required by the individual. The CRP must meet certain requirements before services are purchased. The Contractor will

maintain accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), Council on Accreditation (COA), or other accreditation by a DSB approved national accrediting authority will be a vendor with the state of North Carolina and will accept payments for services provided through an outcome based program.

DSB has cooperative agreements with eight CRPs for the provision of long term follow up support services (extended services) to individuals who achieved their goal of employment assistance from the supported employment program. The CRP meets with the individual based on DSB's phasing system for long term follow up. The Contractor provides extended services and ongoing support services through individual contacts on the schedule as listed below. The contractor bills DSB for these contacts and follows the phases of DSB's extended services plan as follows:

Phase 1: Twice monthly contacts with the individual and employer for the first 6 months of extended services, unless a provision is put in place on the individual's original or amended IPE for off-site monitoring.

Phase 2: At the end of 6 months, the contractor, individual and employer will make determination as to the individual's stabilization on the job. If ongoing support is required by the individual to maintain employment, ongoing support of two monthly contacts can condition. If and when the individual is determined to be well stabilized in the employment situation, an offer will be made to the individual and employer that continued monitoring could be made once every six months. If this offer is accepted by the individual and employer, the contractor must continue to monitor in the phase 2 for no less than 24 months. The individual and employer must sign a waiver acknowledging their agreement to this action during this phase.

Phase 3: When the individual has successfully completed phase 2, the contractor may offer the individual and employer an opportunity to cease regular monitoring. If they chose to enter into phase 3, the individual is placed on an inactive list and monitoring would only be at the individual or employer's request. The individual and employer must sign a waiver agreeing to the conditions of phase 3. If the contractor is contacted by either the individual or employer, the contractor will make an on-site visit to determine what services are needed to re-stabilize the individual's job. If the contractor determines that more than minimal services are needed, then the contractor should refer the individual back to the DSB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program for possible case activation. However, if the contractor determines that the issues can be resolved with for example, short term training or educating of staff, the contractor can provide required services to the individual and/or employer.

DSB developed a community-based work adjustment services program with assistance from several community rehabilitation programs (CRP) for eligible individuals who require initial intervention to improve and increase productivity, attendance, punctuality, ability to interact appropriately with coworkers and supervisors, and work tolerance, yet do not require long-term support. CRP's across the state have developed specialized programs for these services that include situational assessments, job placement and job coaching services. Payments are made to the CRP's using an outcome based format, with increment payments made based on milestones.

DSB provides the Contractor with staff training, consultation and technical assistance, as appropriate. DSB's VR Counselor coordinates individual admissions and subsequent services with the contractor. Consistent with DSB policy, the referring VR Counselor provides the Contractor with the necessary documents. DSB participates in admissions, attends subsequent staffing, and provides individual rehabilitation counseling and other rehabilitation services to promote the individual's progress while enrolled with the Contractor. Individual records will reflect evidence of mutual effort and each party will keep the other informed regarding placement and follow-up activities.

The DSB Rehabilitation Program Specialist meets periodically with the CRP's personnel to provide assistance relative to standards compliance, fiscal accountability, quality of service, individual referrals, and the planning of program services for DSB individuals as identified in this contract.

**(f) Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services**

**Describe the designated State agency's efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.**

**Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

The North Carolina Division of Vocational Services (DVRS) has developed a cooperative agreement with both NC Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services (DMHDDSAS) and NC Division of Medical Assistance (DMA) 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 DMA are partnering to implement the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment in this state. In 2012 DMHDDSAS received a four-year grant from Dartmouth Supported Employment Center to implement IPS SE. A fifth research site was added in July 2015. Outside of the five research sites is a statewide network of employment providers who are also partnering with clinical behavioral health providers to implement this program. During federal fiscal year 2017, 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 17 states, Alameda County, CA, the District of Columbia, and three international countries to learn more about and discuss implementation of the IPS model of SE. 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 CRP agencies providing IPS model of SE.

In response to the statewide need for adequate funding of IPS supported employment services, DVRS developed a milestone-based contract for all teams who are contracted by the LME/MCO. Currently, thirteen (13) 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.

The established CRP-DVRS steering committee continues to review the provision of supported employment services in North Carolina to ensure that funding is optimally utilized so that adequate funding will be available for ongoing extended services. The steering committee continues to address the issues that surround long term support funding such as inconsistencies in the levels of disability-type funding and shortages as well as looks at other best practices that can be incorporated into the NC service delivery system. 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 in which extended services will be provided jointly by DVRS to assess the individual's performance within their job choice and their individual adjustment and success in their position. This time allows any observed issues to be resolved and an extension of the stabilization phase if necessary.

The continued growth of the statewide network of supported employment service providers has resulted from collaboration between the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and entities such as the North Carolina Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, the North Carolina International Association of Psychosocial Rehabilitation Services, 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.

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

DSB utilizes an outcome based method of purchasing supported employment services from private non-profit community rehabilitation programs (CRP) for eligible individuals who are determined to 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. These services are paid through state funds without use of Title VI funding.

### **Section (g) Coordination with Employers**

**Describe how the designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:**

**(1) VR services; and**

**(2) transition services, including pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities.**

*Coordination with Employers: General Overview*

#### **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

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 67 business relations representatives (BRRs) that serve as employment specialists across the state. 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 business fosters these relationships so that they can have a sustainable impact on the supporting individuals with disabilities in finding, maintaining, and advancing in employment.

#### *(1) Provision of VR Services through Coordination with Employers*

DVRS services to 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 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.

Additionally, DVRS will be investing in disability sensitivity training in 2018 to promote the transition of students with disabilities to employment after high school. DVRS BRRs will receive 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. 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. 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 is making steps to procure a replacement case management system by 2020 and has developed requirements for an account management component of 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) 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. DVRS continues to work towards meeting its 15% required spending allocation for Pre- Employment Transition Services (PETS) to students with disabilities.

Since 2014, DVRS has worked towards implementing Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) in the following ways:

- Enhancing existing PETS 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 eight (8) of the fourteen (14) sites across NC.
- Contracted PETS services: At the time of this report, thus far in FFYs 2017 and 2018, DVRS effected sixteen (16) PETS service 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 PETS 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 PETS to students with disabilities in NC's four youth development centers serving adjudicated youth. DVRS has also committed funds to a PETS Coordinator who will directly provide PETS services to these students.

Through the mechanisms described above and others, DVRS will continue to work towards meeting its 15% spending obligation for PETS. 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 PETS 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 PETS 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.

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

Similarly, DSB will reach out to employers in their geographic areas and statewide to make contact on behalf of the agency to ensure that area employers are aware of what DSB-VR has to offer regarding their employment needs. They will offer general information on DSB Services including opportunities for internships, work experiences, and the Supported Employment Program, and screening and placement of potential qualified employees. They may also offer disability sensitivity training and additional information regarding benefits to employers that hire those with disabilities.

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

(h) Interagency Cooperation

**Describe how the designated State unit will collaborate with the State agency responsible for administering each of the following programs to develop opportunities for competitive integrated employment, to the greatest extent practicable:**

- (1) the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act;**
- (2) the State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities; and**
- (3) the State agency responsible for providing mental health services.**

### **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

The NC DHHS Division of Medical Assistance (DMA) is the state agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act. DVRS is currently developing a cooperative agreement with DMA for the purpose of establishing cooperative guidelines to ensure persons with disabilities have equal access to employment services, a continuum of employment services, and independent community living. DMA 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.

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.

DVRS continues to partner with the DMHDDSAS in implementing individual placement and support supported employment (IPS SE) throughout the state. Currently, there are 35 IPS SE programs throughout the state and DVRS contracts with 13 of them. DVRS offers such programs the opportunity to apply to become an 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.

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

NC Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) has established an informational sharing agreement with NCTracks, the recently developed multi–payer Medicaid Management Information System for North Carolina, to make sure that DSB is sponsoring all approved medical cost services at the appropriate pricing tiers. This has taken a combined effort with DVRS, the Controller’s Office, Information Technology Services and the NCTracks team to make sure this information is shared accurately and is up to date at all times. DSB and DVRS has also entered into an agreement with 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 sharing of information was made possible using the BEAM electronic case management system and every VR staff person that has access to such information must annually review appropriate information and agree to confidentiality protocols.

DSB is also making every effort to collaborate with agencies within DHHS including our sister agencies, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) and Division of Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DSDHH). DSB and DVRS have jointly purchased and developed a customized version of the Libera System 7 Electronic Case Management System (BEAM), which has greatly increased DSB reporting and monitoring capabilities while also enabling DSB to better serve VR program clients on an everyday basis. With DSDHH, DSB has continued collaboration on a grant-funded effort to deliver state of the art assistive technology equipment and assistive technology training to those that are Deaf-Blind through services provided directly by Deaf-Blind Specialists on DSB staff. In combination with these efforts, we have reached out to NCTracks, the recently developed multi-payer Medicaid Management Information System for North Carolina, to make sure that DSB is sponsoring all approved medical cost services at the appropriate pricing tier. This has taken a combined effort with DVRS, the Controller’s Office, Information Technology Services and the NCTracks team to make sure this information is shared accurately and is up to date at all times.

DSB has also reached out to NCCDD and DMHDDSAS to begin discussions regarding how our agencies might work together to better serve the needs of North Carolinians with multiple disabilities.

**(i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development**

**Describe the designated State agency's procedures and activities to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit, including the following: Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development**

- (A) Qualified Personnel Needs. Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:**
- (i) the number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;**
  - (ii) the number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and**
  - (iii) projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the State agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.**

**Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Combined Response**

DVRS and DSB utilize 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. For DSB, the ratio of VR counselors to individuals served is served 3,178/ 41 total counselor positions or a ratio of 78:1.

**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	Clients Served per position	Vacancies			Total Over Next 5 Years
			FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2017	
<b>DVRS</b>						
Rehabilitation Counselor I	213	248	29	18	31	128
Rehabilitation Counselor II	98	541	18	4	2	55
Rehabilitation Counselor in Charge	59	898	6	5	12	23
Rehabilitation Admin Counselor I	3	17,671			0	0
Rehabilitation Admin Counselor II	14	3,786			0	0
Rehabilitation Admin Counselor III	14	3,786			1	0
Vocational Evaluator II	42	1,262	8	2	3	23
HR Placement Specialist (BRR)	70	757	14	3	10	33
Human Services Coordinator I	0	0	2	1	0	8
Human Services Coordinator II	4	13,253	2		0	13
Rehabilitation Casework Tech	117	453	12	14	12	52
Processing Assistants	101	525			5	
<b>Total</b>	<b>735</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>332</b>
<b>DSB</b>						
Rehabilitation Counselor I	22	144	6	2	0	20
Rehabilitation Counselor II	19	167	1	1	0	5
Rehabilitation Counselor in Charge	4	794			2	0
Rehabilitation Admin Counselor I	3	1,059		1	1	5
Rehabilitation Supervisor	3	1,059			0	1
Vocational Evaluator II	1	3,178			0	0
HR Placement Specialist	6	529	2		0	0
Human Services Coordinator I	1	3,178		1	0	5
Human Services Coordinator II	0	0		3	0	15
Rehabilitation Casework Tech	2	1589		1	0	5
Processing Assistants	22	146			1	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>61</b>

\*Individuals Served = 53,013 for the DVRS VR Program and 3,178 for DSB (source: FY 2017 RSA-113)

Currently, 100% 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.

**Personnel Development. Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:**

- (i) a list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;
- (ii) the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and
- (iii) the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

## Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Response

(i) **a list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;**

DVRS and DSB work 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 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:** Masters 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:** Masters 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 Number of students enrolled in each program:**

- **NC A&T University:**
  - Mental Health Counseling - Rehabilitation Program Master's program, **36 students**
  - Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Rehabilitation Counseling & Rehabilitation Counselor Education, **28 students**
  - Certificate Rehabilitation Counseling & Behavioral Addictions, **22 students**
  - Certificate in Rehabilitation Psychology & Behavioral Medicine, **8 students**
  - Certificate in Vocational Evaluation & Work Adjustment. **0 students**
- **Winston Salem State University:**
  - Masters of Science in Rehabilitation: **40 students**
- **UNC at Chapel Hill:**
  - Master of Science in Clinical Rehabilitation & Mental Health Counseling: **42 students**
- **East Carolina University:**
  - Masters of Science in Rehabilitation & Career Counseling: **18 students**
  - Certificate in Rehabilitation Counseling: **12 students**
  - Certificate in Vocational Evaluation: **26 students**
  - Certificate in Substance Abuse Counseling: **unknown**

- Certificate in Military & Trauma Counseling: **32 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, **8 graduates (2 hired between DVRS and DSB)**
- Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) Rehabilitation Counseling & Rehabilitation Counselor Education, **4 graduates**
- Certificate Rehabilitation Counseling & Behavioral Addictions, **10 graduates**
- Certificate in Rehabilitation Psychology & Behavioral Medicine, **unknown**
- Certificate in Vocational Evaluation & Work Adjustment, **unknown**

- ***Winston Salem State University:***

- Masters of Science in Rehabilitation: **16 graduates**

- ***UNC at Chapel Hill:***

- Master of Science in Clinical Rehabilitation & Mental Health Counseling: **18 graduates**

- ***East Carolina University:***

- Masters of Science in Rehabilitation & Career Counseling: **14 graduates (2 hired between DVRS and DSB)**
- Certificate in Rehabilitation Counseling: **3 graduates**
- Certificate in Vocational Evaluation: **2 graduates**
- Certificate in Substance Abuse Counseling: **unknown**
- Certificate in Military & Trauma Counseling: **20 graduates**

## **2. Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel**

**Describe the development and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated State unit and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.**

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Combined Response**

DVRS implemented a paid internship program in January of 2005. This program was coordinated from our Staff Development section with the support of management, Human Resources, and counselors across North Carolina. Due to budget restrictions, this program became an unpaid internship program. This change in the program did have impact in the initial involvement of students, but participation is improving overall. The benefit of hiring interns into vacant positions is that we have a sense of the person's strengths and weaknesses prior to being hired. The 24-month probationary period that every new employee undergoes does allow the Division better assess a proper job match. If the person is not successful during this time, the person is released from the job during probationary status. This is not viewed the same as a dismissal. It is considered an extension of the hiring process and not disciplinary action. A majority of our interns hired by DVRS have been from the two Historically Black Universities in our state; NC Agricultural & Technical State University and Winston-Salem State University.

DVRS personnel participate in the university Rehabilitation Counseling program advisory boards within the state. The type of personnel representing DVRS within these advisory boards varies; however the Division is well represented and our role well respected within these programs. Our partnerships with these institutions are fortified through our staff enrolled in many of these programs, which include the historically black schools. Further, the unit offices are encouraged to participate in partnering local career fairs at the partnering universities and colleges. Marketing displays and brochures have been provided to every unit office so that marketing materials remain available for the unit offices' activities.

A broader perspective on retention includes a comprehensive, timely and effective onboarding/orientation program that is in progress. The Division recognizes that getting off to the right start can make the difference in retaining an employee. A comprehensive overview of the Division—its mission, staff, organizational structure, processes and relevant information—can ensure a good start. The Staff Development section is working with an advisory board that includes different job classifications throughout the agency to structure an onboarding program that will be effective for all levels of employees. The program will not begin with the first day of employment; it will begin as part of the hiring process and will extend throughout the career of each employee. An onboarding program helps a person feel that the agency is prepared to help new employees gain information necessary for their job at the right time. The intent is not to flood a new employee with so much information that it becomes useless. The program will be presented largely in an on-line tutorial or distance learning format, enabling employees to be at different places within the process at one time.

DSB has offered unpaid internship positions for students in their last semester of a master level degree program in rehabilitation counseling. Offering internships educates students about the needs of individuals who are blind or visually impaired and strengthens the pool of candidates for possible employment with DSB.

Nationwide recruitment is now done by posting positions in NeoGov, an Internet Human Resources Application Provider for Government Agencies. NeoGov has eliminated the need for numerous individual contacts to advertise available positions and has expanded the available applicant pool. A section on DSB's website labeled, "Career Opportunities" links browsers to NeoGov listings. Plans have also begun to begin to alert the universities with Rehabilitation Counseling Programs to openings as posted to further encourage qualified applicants.

Among senior management and area supervisors, DSB has 2 staff members with more than 25 years of service and one vacancy. The need for succession planning was identified and steps have been taken through cross-training for all staff and training opportunities for those hoping to lead. DSB utilizes NC DHHS leadership training as a point of entrance for pre-supervisory training. DSB conducts leadership/pre-supervisory training in an effort to begin to identify staff interested in management opportunities.

DSB uses affirmative action to ensure the employment and advancement in employment of qualified individuals with disabilities. On an annual basis, DSB conducts a workforce analysis of its representation of persons with disabilities, of persons of different ethnic groups and of males and females in different personnel classifications and occupational categories. Those classifications and occupational categories in which persons with disabilities and minority groups are under-represented are identified, and goals are established to increase representation in DSB's workforce.

During their first year of employment, all rehabilitation counselors are required to complete developmental training in casework requirements and documentation. The chiefs of rehabilitation and the REA and district rehabilitation supervisors provide this training in small groups to directly address agency policies and procedures for professional casework practices. After 1 year of employment, rehabilitation counselors who meet the standard for qualified Rehabilitation Counselor may request promotion to rehabilitation counselor II. Evaluation procedures for this promotion consist of a written and oral examination of casework policies and procedures, caseload review and audit, and review of contact with caseload eligible individuals to assess quality and satisfaction of services. The Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services administers and reviews all aspects of the examination process. Counselors are also required to participate in a week-long adjustment to blindness training which is organized by the rehabilitation center teacher staff and management to increase knowledge regarding working with those with a visual impairment or blindness.

### **3. Personnel Standards.**

**Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:**

- a. standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and**
- b. the establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.**

#### **Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Combined Response**

While DVRS and DSB modeled their counselor personnel standard after the CRCC, the Divisions 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.

Within the Division of Services for the Blind between 2016 - 2018, two newly hired rehabilitation counselors successfully completed coursework to meet the minimum educational requirements for employment. Three DSB employees have enrolled in RSA Scholarship programs for Rehabilitation Counseling at Auburn University and Winston-Salem State University. One of these employees graduated in 2016 and met requirements to be promoted to Rehabilitation Counselor position within DSB. The other two employees are still completing coursework under the Academic Assistance policy.

#### **4. Staff Development**

**Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section 101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:**

- (a) a system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated State unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and**
- (b) procedures for the acquisition and dissemination to designated state unit professionals and paraprofessionals significant knowledge from research and other sources.**

#### **Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Combined Response**

- (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**

DVRS provides a comprehensive system of staff development for VR professionals and paraprofessionals, particularly with respect to service delivery, assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, transition services, rehabilitation technology, employee engagement, and leadership development. This includes training provided by the DVRS Staff Development team, Rehabilitation Education Specialists, and Quality Development Specialists, as well as agency participation in collaborative training events and statewide conferences. Individuals 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.

Agency training sessions are conducted through customized instructor-led sessions and online learning experiences. Continuing education units are provided in the form of CEU and CRC credit for all internal training programs. More than 2500 participants engaged in 67 training events, including the classroom sessions and webinars listed below.

A total of 46 internal instructor-led sessions were provided during this timeframe, providing 196 classroom contact hours, as follows:

- Medical Records Training (4 hours, delivered 3 times)
- Influence: Making Things Happen in the Workplace (1 hour)
- Leading at all Levels-Supervisory Foundations (14 hours, delivered 3 times)
- Do you have the Right Stuff? (performance) (3 hours)
- Valuing Individual Performance: VIP Training (2 hours)
- Transference & Countertransference (3 hours)
- Disability Awareness (4 hours)
- Training Needs – Strategic Office Planning (2 hours, delivered 3 times)
- PowerPoint Coaching (4 hours)
- Effective Communication (3 hours)
- Components of Effective Case Management (2 hours, delivered 2 times)
- Employee Engagement (3 hours, delivered 2 times)
- Procrastination & Avoidance (2 hours, delivered 2 times)
- Employment Strategies for Vocational Placement (5 hours)
- Positive Behavioral Intervention & Supports (1 hour)
- Documentation and Collaboration: Let's work together! (3 hours)
- NCDVR-NCDPI 2017 Joint Regional Transition Trainings (1-day, delivered 6 times)
- Ethical Issues for Rehabilitation Counselors, provided by UNC-CH (4 hours)
- Teambuilding (14 sessions ranging from 2-5 hours in length)

Twenty-one online learning webinars were provided for a total of 24.5 contact hours, as follows:

- De-escalation (1 hour)
- Career Counseling: Exploring Job Options (2 hours)
- Customer Service in VR: Back to Basics (1 hour)
- Get Set with PETS Part I (1 hour, delivered 2 times)
- Get Set with PETS Part II (1 hour, delivered 2 times)
- NC VIP-Completing the Interim Review (1 hour)
- Office Support-Back to the Basics with Outlook (1 hour)
- Coaching for Peak Performance (2 hours)
- Create a Great Place to Work (1 hour)
- Skype for Business (1 hour)
- Magic with Word (1 hour)
- Communication Strategies that Engage Your Team (1 hour)
- Effective Delegation (2 hours)
- Excel 101: Mission Not So Impossible (1.5 hours)
- OneNote (1 hour)
- WIOA Compliance, Policies & Procedure Requirements (1 hour, delivered 2 times)
- Internship Policy (1 hour)
- Annual Benefits Enrollment (1 hour)

DVRS also sponsored 868 staff to attend 20 different professional conferences during this timeframe, including:

- NC Foundation for Alcohol and Drug Studies, Summer School (30)
- NC Foundation for Alcohol and Drug Studies, Winter School (20)

- NCARF Conference (10)
- NCAPSE Annual Fall Conference (24)
- NCAPSE Spring Conference (7)
- NCWorks Pre-Conference (56)
- NC Workforce Development Conference (80)
- SERID (South East Regional Institute on Deafness) (12)
- The GREAT Conference, a collaboration between NCATP, NCRA, and SERNRA (224)
- NC VEWAA Fall Conference (20)
- NC VEWAA Spring Conference (13)
- Traumatic Brain Injury Conference (10)
- Rehabilitation of Racial and Ethnic Minorities with Behavioral Addictions (REMBA) Conference (45)
- NC Division on Career Development and Transition conference (31)
- Vocational Evaluators National Issues Forum (20)
- UNC TEACCH Autism Program Conference (30)
- IPS Training for VR Counselors & Supervisors (webinar) (50)
- 2016 NC DVR & DSB Joint Transition Counselors Conference (165)
- NRA & Georgia Rehabilitation Association Conference (3)
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Building Expo & Conference (18)

In addition to the above, individuals are sponsored to attend local training events and conferences upon approval of their manager and utilizing office administrative funding. Some of these sponsored events included Winston-Salem University Mental Health & Substance Abuse Training, the Trinity Conference, the Kanuga Conference, the Carroway Conference, the NC Employment & Training Association (NCETA) Conference, the NC Exceptional Children's Conference, and the System Administrator WIOA Changes Training.

New employees receive both mandatory and optional training opportunities. Mandatory training includes "Understanding Harassment in the Workplace"; "HIPAA training"; "Investigating Workplace Violence"; "Bloodborne Pathogen Awareness Training"; "NCVIP Employee Performance Management" training curriculums; "Be a Hazard Hero Safety Training"; "Slips, Trips & Falls Safety Training"; "OSHR Safety: Incident Investigation & Reporting Procedures"; and "DHHS Active Shooter" training. Suggested training for non-supervisory staff includes the Leading at All Levels (LAAL) program curriculum for individual contributors, which includes "Individual Contributor Foundations"; "Communicating with your Team"; "Dealing with Change"; "Out of the Box Thinking" and "Exploring Supervision: Is this the role for me?"

New supervisors and managers receive both mandatory and optional training opportunities. Mandatory training includes: "Grievance Overview"; "Equal Employment Opportunity & Diversity Fundamentals"; "Effective Hiring"; "Introduction to Recruitment and Selection" and the "NCVIP Performance Management" training curriculums. Suggested training includes "Coaching the NCVIP Way"; "Disciplinary Action Process"; "Stress Awareness for Supervisors & Managers"; and the Leading at All Levels (LAAL) program curriculums for supervisors or managers, which includes "Supervisory Foundations"; "Managerial Foundations"; "Leading Teams for Supervisors"; "Coaching for Supervisors"; "Managing Work for Supervisors"; and "High Performance Coaching for Managers". Furthermore, more experienced managers were supported in participating in the "Advanced Skills for Managers" and the "Certified Public Manager" programs provided by the NC Office of State Human Resources.

Additional training is provided at the agency's annual Statewide Manager's Meeting. The March 2017 meeting theme was "Create the Great: Growing Together", and training was provided on disciplinary action, EEO situation awareness as well as team and employee development.

DSB has an ongoing comprehensive system for personnel development that provides all staff classifications with appropriate job-related training. Staff members complete Learning Request Forms yearly to identify specific training needs. The Program Specialist for Staff Development analyzes the learning requests, and then plans specific training activities to meet the identified needs. As a result of these requests, training has been provided in an array of training events with relevant curriculum and skills acquisition experiences. DSB has developed and presented intensive training sessions this year.

Since the implementation of WIOA, and as of December 2017, DSB provided a number of mandatory trainings focused on WIOA and Pre-ETS for Rehabilitation Counselors, supervisors, specialists, Business Service Representatives and Community Employment Specialists, including introductions to the changes in definitions, policies and specifically the BEAM-System 7 reporting processes. In 2016, staff attended a joint DVRS and DSB Transition Conference, which provided a specific overview to Pre-ETS from different workforce and educational partners. Most recently, DSB sponsored a training event that introduced staff to more than 20 national and state vendors of Pre-ETS services to support their efforts in matching students to appropriate training opportunities. Another area of focus of staff development has been Job Development. Since 2016, DSB has had at least one employee per year enrolled in the Career Development Facilitator training offered by NCWorks. Other Job Development trainings provided by DSB include Windmills training, Improving Business Development Skills Training, attendance at the annual NCWorks Partnership Conference and annual Business Engagement training for specific employment specialists.

Beginning in May 2017, DSB became one of 4 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 have been and continue to respond 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 3-day training for Rehabilitation Counselors, supervisors, job development staff and Deaf-Blind Specialists. Following the training, the Rehabilitation Counselors will continue completing quarterly surveys for approximately 9 months as part of the research project. Additionally, the NRTC will provide Technical Assistance to DSB administration.

DSB staff attended-trainings many of which were developed as in-service trainings included: Administrative Professionals Certificate Training; Assistive Technology; BEAM-System 7 Training-All Staff Statewide; Best Practices for DSB's New Rehabilitation Counselors; Business Service Representative Training; Community Collaboration and Training Forum; CPR Training; CFNC.ORG Training Sessions; DHHS Leadership Training; Employment Opportunities Professional Training; National Equipment Deaf-Blind Training Program; National Transition Conference; New Employee Sensitivity Training; North Carolina Conference on Visual Impairment and Blindness (NCCVIB) in collaboration with Governor Morehead School for the Blind, and the NC Department of Public Instruction; North Carolina Deaf Blind Association Conference; Orientation & Mobility at SOMA Conference; Pre-Supervisory Training; Professional and Personal Development; Rehabilitation Center and Evaluation Unit Annual Training; Spanish Training Courses; Strategic Planning; Teaching Financial Literacy; Workplace Violence Prevention.

As of 2017, in coordination with the Office of State Human Resources, a number of DSB employees have completed coursework in the Leading at all Levels curriculums for Individual Contributors and Supervisors. The Staff Development VR Program Specialist has become credentialed as a trainer for 3 of the 5 Individual Contributors modules in an effort to make the trainings more available to DSB staff. Additionally, during the 2017 calendar year, 15 employees participated in and received 3-year certificates in Mental Health First Aid.

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 format, and can be checked out from the library by any staff member across the state. Equipment is purchased and maintained to enhance training programs, presentations, and small group work.

DSB requires professional skills in customer service and business relationship development to enhance employment opportunities. Training materials are extensively researched and drawn from a rich spectrum of resources, including vocational rehabilitation, sales, customer service, business, marketing, workforce development, job development, SSA, RSA, EEOC, ODEP, ADA National Network, and Technical Assistance and Continuing Education (TACE) Centers. Attention is given to knowledge translation: a process which includes knowledge dissemination of evidence-based and best practices derived from the results of rigorous research. The Program Specialist for Employment Services provides comprehensive training on these subjects to all newly hired VRCs and VR staff responsible for job development and placement. Follow-up training and one-on-one coaching is available to staff not meeting performance objectives.

DSB has maintained the authority granted by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification to provide Certified Rehabilitation Counselor Credits (CRC) for all certified rehabilitation counselors. The agency also has the authority to grant Continuing Educational Units (CEU) by the Academy of Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Programs (ACVREP).

During the years of 2015-2018, DSB secured a 3-year subscription to the e-Learning platform of the American Foundation of the Blind (AFB). At the 2 ½ year mark of the subscription, 121 DSB employees have completed more than 200 courses. Most of the coursework provided on the AFB e-Learning platform provide CRC and ACVREP credentials. DSB staff are also routinely alerted to other on-line training events provided by sponsors such as, WINTAC, NCWorks and the ADA National Network.

DSB partnered with Mississippi State University Research and Training Center Vision Specialist Certificate Program to train staff in the specific area of vision. DSB had one person graduate from this program in August 2012 and nine graduated in 2011. DSB began a Transition Certificate program with Winston-Salem State University and 2 staff began this program, but it has presently been suspended by the University. We are in touch with WSSU and will again offer this opportunity to staff as it presents itself. DSB is also researching additional resources for transition training. In 2016, one transition counselor completed coursework for a Transition certificate from the University of Maryland.

DSB continues to work towards expansion of the availability of additional transition programs that can better prepare students in transition from school to work and develops specialized training in transition services. DPI's consultant for vision impairment and DSB's specialist for transition services work together to identify areas to establish new programs and to provide consultation for the school systems in transition program development. The program specialist is responsible for maintaining a good relationship with DPI to ensure continued communication at the state level that will enhance the availability of services to students in their local school systems. DPI's consultant for vision impairment serves on DSB's state rehabilitation council.

## **B. Acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge**

### **Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.**

DVRS staff acquire and disseminate information, including knowledge from research and other sources, through conferences and trainings as described in the preceding section, 4(a), and through regularly scheduled meetings, in-person and online trainings, reports and publications, email distribution, monthly and quarterly newsletters, and through posting information on its intranet site, which includes sectional areas, policy updates, reports, case management system changes, and links to other information sources. Information is also shared at collaborative meetings among staff and leaders across the state. At the 2017 Statewide Manager's Meeting previously referenced, presentations were provided on the NC Partnership Plus Implementations, the WIOA Performance Accountability System, Poverty and Disability, and WIOA: Where We've Been, Where We're Headed. Online learning is facilitated through online meeting and video conferencing technology and online presentations through the NC Learning Center web portal. DVRS also retains subject matter experts on its staff who serve as statewide program specialists in the areas of deaf and hard of hearing; mental illness and substance abuse; developmental disabilities and brain injury; transition-age youth and business relations; community rehabilitation programs; and rehabilitation engineering. Domain-specific knowledge is shared by the program specialists with regional specialists and local office staff at meetings, trainings, reports and presentations.

In 2016 a Peer Advisory Leader (PAL) Mentoring Program was developed and implemented through the Professional Development and Training section to assist new employees with knowledge and understanding of the agency's mission and goals, and to aid in employee retention. 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. The PAL's program helps new employees build an optimistic attitude and motivation for job performance, productivity and acceptance of responsibility with confidence. PAL's also encourages socialization, networking beyond their local office, and a sense of belonging in professional and customer service relationships. Our PAL's Mentors provide continuous accessibility to NC DVRS resources in support of all employees. The first group of Peer Advisory Leaders successfully completed orientation on February 16, 2016. Seventy-three Peer Advisory Leader Mentor relationships were developed with new hires across the state in FY16-17. The second class of 42 PAL Mentors is currently underway. While the program is still new, it is deemed to be very valuable to our organizational success, and the results thus far are notable. Plans to continue the PAL's program is supported at the highest levels of the organization.

## **5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs**

**Describe how the designated state unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability or in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.**

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Combined Response**

DVRS 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 Membership Directory of the Carolina Association of Translators and Interpreters at <http://www.catiweb.org/> is presently used; however, it is not required that all qualified interpreters/translators be listed in this directory. All fundamental VR and IL forms are available in Spanish for individuals with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). The DVRS public website is also in Spanish for the section regarding VR Services to Consumers.

During federal fiscal year 2016-17, DVRS employed 14 counselors proficient in American Sign Language with caseloads specifically serving deaf and hard of hearing individuals. There were also 10 technicians, 3 Business Relations Representatives, 1 Human Service Coordinator, 1 Program Specialist, and 1 Assistive Technology consultant for the deaf who support these counselors and the consumers being served. Approximately 11 interpreting agencies and over 159 independent licensed interpreters contract with the Division and are paid out of this budget.

DSB has personnel and obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability or in appropriate modes of communication with applicants or eligible individuals.

The capability to produce Braille is available in all seven district office locations. Information can also be produced in large print for distribution as needed in the district offices with use of existing computer equipment. Mass production of Braille and large print material is done by the specialized communications unit located at DSB's state office to support DSB's employees who are blind or visually impaired. Information is put on tape for those who prefer this mode of communication by district office staff. Information is also shared using e-communications (e-mail, disks, etc.), and each office has a computer with speech access for staff who use this mode of communication. DSB has placed the policy and procedures manual on DSB's website. The website currently contains information about all of DSB's programs, frequently used forms, links to resources, the local office locations, and the staff directory.

DSB has a specialized program for persons who have both vision and hearing loss. The program consists of 5 specialists to serve the district offices and a statewide program specialist who manages the activities of this program. Each member of this program is skilled in use of sign language to enhance communication. The consultants work very closely with rehabilitation counselors on all cases where individuals have any degree of both vision and hearing loss. They provide information regarding specialized needs of these individuals, the availability of resources, and the arrangement of appropriate communication. This collaboration ensures the individual has the opportunity for maximum participation in a rehabilitation program of services that will lead to successful employment. DSB maintains a list of approved interpreters and dedicated funding for interpreting services through DHHS resources.

A list of qualified interpreters is maintained in each office, and these can be hired as required to enhance communication. When necessary, all offices have access to a state-contracted service for interpreting services available through use of a telephone. When an applicant or eligible individual meets with a staff member, the Telelanguage service is contacted, and they obtain a language specific interpreter by telephone. Through use of a speakerphone, the interpreter translates the conversations into a language that the individual and staff understand. Initial feedback from use of this program is that it is efficient and constructive to effective communication.

Also, DSB purchased Rosetta Stone-Spanish and made the program available to all staff in the agency. DSB has had 26 staff engage in the program since its inception. However, secondary to technical difficulties with the program, DSB is presently seeking an alternative that will be more accessible to all users.

## **6. Coordination of Personnel Development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act**

**As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.**

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Combined Response**

North Carolina's Secondary Education and Transition Services team consisting of members from DVRS, NC Department of Public Instruction (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.

DSB works with DPI to ensure all students who are blind or visually impaired have access to VR services while attending public school. DSB has 13 memorandums of agreements with school systems to provide transition programs for their students who are blind or visually impaired. These programs work with students who are blind or visually impaired, the school staff, and the parents or guardians as the student transitions from school to work, and continue working with them until they achieve their employment goals. The specialized programs are located in the following school systems: Cumberland County Schools, Mecklenburg County Schools, Pitt County Schools, Wilson County Schools, Edgecombe County Schools, Wake County Schools, Guilford County Schools, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, New Hanover County Schools, Pender County Schools, Onslow County Schools, Brunswick County Schools, and the Governor Morehead School for the Blind. Each program consists of a Rehabilitation Counselor and a Community Employment Specialist who are trained to work with students during their transition from school to work.

All Rehabilitation Counselors have received training on IDEA. Rehabilitation counselors in the district offices develop relationships with school systems and with teachers who serve students with blindness or visual impairments in their coverage area. They participate as members of the school's individualized education program (IEP) team as a provider of transition services for students who are blind or who are visually impaired. Consultation is provided to all rehabilitation counselors who include students on their caseload. The program specialist and the specialized transition counselors are available to advise counselors in areas such as participation on the IEP team and location of specialized resources for students as they transition from school to work.

DSB provides additional specialized services for students, such as the summer youth programs at the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind. One program called "SAVVY" (Summer Adjustment to Blindness Vital to Visually Impaired Youth) World Of Work provides career exploration, paid internships with job coaching, interviewing skills and counseling provided by DSB staff. One program, "SAVVY" Youth in Transition provides a classroom setting and field trips to develop skills and confidence for greater independence, specific life skills, basic living skills, social development, vocational and study skills and independent living. Another program called "SAVVY" College Prep provides "college survival skills," such as independent study habits and maximum use of any assistive technology.

In addition, DSB often provides Youth Mini Centers in the communities throughout the state in coordination with the 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.

#### **(j) Statewide Assessment**

- a. Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the VR services needs of those:**
  - i. with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;**
  - ii. who are minorities;**
  - iii. who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;**
  - iv. who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and**
  - v. who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.**
- b. Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State; and**
- c. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.**

#### **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

To address the mandated requirements, the data collection and analysis portion of the DVRS CSNA focused on surveys with consumers and VR staff and other stakeholders. These data were supplemented with data on the demographics of people with disabilities, employment and labor statistics, other components of the North Carolina's Workforce Development System, and community rehabilitation programs.

The survey data presented in this report includes two sets of surveys: one set of surveys was conducted from mid-August through mid-September 2013 specifically for the purpose of the CSNA. These surveys were sent electronically to VR consumers, VR staff members, and also to leaders of consumer advocacy groups and WDB Directors, who served as key informants. The self-administered electronic questionnaire was delivered using the NC DHHS online survey data collection tool, called SurveyMax II. The survey responses, which were mostly free-text because the survey consisted mainly of open-ended questions, were first coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS Text Analytics for Surveys, with the results reviewed a second time for validation.

Other survey data incorporated into the CSNA report were collected for other program development, planning, and evaluation purposes that were applicable to the CSNA. These include (a) the results of our ongoing VR consumer satisfaction surveys and (b) the results from surveys of VR staff and Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) conducted to address the need to establish, develop or improve

community rehabilitation programs within the state through a change from an hourly-rate fee-for-service payment system to a milestone-based payment system. This section provides an overview of the surveys conducted specifically for the CSNA.

### ***DVRS VR Consumer CSNA Survey***

Approximately 5,000 VR Program consumers with active or recently closed cases and known email addresses received electronic surveys asking them to: (a) Identify their most important, second-most important, and third-most important VR needs for getting a job and keeping a job; (b) Rate the ability of the VR Program to help them with each of these needs; and (c) Let DVRS know what they think the VR Program could do to help with each of these needs.

There were also questions for the VR consumer to let us know whether they were currently working and if there was anything else we could do to help them. In total, 867 VR consumers responded to the survey, of which 684 (79%) provided responses that identified one or more specific needs. The remaining 21% were responses indicating the client didn't know or didn't have any needs, or were off-target in that the response didn't address the question that was asked. The level of participation was comparable to that of the VR consumer satisfaction survey, and similarly self-selection and the ability to access an electronic survey resulted in respondents who were generally somewhat older, were more often women, were more often not of a minority race or ethnicity, and were more often clients with physical disability or chronic medical condition rather than a cognitive or psychosocial disability.

- Individuals of Hispanic or minority racial background accounted 38.5% of survey respondents and 52% of eligible VR consumers served.
- Survey respondents were older, with a median age at application of 43; whereas the median age of all eligible consumers with open VR cases was 34. The proportion of survey respondents who were transition age youth was about 18%, which is less than half that of the population of eligible consumers, which is 38%, and the proportion of respondents ages 55 and older was 19%, or more than double that of the general population of VR consumers, which is about 9%.
- Women with disabilities accounted for 57% of the survey respondents, and 45% of the total population of eligible VR consumers.
- Individuals with a cognitive or psychosocial impairment account for 42% of the survey respondents but 69% of the total population of eligible VR consumers.
- The proportion of respondents with significant or most significant disabilities (86%) was close to that of the total population of eligible VR consumers (84%).

### ***DVRS VR Staff CSNA Survey***

DVRS staff members received electronic surveys consisting of two parts that respectively addressed the objectives of (a) assessing the needs of individuals with disabilities, including those with significant and most significant disabilities, and their need for supported employment services, and (b) the needs of individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program. These sets of questions were intended to meet only two of the 34 CFR §361.29 requirements, although several responses overlapped with the other report requirements in that they addressed the need to collaborate

with other Workforce Investment Act agencies and establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs. The survey was presented in two sections. The first part of the survey requested that respondents: Identify the most critical, second-most critical, and third-most critical needs toward becoming employed or continuing employment for people with disabilities in North Carolina, and for each: (a) Rate how DVRS responds to that need; (b) Identify the major gaps/barriers DVRS experiences when fulfilling this need; and (c) Recommend a solution for DVRS to overcome these barriers.

The second component of the survey requested that the respondents identify special populations of people with disabilities in North Carolina they considered to be unserved or underserved, the specific VR needs of these populations, and what DVRS can do to increase outreach to these unserved or underserved populations.

Surveys were completed by 370 VR staff members representing all aspects of service provision, including various levels of management, direct service staff, rehabilitation specialists and consultants, and support staff.

### **DVRS Staff Survey Respondents by Role**

<b>DVRS Staff Role</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Managers (Regional Directors, Assistant Regional Directors, Unit Managers)	27	7.3%
Casework Supervisors (Asst. Unit Managers, Counselors in Charge)	33	8.9%
Rehabilitation Counselors (RC-1 and RC-2)	137	37.0%
Rehabilitation Specialists and Consultants*	75	20.3%
Casework Technicians and Assistants	37	10.0%
Administrative Support (Office Assistants and Lead Office Assistants)	45	12.2%
Other VR Staff (State Office and Vocational Facility staff members)	16	4.3%
Total	370	100.0%

\* Includes Rehabilitation Engineers, Vocational Evaluators, Benefits Counselors, Employment Specialists, State Office Program Specialists, CRP Specialists, Quality Development Specialists, Rehabilitation Education Specialists, and the DVRS Small Business Specialist and Medical Consultant.

### **Advocacy Organization Key Informant Survey**

Electronic surveys were sent to disability advocacy organization leaders with a request to forward to their staff members as they felt appropriate. The survey consisted of two main components that respectively addressed the objectives of assessing the needs of individuals with significant and most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services and the needs of individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program. The first part of the survey requested that respondents: Identify the most critical, second-most critical, and third-most critical needs toward becoming employed or continuing employment for people with disabilities in North Carolina, and for each: (a) Rate how DVRS responds to that need; (b) Identify the major gaps/barriers DVRS experiences when fulfilling this need; and (c) Recommend a solution for DVRS to overcome these barriers.

The second component of the survey requested that the respondents identify special populations of people with disabilities in North Carolina they considered to be unserved or underserved, the specific VR needs of these populations, and what DVRS can do to increase outreach to these unserved or underserved populations. A total of 22 survey responses were received representing members of the following agencies and organizations: Information Technology Accessibility Working Group at NC State University; North Carolina Psychological Association; Disability Resource Center; Disability Rights, North Carolina; North Carolina Association of Peer Specialists (NCAPS); North Carolina Mental Health Consumers' Organization; National Alliance on Mental Illness, North Carolina; Cardinal Innovations

Healthcare Solutions; NC DHHS - Division of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse.

Members from these organizations advocate for employment, community involvement, and accessibility on behalf of: Individuals who are blind and visually impaired; Adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities; Adults with mental illness and substance abuse disorders, and their families; All people with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities.

### ***Workforce Development Board Director Survey***

Electronic surveys were sent to the Board Directors of each of North Carolina's 23 Local WDBs to assess the VR needs of individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide Workforce Development System (other than the VR program), as identified by such individuals and personnel assisting such individuals through other components of the statewide Workforce Development System. Five of the 23 Board Directors agreed to serve as key informants by participating in the survey.

The survey instrument was structured similarly to that sent to advocacy organizations in that it consisted of two main components with the first part asking the Board Director to identify the most critical, second-most critical, and third-most critical needs toward becoming employed or continuing employment for people with disabilities in North Carolina, and for each: (a) Rate how well they thought their component of the NC Workforce Development System responded to that need; (b) Identify the major gaps/barriers the NC Workforce Development System experiences when fulfilling this need; and (c) Identify what their component of the NC Workforce Development System could do to better address these barriers.

The second component of the survey requested that the Board Directors (a) Identify challenges the NC Workforce Development System as a whole faces when fulfilling the needs of people with disabilities; (b) Identify what they thought could be done to overcome these challenges; and (c) Identify what they thought DVRS and the State Rehabilitation Council could do to help in overcoming these challenges.

### **Summary of the Findings Regarding the VR Needs of People with Disabilities**

This section provides a summary of the findings regarding the VR needs of North Carolinians with disabilities. These data were achieved through the surveys with consumers, VR staff, and other stakeholders who served as key informants. The findings from the surveys are supplemented with secondary data from multiple sources. A more detailed account of the survey data collection process and findings is presented in complete report.

The most critical needs of VR consumers are related to employment services, such as job search and placement assistance, and that physical and mental restoration services and training services needs are often antecedents to job placement and retention. The need for these services is embedded in the context of two overlapping environments: (a) A labor market environment consisting of various employment-related factors, including labor market demand-side factors, such as the availability of jobs, wages, benefits, and career progression, which may be influential on supply-side factors, such as the VR Consumer's motivation to work and the type and level of training the VR client will require; and (b) A supportive environment that provides the needs for various types of support services, most notably transportation, but also assistance with meeting basic needs such as housing and utilities, work clothes, childcare, and other support services. Some of these services can be sponsored through the VR Program, but other community resources may also provide these services until the VR consumer achieves economic stability.

### **Results of the VR Consumer CSNA Survey of Vocational Rehabilitation Needs**

The most frequently mentioned needs of individuals with disabilities, as identified by VR consumers, are listed in the table below. Job search and placement assistance, including workplace accommodations and help with job applications and interviewing skills, ranks first as having the most responses, followed by training services; transportation; physical and mental restoration services, including medication and

medical supplies and equipment; on-the-job supports, such as peer mentors and job coaches; and other supports, such as help with housing, utilities, childcare, and work clothes and shoes.

### Major Categories of Need Identified by VR Consumers on the CSNA Survey

<b>Category of Need*</b>	<b>Total Responses (Total = 684)</b>		<b>Most Critical Need</b>		<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Most Critical Need</b>		<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Most Critical Need</b>	
	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>
Job search & placement assistance	287	42.0%	214	74.6%	50	17.4%	23	8.0%
Training	175	25.6%	128	73.1%	36	20.6%	11	6.3%
Transportation	136	19.9%	76	55.9%	44	32.4%	16	11.8%
Physical and mental restoration, including medication and medical equipment	107	15.6%	65	60.7%	33	30.8%	9	8.4%
On-the-job supports	34	5.0%	17	50.0%	12	35.3%	5	14.7%
Other support services	32	4.7%	13	40.6%	13	40.6%	6	18.8%

\*Multiple needs can be identified from a single open-ended response.

### Results of the VR Staff CSNA Survey of Client Vocational Rehabilitation Needs

The most frequently mentioned needs of individuals with disabilities, as identified by VR staff members, are listed in the table below. Transportation ranks first as having the most responses, followed by employer and community awareness, training services, VR counseling and guidance, including benefits counseling, access to healthcare, including mental healthcare, and the overall labor market and economy, which has disproportionately impacted many rural areas in North Carolina. The number and percent of responses for each category is provided in the table below.

### Major Categories of Need Identified through the VR Staff CSNA Survey

<b>Category of Need*</b>	<b>Total Responses (Total = 370)</b>		<b>Most Critical Need</b>		<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Most Critical Need</b>		<b>3<sup>rd</sup> Most Critical Need</b>	
	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>% Total</b>
Transportation	206	55.7%	94	45.6%	67	32.5%	45	21.8%
Employer / community education & awareness	169	45.7%	83	49.1%	52	30.8%	34	20.1%
Training services	95	25.7%	36	37.9%	33	34.7%	26	27.4%

Category of Need*	Total Responses (Total = 370)		Most Critical Need		2 <sup>nd</sup> Most Critical Need		3 <sup>rd</sup> Most Critical Need	
	Count	% Total	Count	% Total	Count	% Total	Count	% Total
VR counseling & guidance	94	25.4%	49	52.1%	14	14.9%	31	33.0%
Access to healthcare	91	24.6%	25	27.5%	36	39.6%	30	33.0%
Labor market & economy	89	24.1%	23	25.8%	48	53.9%	18	20.2%

\*Multiple needs can be identified from a single open-ended response.

### ***Transportation Services***

This category was the most frequently mentioned, with 206 (56%) of the 370 VR staff members indicating this need. Of the 206 responses identifying this need, 94 (45.6%) identified it as the most critical need, 67 (32.5%) identified it as the second most critical, and 45 (21.9%) as the third most critical VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities. Responses in this category address the need for transportation, especially with regard to accessibility and lack of public transportation availability in rural areas and when work shifts are not regular, and also with regard to the cost of private transportation, including the costs of maintaining a vehicle and insurance.

#### **Major service gaps or barriers DVRS experienced when fulfilling this need were:**

- **Public transportation services:** Lack of funding and no public transportation in rural areas. Many NC cities do not have public transportation available, and those that do, do not serve rural areas. In cities that do have transportation, the system only operates on a fixed schedule and doesn't meet the needs of consumers that have to work weekends or the night shift. Work locations may not be close to bus routes.
- **Private transportation services:** There is a lack of private providers willing to provide transportation at a reasonable rate, and consumers do not have the money to pay someone to drive them to and from work.
- **Personal transportation:** Many VR consumers don't have a license and/or vehicles, and have no family member or friend to provide transportation. They have lost their license due to previous substance dependence, cannot obtain a license due to their disabling condition, cannot drive due to their condition, and/or cannot drive due to the side-effects of necessary medications. Some VR consumers who are able to drive cannot afford to because they are on limited income (SSI, SSDI, etc.) or have not had income due to their condition.
- **Vehicle modifications:** The current policy regarding agency contribution toward the cost of vehicles for modification purposes is the major barrier to someone who needs to purchase a modified vehicle.
- **VR policy isn't adjusted for geographical differences:** Tighter policy controls on transportation costs/payment which disregard individual geographical needs. When cases are looked at for compliance and fiscal management it is with a critical eye toward this and other types of maintenance expenses which may or may not occur in other geographical or economic conditions/situations.
- **VR sponsorship of transportation is a short-term solution:** DVRS is not presently set up to provide ongoing transportation services for individuals after they have been employed. Sponsored transportation is meant as a short-term solution.
- **VR sponsorship of transportation is a time-consuming process, and sometimes unreliable:** Even when we can justify sponsorship of public or private transportation services, often the process is

time consuming and the provider unreliable, thus creating a major delay in requested and agreed upon services.

**Recommended solutions** for DVRS to overcome a lack of transportation as a barrier to employment for people with disabilities included:

- Increase vendorships with private transportation companies: Engage in more vendorships with private transportation companies to assist in helping employees with disabilities get to/from work.
- Promote small business opportunities for consumers: Encourage clients who are interested in small business to invest in transportation to become VR vendors. Help consumers that are able to start their own business in supplying transportation services in those rural areas that are underserved. We could use state vehicles and pay consumers as drivers, and consumers could also be employed to do maintenance and repairs on the cars -- the process could be used for training clients.
- Collaborate with local transit authorities: The local areas will have to develop affordable transportation, so work closely with the local transit authority staff. Partner with local transportation authorities to provide free or reduced fares to people with identified disabilities to and from work, and to provide services at nights and on weekends. Advocate on behalf of people with disabilities regarding the need for accessible transportation. DVRS can serve on a task force or community forum to address concerns pertaining to transportation, and inform their counties of potential grants or express concerns pertaining to transportation for people with disabilities and see how the community can come up with a solution.
- VR Policy Changes: Separate transportation costs for clients from the general 'maintenance' category. This could be a more flexible expense that truly reflects a regional or local need. Make the policies specific and eliminate the gray areas so that they are consistently applied. Increase funding to expand the purchase of vehicles for modification purposes.
- Speed-Up the Process: Reduce time to approve special transportation requests.

### ***The Need for Community and Employer Education and Employer Willingness to Hire and Accommodate Workers with Disabilities***

One of the major themes for this question related to the issue of public and employer perceptions of VR and people with disabilities, and specifically with regard to their willingness to work with our agency and hire our consumers. Of the 370 VR staff members who responded to the survey, 169 (46%) indicated this need. Of these, 83 (49%) identified it as the most critical need, 52 (31%) identified it as the second most critical, and 34 (20%) as the third most critical VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities.

Responses in this category relate to employer attitudes towards people with disabilities, and their willingness to hire people with disabilities, including job creation, job carving and making accommodations. Responses in this category also address larger societal and cultural myths and stereotypes about people with disabilities. VR staff members identified a need for public awareness and education regarding employment for people with disabilities; business relations; and the dual-customer approach

### **Major service gaps or barriers DVRS experiences when fulfilling this need were:**

- Negative perceptions towards people with disabilities: Based on experiences of VR staff, they observe that public and employer perceptions of individuals with disabilities were a major barrier. This included VR consumers with an obvious disability who can't get past human resources because it is assumed that individual can't perform the required functions of the position based on

physical appearance. Other reasons included that people are not familiar with, therefore not comfortable around individuals with disabilities. This barrier of negative attitudes and perceptions is described in terms of *misinformation*, *myths*, *stigma* and *discrimination*, and also *risk* -- that employers feel that it's a risk to hire someone with a disability because the person may become a liability to their business. The issue of risk was said to be more applicable to smaller employers that were resistant to taking chances or making accommodations. The preference for an employee without a disability was also said to relate to higher job competition in areas where unemployment was higher, in which there were many applicants for one job opening, placing our consumers at a considerable disadvantage.

- Limited VR resources for dual customer approach, and employer outreach and education: VR staff members wrote that implementation of the dual customer approach, and other employer outreach and education efforts were limited by VR resources, including limited use of social media. Staff members wrote that the business relations representatives were essential to their efforts, but that their catchment areas were too large, and that they could not do it all themselves. VR staff wrote that they needed more assistance with the employer outreach and did not have enough time to market VR and services to employers as they should. They also wrote they needed more leadership for this function in DVRS, best practices in its implementation, and more effective management and teamwork in many offices to effectively use the resources they have. Currently, there is no outreach plan, unit offices have little or no funds for advertising to employers, and that the materials they do have are out-of-date. This sentiment wasn't across the board, as some staff members noted that some counselors are actively building relationships with employers and educating them, but that it was not being consistently done by everyone.

**Recommended solutions** for DVRS to reduce negative public and employer perceptions and attitudes toward people with disabilities, and increase employers' willingness to hire our consumer included:

- Having an outreach plan and expanding the outreach and disability awareness and education for employers and the community. Recommendations included educating policymakers, and increasing involvement with business associations, chambers of commerce, workforce boards, and other organizations;
- Marketing VR to employers through traditional and newer channels of communication, including social media; and
- Increasing outreach capacity through counselors and business relations representatives, including in-person and electronic networking activities. The means of increasing outreach capacity included paperwork reduction and increasing the number of counselors and casework technicians to reduce caseload size and allow counselors more time for outreach activities, in addition to increasing the number and availability of business relations representatives.

### ***The Need for More Jobs and Higher Paying Jobs in a Changing Economy***

Closely related to the need for employers to be willing to hire individuals with disabilities is the need for a better labor economy, with more job openings, full-time work, and higher wages. Of the 370 VR staff members who responded to the survey, 89 (24%) indicated this need. Of these, 23 (26%) identified it as the most critical need, 48 (54%) identified it as the second most critical, and 18 (20%) as the third most critical VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities.

Responses in this category relate to a lagging economy and shortage of jobs, particularly in rural areas, and that the jobs that are available are often part-time or low-wage positions. The imbalance between labor-market supply and demand allows employers to be more selective in their hiring, often bypassing VR consumers, and especially those with criminal backgrounds.

**Major service gaps or barriers** DVRS experiences when fulfilling this need were related to high unemployment and changes in the types of jobs that are available, which is often unfavorable for VR consumers with work limitation. VR staff members also reported that employers can be more

selective in their hiring, and may be resistant to taking the time or assess the costs for job carving, on-the-job training, job coaches, or additional healthcare coverage. A common theme was that many of these factors were due to economic conditions.

**Recommended solutions** for DVRS to increase employment opportunities for our consumers in the face of a declining job market for low-skill workers and workers with employment limitations or who require accommodations:

- Employer incentives and advocacy for workforce development, including employer education on the value of hiring workers with disabilities and incentives, such as subsidized insurance, that would motivate employers to hire VR consumers and tax breaks that would attract new businesses to NC.
- Increased networking, outreach and business relations to make the connections between employers and VR consumers receiving job search assistance and placement services.

### ***The Need for Job Skills Training and Education for VR Consumers***

Of the 370 VR staff members who responded to the survey, 95 (26%) indicated job skills training and education were an unmet need. Of these, 36 (38%) identified it as the most critical need, 33 (35%) identified it as the second most critical, and 26 (27%) as the third most critical VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities. Responses in this category are specific to vocational or job skills training and academic education, and do not include interpersonal or soft skills training, or employability training on how to self-market and search for jobs, which are included in the category for job search and placement assistance.

**Major service gaps or barriers** DVRS experiences when fulfilling this need most generally in terms of:

- Lack of resources: funding, staff, and programs within DVRS to assist individuals with obtaining the necessary skills to transition into employment.
- Procedural barriers, mainly policies on transferrable work skills, the vendor approval process, and the approval process for training services, which was described as “layered.”
- The short-term measure of a successful outcome rather than a focus on career employment.
- Client motivation to participate in training programs.

**Recommended solutions** for DVRS to increase or improve training services included:

- Increase collaboration with community colleges and have a VR representative on campus.
- Expand training programs, including those administered through WorkSource East and WorkSource West.
- Sponsor GED completion for adult high-school dropouts, and provide assistance with mileage to for clients to travel to GED/HSD sites, and also assistance with loan of computer/laptop or assistance with onsite computers at VR offices for consumers to access training.
- Help consumers identify resources for training or companies that are willing to provide training.
- Review vendor approval policies and evaluate the criteria for vendor approval, especially schools or training sites.
- Develop business relationships with employers and provide incentives for on-the-job training and internships.

### ***The Need for Access to Healthcare and Mental Health Services***

Of the 370 VR staff members who responded to the survey, 91 (25%) indicated that access to healthcare and mental health services, including dental care and VR sponsored restoration was a critical need. Of these, 25 (27%) identified it as the most critical need, 36 (40%) identified it as the second most critical, and 30 (33%) as the third most critical VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities. Responses in this category refer to medical and mental health treatment, including medications and treatment for substance abuse.

**Major service gaps or barriers** DVRS experiences when fulfilling this need most generally in terms of:

- Lack of resources, mainly community resources and the NC mental health system.
- The trend of employers hiring part-time workers to avoid having to provide medical insurance.
- VR policies and focus, which include limitations on the provision of restorative services, although staff members also reported an increased emphasis on placement over restoration.

**Recommended solutions** for DVRS to increase access to healthcare and mental healthcare services:

- VR staff training on restoration policies.
- Tele-psychiatry for lower cost mental health services.
- Advocacy.
- VR staff awareness about companies that assist with prescriptions, grant writing, and the newer processes/eligibility requirements for certain services through social services and local management entities.
- Increased collaboration with providers and the development of new programs.

### ***The Need for Counseling and Guidance, Including Benefits Counseling***

Of the 370 VR staff members who responded to the survey, 94 (25%) indicated that counseling and guidance, including motivational counseling and benefits counseling was one of the three most critical VR-related needs. Of these, 49 (52%) identified it as the most critical need, 14 (15%) identified it as the second most critical, and 31 (33%) as the third most critical VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities. Responses in this category refer to counseling and guidance by our VR counselors, including career counseling with referrals to other appropriate services, and also to the need for benefits counseling and motivational counseling to increase client motivation to return to work. Responses concerning client awareness of available services and willingness to return to work are also included in this category. Client motivation, awareness, self-esteem, cooperation, and work-willingness were most typically addressed as the need, gap or barrier to employment to which increasing VRs capacity for benefits counseling, VR counseling and guidance, including motivational counseling, and referrals to other appropriate was presented as a solution.

**Major service gaps or barriers** DVRS experiences when fulfilling this need most generally in terms of: (a) consumers' needs for VR services, but lack of motivation to become employed, some of which is driven by disincentives to work, including the potential loss of SSI, SSDI or other public benefits; and (b) the lack of resources, including time, additional counselor positions, and expertise required for better counseling and guidance. The lack of resources was said to be in part due to counselor vacancies, lack of support staff, and attention to non-counseling related activities, such as focusing on meeting performance measures and processing paperwork.

**Recommended solutions** for DVRS to increase its capacity for counseling and guidance and help further motivate consumers to enter or reenter the workforce, particularly those receiving SSI or SSDI benefits included increasing VR counseling capacity through: (a) smaller caseloads; (b) paperwork reduction; (c) a

decreased focus on performance measures and increase attention to holistic counseling; (d) hiring additional counselors and support staff; and increasing the quality of VR counselors through training and higher salaries. These were said to attract and retain high quality counselors and allow the counselors more one-on-one time with the consumer to provide counseling and guidance, including motivational counseling. The most frequently mentioned solution for increasing client motivation for our consumers receiving public benefits, such as SSI or SSDI, was to increase benefits counseling services.

### **Results of the Advocacy Key Informant CSNA Survey Regarding VR Needs**

In response to the question of what were the critical needs toward becoming employed or continuing employment for people with disabilities in North Carolina, the major categories of responses were:

#### ***The Need for Employer Willingness to Hire and Retain Workers with Disabilities***

This category had the most frequent responses, with 18 (82%) of 22 advocates indicating this need as the most critical (33%), second most critical (45%), or third most critical (22%) employment-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities. This category includes responses related to employer willingness to address physical and perceived obstacles; disadvantageous job competition between people with and without disabilities, especially in areas or during periods of higher unemployment; and social stigma or negatively biased attitudes towards people with disabilities by employers and peer employees without disabilities, including a response related to the “double whammy” of people with a disability having a criminal background.

#### ***The Need for Job Supports, Including Long-Term Supports***

This category had the second-most frequent number of responses, with 8 (36%) of 22 advocates indicating the need for additional job coaching and job supports, including peer supports was the most critical (62.5%), second most critical (25%), or third most critical (12.5%) VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities.

#### ***The Need for Transportation Services***

This category also had the second-most frequent number of responses with 8 (36%) of 22 advocates indicating this need as the most critical (75%), second most critical (12.5%), or third most critical (12.5%) VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities. Responses in this category address the need for transportation, especially with regard to accessibility and lack of public transportation availability in rural areas, and when work shifts are not regular.

#### ***The Need for Staff Development and More Empathy for VR Consumers by Providers***

This category was discretely identifiable with 3 (14%) of 22 advocates indicating a need for sensitivity and empathy among service providers, such as clinicians, and particularly with regard to consumers with addiction disorders. There was one response each (33%) as this being most, second most, or third most critical VR-related need for North Carolinians with disabilities.

### **Workforce Development Board Director Survey of VR Needs for People with Disabilities**

WDB Directors were asked to identify the critical needs of people with disabilities in North Carolina toward becoming employed or continuing employment. The major categories of need, the average rating regarding how well the WDBs respond to these needs, the barriers they face, and proposed solutions are summarized in the table below.

## Workforce Development Board Director Key Informant Responses

VR Need	Rating*	Barriers	Solutions
Client Training and Job Skills Development	3.4	The system doesn't specialize in serving folks with disabilities.	Training for staff in the different types of disabilities.
		Getting employers who allow flexible working schedules.	Continue to market our services to employers.
		Lack of partnerships with Vocational Rehabilitation to serve people with disabilities.	One Stop Center staff can refer customers to VR. Continue to build rapport with our other Workforce partners. Bridge the gap with employers.
		Clients may not be aware of the other services available (WIA).	VR can present information about One Stop Centers (NCWorks Career Centers) and WIA programs to customers.
More employers to hire and accommodate people with disabilities	3.0	Lack of funding to educate business on the hidden workforce available.	Continued partnerships with agencies that specialize in providing services for those with disabilities
		Lack of employer knowledge of available accommodations that can be made.	Train our staff, educate employers, and promote hiring of individuals with disabilities to employers.
Transportation and other Support Services	3.3	Insufficient public transportation.	Provide more assistance with transportation besides public transportation.
		Lack of funding for support services.	Provide funding.
		Lack of coordination of services.	Coordinate resources and have a coordinated plan.
Training and resources related to Assistive Technology for One-Stop Centers	3.0	Lack of funding and training.	Have funding to purchase, build infrastructure, and install technology that assist individuals with disabilities

\* Ratings are from the Workforce Development Board's response to these needs on a 5-point scale, with 5 being "excellent." Ratings between 3 and 4 indicate "average."

### Minorities and Other Underserved Populations of Individuals with Disabilities

This portion of the CSNA is an assessment of minorities and other populations of North Carolinians with disabilities that identified as unserved or underserved by the VR Program. The first subsection provides a comparison between eligible VR consumers served in federal fiscal year 2013 and the population of North Carolinians with disabilities, as identified through the 2012 American Community Survey (ACS). The second subsection identifies unserved and underserved populations through surveys with VR staff members and advocacy group key informants. The findings of the latter reveal some of the limitations inherent in the ACS data. Specifically, with ACS data, the population of people with mental illness, which was identified as an underserved population by 76% of VR staff members, is not discernible from the population of people with intellectual disabilities, which, comparatively, was identified as an underserved population by 15% of VR staff members. Based on the wording of the disability questions on the ACS, which do not address interpersonal and behavioral impairments, including difficulty coping,

the population of people with behavioral health issues may be significantly underreported in the ACS data.

Another limitation of the ACS data in defining the population frame for VR consumers is that the ACS questionnaire does not include any questions regarding criminal history, which was identified in the CSNA surveys as a key data point in defining barriers to employment and an underserved VR client population. The findings of the CSNA surveys, in this regard, are supported by VR client data: 22% of eligible VR clients eligible for services during the triennial CSNA period have a record of criminal conviction or a recent arrest with charges pending, 18% of eligible VR clients served over the past five years have a prior record with the NC Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice, meaning they were convicted of a violation of North Carolina law, with sentences ranging from probation served in the community to incarceration in one of the state's prison facilities; and 7.5% were on probation or parole at the time they apply for VR services.

### **DVRS and State Disability Demographics from the 2012 ACS**

This section provides comparisons between the NC population of individuals with disabilities, as defined on the 2012 ACS and eligible VR consumers served October 1, 2012 through September 30, 2013. The data from the ACS was obtained via the Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute (Retrieved from [www.disabilitystatistics.org](http://www.disabilitystatistics.org)). The ACS defines four broad categories of disability from a "yes" response to the following questions:

- Hearing Disability (asked of all ages): *Is this person deaf or does he/she have serious difficulty hearing?*
- Visual Disability (asked of all ages): *Is this person blind or does he/she have serious difficulty seeing even when wearing glasses?*
- Cognitive Disability (asked of persons ages 5 or older): *Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?*
- Ambulatory Disability (asked of persons ages 5 or older): *Does this person have serious difficulty walking or climbing stairs?*

Additionally, there are two separate questions that identify self-care and independent living disabilities. The category, *Any Disability*, includes a "yes" response to one or more individual disability types.

In developing comparable categories from the RSA-911 impairment codes, Hearing Disability included impairment codes 03-08; Visual Disability included impairment codes 01, 02, and 08; Cognitive Disability included impairment codes 09 and 17-19; and Ambulatory Disability included impairment codes 13-16. A significant limitation of this crosswalk is that it is somewhat of a forced fit of the RSA-911 impairment categories. There is also a loss of granularity, such as with a lack of distinction between mental illness and intellectual disabilities.

### ***Comparison of VR Consumers and the NC Population by Age and Disability***

The following table shows a comparison of the 2013 American Community Survey (ACS) estimated population of North Carolinians with disabilities and eligible VR clients served during federal fiscal year 2013 by age group and disability type, and the percent of the state's population of individuals with disabilities served by the VR Program in federal fiscal year 2013, which is sometimes referred to as a population penetration rate.

In North Carolina, the estimated prevalence of disability increases with age, as was found in the 2010 CSNA. For 16 to 20-year-olds, prevalence is 5.8%, and among people ages 21-64 the prevalence rate is 12.0%. These rates are lower than were reported in the 2010 CSNA, but this is due to changes in the wording of ACS questionnaire items and not a reduction in the actual prevalence of disability.

Among 16-20 year-olds, the population penetration rate is 28.5% overall, and 34.6% for youth with cognitive disabilities, which is a large VR consumer population segment, accounting for 18% of all VR clients. The population penetration rate is less than 1% for youth with visual disabilities, though this may be due to services available through other programs, including the NC DHHS VR Program offered through DSB. The penetration rate is 6.5% for youth with hearing disabilities, which may suggest additional efforts could be made to serve this population, although services provided through the North Carolina School for the Deaf, and DSDHH may also be available.

In the population of working age adults, ages 21-64, the penetration rate is much lower: 6.9% for any disability, and less than 5% for each of the individual disabilities types except cognitive disabilities, which was 12.2%, when including adults with psychosocial disabilities. Individuals with cognitive and psychosocial disabilities account for nearly 71% of all adult VR consumers. Although the population penetration rate was considerably lower for adults with other types of disabilities, this does not necessarily indicate that these groups are underserved. Excepting CRP services, most other direct cost services sponsored by the North Carolina VR Program are subject to a financial needs test, and so the program is more tailored toward providing CRP services for individuals with cognitive and psychosocial impairments, and restoration and training to only the subgroup of people with physical and sensory impairments who are financially eligible for such services. Additionally, many people with physical disabilities find jobs for themselves independent of the VR Program. Other factors, such as a criminal history, which is more prevalent among VR consumers with cognitive and psychosocial disabilities, create additional barriers to employment.

**DVRS VR Consumers and ACS Population Estimates by Age and Disability Type**

Age Group <sup>1</sup>	Disability Type <sup>2</sup>	Estimated Population of North Carolinians with Disabilities (ACS 2013)				NC VR Clients Eligible for Services with Cases in Service, federal fiscal year 2013		Percent of NC Population Served by VR in federal fiscal year 2013
		Prevalence		Count	% Total	Count	% Total	
		Rate	MoE <sup>3</sup>					
Ages 16-20	Any Disability	5.8%	0.65%	39,400	100.0%	11,224	100.0%	28.5%
	Visual	1.1%	3.29%	7,100	18.0%	45	0.4%	0.6%
	Hearing	0.6%	3.29%	3,800	9.6%	248	2.2%	6.5%
	Ambulatory	0.8%	3.29%	5,200	13.2%	1,008	9.0%	19.4%
	Cognitive	4.5%	0.58%	30,500	77.4%	10,543	93.9%	34.6%
Ages 21-64	Any Disability	12.0%	0.31%	680,800	100.0%	47,216	100.0%	6.9%
	Visual	2.3%	0.14%	127,500	18.7%	428	0.9%	0.3%
	Hearing	2.3%	0.15%	130,500	19.2%	2,325	4.9%	1.8%
	Ambulatory	6.7%	0.24%	379,900	55.8%	17,044	36.1%	4.5%
	Cognitive	4.8%	0.21%	273,800	40.2%	33,346	70.6%	12.2%

<sup>1</sup> VR client age on 9/30/2013.

<sup>2</sup> Individuals can have more than more disability type.

<sup>3</sup> Margin of Error (MoE) is a measure of the degree of sampling variability at the 90% confidence level. This means that there is a 90% certainty that the actual value is between the reported rate plus or minus the margin of error. Smaller population estimates are less precise and will have a higher margin of error.

### ***Comparison of DVRS VR Consumers and the NC Population by Minority Background and Disability***

The following table shows a comparison of the 2013 ACS estimated population of North Carolinians with disabilities and eligible VR clients served during federal fiscal year 2013 by minority race and ethnicity, and disability type, and the population penetration rate or percent of the state's population of individuals with disabilities served by the VR Program in federal fiscal year 2013.

In federal fiscal year 2013 about 52% of all eligible VR consumers were of a minority race or ethnicity, and 90% of minorities were Black or African American. The prevalence of disability among African Americans, ages 16-64, is estimated at 13.9%. The penetration rate for the population of African Americans with disabilities is 14.7% for any disability; 27.7% for cognitive disabilities; 7.9% for ambulatory disabilities; and 3.9% for hearing disabilities.

Comparatively, the prevalence of disability among American Indians is the highest at 15.7%, and the penetration rate for this population is lower than for African Americans, with 9.6% for any disability; 16.2% for cognitive disabilities; 5.0% for ambulatory disabilities; and 2.7% for hearing disabilities.

The prevalence rates for Hispanics and Asians are considerably lower than for African Americans and American Indians, at 5% and 3.8%, respectively. The reason for this was explored in the 2010 CSNA, which identified US nativity as a factor associated with higher prevalence of disability. However, although the prevalence rates are low, the penetration rates for these populations are also very low. For Hispanics, the penetration rate is 6.4% for any disability; 11.3% for cognitive disabilities; 4.2% for ambulatory disabilities; and 2.1% for hearing disabilities. For Asians, the penetration rate is 5.1% for any disability; 12.5% for cognitive disabilities; 4.4% for ambulatory disabilities; and 4.6% for hearing disabilities. VR Staff members identified non-English speaking populations, including Hispanics and Asians, as unserved, and these data identify these groups as having the lowest population penetration rates.

## DVRS VR Consumers and ACS Population Estimates by Minority Race and Disability Type

Race or Ethnicity <sup>1</sup>	Disability Type <sup>2</sup>	Estimated Population of North Carolinians with Disabilities Ages 16-64 (ACS 2013)				NC VR Clients Eligible for Services with Cases in Service, federal fiscal year 2013		Percent of NC Population Served by VR in federal fiscal year 2013
		Prevalence		Count	% Total	Count	% Total	
		Rate	MoE <sup>3</sup>					
Black or African American	Any Disability	13.9%	0.68%	192,800	100.0%	28,345	100.0%	14.7%
	Visual	2.9%	0.33%	40,300	20.9%	276.0	1.0%	0.7%
	Hearing	1.8%	3.29%	24,300	12.6%	938.00	3.3%	3.9%
	Ambulatory	7.7%	0.52%	106,300	55.1%	8,428	29.7%	7.9%
	Cognitive	5.7%	0.45%	78,200	40.6%	21,665	76.4%	27.7%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	Any Disability	15.7%	3.07%	11,500	100.0%	1,106	100.0%	9.6%
	Visual	3.5%	1.55%	2,600	22.6%	6	0.5%	0.2%
	Hearing	2.7%	1.38%	2,000	17.4%	53	4.8%	2.7%
	Ambulatory	10.2%	2.56%	7,500	65.2%	376	34.0%	5.0%
	Cognitive	6.6%	2.10%	4,900	42.6%	793	71.7%	16.2%
Asian	Any Disability	3.8%	1.09%	6,100	100.0%	314	100.0%	5.1%
	Visual	1.1%	3.29%	1,800	29.5%	2	0.6%	0.1%
	Hearing	0.4%	3.29%	700	11.5%	32	10.2%	4.6%
	Ambulatory	1.6%	3.29%	2,600	42.6%	114	36.3%	4.4%
	Cognitive	1.0%	3.29%	1,700	27.9%	212	67.5%	12.5%
Hispanic or Latino	Any Disability	5.0%	0.69%	26,100	100.0%	1,679	100.0%	6.4%
	Visual	1.0%	3.29%	5,200	19.9%	18	1.1%	0.3%
	Hearing	1.2%	3.29%	6,100	23.4%	126	7.5%	2.1%
	Ambulatory	2.0%	3.29%	10,300	39.5%	429	25.6%	4.2%
	Cognitive	2.2%	0.46%	11,200	42.9%	1,267	75.5%	11.3%

<sup>1</sup> Individuals can have more than one race and individuals of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity can be of any race.

<sup>2</sup> Individuals can have more than more disability type.

<sup>3</sup> Margin of Error (MoE) is a measure of the degree of sampling variability at the 90% confidence level. This means that there is a 90% certainty that the actual value is between the reported rate plus or minus the margin of error. Smaller population estimates are less precise and will have a higher margin of error.

### DVRS Staff Survey Part 2: Identifying Underserved Populations

Of the 370 VR staff members that completed the survey, 320 (86.5%) identified one or more specific populations of individuals with disabilities that were unserved or underserved, including 9 (2.4%) staff

members who indicated that all populations of individuals with disabilities were underserved. The remainder included 16 (4.3%) that indicated that there weren't any underserved populations and 34 (9.1%) that either didn't answer the question or responded that they didn't know or were unsure. The following section shows the specific populations of North Carolinians with disabilities that staff members identified as underserved.

### ***People with Mental Illness***

Of the 370 staff respondents, 76 (21%) identified individuals with mental illness as an underserved population. This category includes mental illness, in general, and also individuals where mental illness is concurrent with another disabling condition, such as substance abuse disorder, or particular demographic characteristics, such as being of younger or older age, having low income or being homeless, and having a criminal background.

The three most frequently mentioned **VR needs** specific to this population were identified as follows:

- **Mental Health Services:** 40 (53%) of the 74 VR staff members who identified people with mental illness as an underserved population indicated the need for additional mental health services. The NC mental health system was said to be both fragmented and limited, and clients may not receive ongoing treatment needed for stable employment. Mental healthcare is not always available for the client, and timeliness of services was said to be an issue: It can take months to get an appointment with another agency. Responses in this category included a need for community-based, outpatient care that is more comprehensive and affordable, with continuity of care, including medications and counseling from licensed professionals. This includes mental health evaluations by medical professionals; psychotherapy, as appropriate; and long-term monitoring and medication management to stabilize them so they can work and have productive lives.
- **Support Services:** 22 (29%) of the 74 VR staff members who identified people with mental illness as an underserved population indicated the need for additional support services, including support to their families and employers. Staff members indicated that this population often has basic needs that are unmet including housing, transportation, and food, but also that there was a need for long-term vocational supports.
- **Willingness of Employers to Hire and Make Accommodations:** 19 (26%) of the 74 VR staff members who identified people with mental illness as an underserved population indicated the need for overcoming the stigma of mental illness for employers. Responses in this category related stated a need for "open-mindedness" among employers, regarding their willingness to hire and flexibility in scheduling and other workplace accommodations. As one respondent put it, "too many employers see them as just "crazy." Also included in these responses was the need for better trained client advocates and job coaches to help with job placement and to educate employers.
- **Other:**
  - **Outreach:** The VR programs would receive additional appropriate referrals if they were aware of the many broad disabilities that can receive assistance through this employment program and not think narrowly of VR as a service for individuals with sensory or physical disabilities. Expanded educational efforts to referral sources serving individuals with more less evident disabilities such as psycho-social and medical disabilities that limit work activities. Further, language used with the general public needs to be easily understood as they often do not understand language such as impairment, impediment, limitations to employment, and chronic conditions.

### ***Individuals with Cognitive Impairments and Developmental Disabilities***

Of the 370 staff respondents, 55 (14.9%) identified people with cognitive impairments and developmental disabilities as an underserved population. This population was identified more often from casework supervisors (30.3%) than from VR managers, counselors, and specialists and consultants (group average = 16.9%). For the purpose of classification, this population includes people with autism and brain injuries, including individuals who are high functioning but still in need of support.

The **VR needs** specific to this population were fairly diverse, and inclusive of most every service provided or sponsored by the VR Program. This is likely because, as a few staff members indicated, the needs of this population “varied according to the nature of the disability,” and were highly individualized: “one size does not fit all.” The most frequently mentioned **VR needs** specific to this population are identified as follows:

- ❑ Education, training, job coaching and related supports: The need for training and training-related supports was the most common need mentioned: The needs in that category include traditional education, but also other types of training, including job skills development, work adjustment training services, and specialized cognitive training and interpersonal skills training.
- ❑ Supported Employment and increased CRP service capacity: Respondents wrote there was a need to continue existing programs and increase service capacity through additional programs.
- ❑ Employment Services, job availability and employer willingness to hire and make accommodations: Responses in this category related to the need for job placement services, the lack of availability of jobs for this population, the need to educate employers and have employers willing to hire and make accommodations for individuals with cognitive impairments and developmental disabilities, including autism and those resulting from brain injuries.
- ❑ Training for VR and CRP Staff, and more individual attention: There were a few responses that indicated a need for additional training and specialization for VR and CRP staff. This category also includes the related need of more individual attention.

### ***Offenders***

Of the 370 staff respondents, 36 (9.7%) of the 3 identified people with disabilities and criminal records, particularly those with felony convictions, inmates, and individuals on probation or parole as an underserved population. Descriptions of this population included concurrence with mental illness and substance abuse disorder, but were not limited to these populations. The distribution of the staff members that identified this population is shown in the table below, which indicates that the perception that ex-offenders and inmates were an underserved population was considerably less frequent among VR managers, supervisors, and counselors than VR staff members in other roles.

The most frequently mentioned **VR needs** specific to this population were identified as follows:

- ❑ Willingness of Employers to Hire: 17 (47%) of the 36 VR staff members who identified people with disabilities and a criminal background as an underserved population indicated the need to find employers willing to hire them, regardless of their criminal history, which may require additional employment services, including additional job search assistance and selective placements.
- ❑ Training and job readiness: 13 (36%) of the 36 VR staff members who identified people with disabilities and a criminal background as an underserved population indicated the need for job skills training, education, and other skills development, including the need to develop interviewing and social skills.
- ❑ Other needs: Single responses indicating a need for case management assistance, peer supports, transition services, and support systems.

### ***People with Substance Abuse Disorder***

Of the 370 staff respondents, 27 (7.3%) identified people with a substance abuse disorder as an underserved population.

The specific needs of this population were not neatly identified because they were most frequently mentioned in concurrence with the needs of other the populations, such as individuals with mental illness, consumers that were homeless, those with criminal backgrounds, or some combination of these. The most frequently mentioned **VR needs** that seemed most specific to this population were identified as follows:

- Treatment and relapse prevention services: These services include placing a priority on treatment first so that the client can pass a drug screening test, with mention of recovery houses and Narcotics Anonymous and Alcohol Anonymous meetings, counseling and relapse prevention.
- Support services: These include all types of support services provided through the VR program, including transportation services.
- Employment services and employer willingness to hire and provide accommodations: Examples of responses include:

### ***Ethnic Minorities***

**Particularly Hispanics/Latinos, Immigrants and Non-English Speaking Consumers:** Of the 370 staff survey respondents, 26 (7.0%) identified people with disabilities of minority backgrounds as underserved, 24 of which identified Hispanic or Latino non-English speaking individuals, although other racial and ethnic minorities, including individuals of Hmong, American Indian, and Muslim backgrounds were also mentioned in four of the responses. Examples of responses include:

The most frequently mentioned **VR needs** specific to this population were identified as follows:

- Language Communications: 13 (57%) of the 23 responses identified language communications, and the need for interpreter services or bilingual VR staff as the specific need for this population:
- Outreach Services: 4 (17.4%) of the 23 respondents responded that a cultural barrier existed and that there is not enough outreach to these populations. This relates to language communications in that one respondent wrote that it was the reason this population was overlooked.
- Other Needs: single responses indicating basic education, interviewing skills, transportation, and loss to follow-up due to seasonal work.

### **Advocacy Key Informant Survey Part 2:**

Of the 22 respondents, 16 (73%) identified one or more populations of people with disabilities they considered to be unserved or underserved in North Carolina.

### ***People with Mental Illness***

Five respondents identified individuals with mental illness as an underserved population. The specific **VR needs** of this population were identified as follows:

- Job supports on a regular basis.
- Training on how to do task from start to finish; how to evaluate when task is done properly; how to receive judgment and criticism and redirection.
- Higher learning or high school/GED completion, job skills training, résumé writing, interview skills.

- Clear expectations, by VR, Community Rehabilitation Programs, other government agencies, parents, teachers, and employers. Then, a supportive philosophy, with accompanying policies, practices and funding.

### ***People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities***

Five respondents identified people with intellectual and developmental disabilities as an underserved population. The specific **VR needs** of this population were identified as follows:

- As with people with mental illness, clear expectations from VR, other involved agencies, parents, schools, and employers.
- Cost-effective, perhaps group services for those who with limited skills and the potential to work independently.
- Educating employers to help them understand that physical disabilities don't limit other abilities.
- Employment resources and training to find jobs that interest them.

### ***Other groups identified in single responses***

- *People with brain injury*: This population is challenging to service because of multiple needs and issues. These individuals often need job coach opportunities and help finding the right job match.
- *People with autism*: This population needs pre-vocational skills training, and training on how to find and keep a job, including proper workplace behaviors.
- *People with substance abuse disorder*: This population needs for providers to learn the most up-to-date treatment issues for this population
- *High school students with disabilities*: This population needs VR services while in school, and more VR training before the student becomes an adult.
- *People with disabilities who qualify for Medicaid or state funded services*: This population includes the uninsured working poor. Such individuals may need more education to be able to apply for jobs that can be more rewarding. Individuals in this category who are ex-offenders may need to be able to clean up criminal records at times. They need counselors who will believe in their aptitude and connect them with resources.

## **The VR Needs of Individuals with Disabilities Served through other Components of the Statewide Workforce Development System**

### **State and Local Improvements Needed for Workforce Development System Integration and Accountability**

This section is named after the title of a complete evaluation of North Carolina's entire workforce development system, which was published in March 2012 by the North Carolina General Assembly Program Evaluation Division. NC DHHS and DVRS participated in the evaluation at various stages. The full document is accessible online through the North Carolina General Assembly website:

[http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/PED/Reports/documents/Workforce/WFD\\_Report.pdf](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us/PED/Reports/documents/Workforce/WFD_Report.pdf).

The summary of the report's findings are that state and local program coordination of workforce programs have failed to create an integrated, effective workforce development system. Among its findings, the report notes that the services offered at local NCWorks sites and level of integration varies across the state, and that the centers do not apply information technology to the extent available, and that despite investments in a data system to track participants, there are no statewide performance measures for the workforce development system. The recommendations were that the NC General Assembly should

streamline the workforce development system, enhance accountability, strengthen the NCWorks system (One-Stop Centers), require increased use of technology, and create a legislative oversight committee to oversee the reforms. These changes would benefit all job seekers, of which individuals with disabilities are a disadvantaged subgroup. The recommendation toward increased use of technology was said to be particularly applicable to North Carolinians with disabilities in making services more accessible. For example, in the report (p.25), a Workforce Solutions administrator explained that NCWorks were conceptualized as a physical location but that remote access could facilitate the virtual presence of specialized staff that do not need to be at NCWorks full time for customers with disabilities, thereby avoiding the need for a return visit on a day when staff is on site.

### ***North Carolina Common Follow-up System***

An important recommendation of the above reference Workforce Development System evaluation report was to improve the NC Common Follow-up System (CFS), which is currently undergoing implementation. Most recently, DVRS had the opportunity to test the NC Tower, a portal to an application that provides longitudinal information on labor market participation and earnings for individuals participating in a CFS program, such as the VR program. The testing, however, was limited to academic institutions, though it expected to be expanded to other programs during the next CSNA cycle.

The NC CFS is a database of the educational and employment outcomes of participants in publicly supported educational, employment, and training programs. The CFS was first developed in 1992 to longitudinally track the progress of workforce program participants, and has since been used to fulfill much of the collection, calculation, and reporting of performance and accountability measures for workforce training programs operated throughout the state, as mandated under the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.

North Carolina's workforce development system was streamlined to some extent in 2011 through a consolidation of many services delivered through Workforce Investment Act, Trade Adjustment Assistance, and Wagner-Peyser Act programs that are now administered through the NC Department of Commerce in collaboration with NC DHHS, the NC Community College System, the NC Department of Public Instruction, the NC Department of Public Safety, and other partner agencies.

State legislation passed in 2012 further reformed the NC workforce development system by expanding the oversight authority of the NC Commission on Workforce Development (the state Workforce Investment Board) to develop and evaluate performance measures for all workforce programs in the state, including the VR Program. Part of this legislation requires the Department of Commerce to enhance the Common Follow-up System and work in collaboration with the State Commission on Workforce Development to utilize data from the Common Follow-up System in the development of performance measures for North Carolina's Workforce Development System. These efforts are still in their preliminary stages and will be covered in more detail in the 2016 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

The two tables show below include the number of VR Program consumers eligible for services with open and the number and proportion that were also served by at least one of the nine other participating entities that contribute to the Common Follow-up System. Data for the first table are released on an annual basis and provide the year-to-year change or trend. The second table shows the unduplicated total number of VR Program consumers and those served by at least one other participating entity over a five-year span to provide a big picture summary.

The first table shows a net 6.5% increase in the number of individuals served by the VR Program during an annual state fiscal cycle (SFY), from 57,473 in SFY 2009-10 to 61,207 in 2010-11. This increase is due to case accumulation and not to an increase in applications or newly active cases. To the contrary, there was a 5.4% net decrease in number of applications during this period, from 25,513 in SFY 2009-10 to 24,143 in 2011-12; and a 7.5% net decrease in newly signed individual plans for employment, from 14,620 in SFY 2009-10 to 13,528 in SFY 2011-12. With regard to change in the number of individuals

served by the VR program and at least one other Common Follow-up System reporting entity, the percent of individuals served only by the VR Program declined from 62.7% in SFY 2009-10 to 59.7% in SFY 2011-12.

Over the past three state fiscal years (2010-2012), the proportion of VR consumers served by other workforce training programs has remained relatively consistent, with a three-year average of 60.8%: an average of 34.6% were served by one other agency or program; 16.9% by two other agencies or programs; and 9.3% by three or more other agencies or programs. Although there was a 6.5% net increase in the number of unduplicated individuals served by the VR program, from 57,473 in state fiscal year 2009-2010 to 61,207 in 2011-2012. The net increase in the number served by NC VR plus two other programs was 8.2%, from 9,809 in state fiscal year 2009-2010 to 10,600 in 2011-2012, and the net increase in the number served by three or more other programs was more than three times (204.5%), from 3,425 in state fiscal year 2009-2010 to 10,430 in 2011-2012. We also notice that during this three years period there was a net decrease in the number served by only one other program in addition to NC VR services and it was 32.3%, from 22,781 in state fiscal year 2009-2010 to 15,421 in 2011-2012. These double digit increases in multi-agency or multi-program participation may suggest a need for increased interagency collaboration towards identifying the service needs of participants.

### VR Program Consumers Served by Other Agencies in the NC CFS: 2010, 2011 & 2012

	SFY 2009-2010		SFY 2010-2011		SFY 2011-2012		Net Change (%)
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	
Total Unduplicated VR Consumers Eligible for Services	57,473	100	60,421	100	61,207	100	6.5
<b>Number of Agencies Providing Services</b>							
NC VR Program only	21,458	37.3	24,001	39.7	24,696	40.3	15.1
NC VR + 1 other agency	22,781	39.6	23,594	39.0	15,421	25.2	-32.3
NC VR + 2 other agencies	9,809	17.1	9,832	16.3	10,600	17.3	8.1
NC VR + 3 or more other agencies	3,425	6.0	2,994	5.0	10,430	17.0	204.5
<b>Individuals Served by Each Agency</b>							
NCWorks Career Center	13,691	23.8	10,492	17.4	11,174	18.3	-18.4
Dept. of Public Safety, Division of Adult Correction	5,636	9.8	5,456	9.0	5,456	8.9	-3.2
Dept. of Labor	17	<0.1	10	<0.1	<10	<0.1	N/A
Dept. of Public Instruction	5,629	9.8	5,106	8.5	4,678	7.6	-16.9
Dept. of Health and Human Services, Division of Services for the Blind	64	0.1	76	0.1	67	0.1	4.7
Dept. of Health and Human Services, Division of Social Services	6,975	12.1	7,481	12.4	8,401	13.7	20.4
Dept. of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions	18,014	31.3	17,639	29.2	18,686	30.5	3.7
NC Community College System	14,023	24.4	14,545	24.1	14,700	24.0	4.8
University of North Carolina Constituent Universities	991	1.7	953	1.6	856	1.4	-13.6

Source: NC Department of Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division

As the second table shows, of the nearly 118,714 individuals served by the VR program, in an eligible case status, 82% were provided services or participated in a program provided through another CFS agency. Nearly 1 in 5 VR consumers was served through the Division of Adult Corrections, which is slightly more than those in DPI. More than half of VR Consumers are served through DWS, and just under half receive services through the NCWorks Career Center System, and just under half were enrolled in the NC Community College System. The need for collaboration in service provision is suggested by the volume of our VR consumers served through one or more of these other agencies.

**DVRS VR Consumers Served by Other Agencies in the NC CFS: 5-Year Total**

Individuals Served by Each Agency, SFY 2007-2012			Number of Agencies Providing Service		
Agency	Individuals	Percent	Number of Agencies	Individuals	Percent
Dept. of Public Safety, Division of Adult Corrections	21,341	18.0%	NC VR Program only	21,311	18.0%
Dept. of Labor	157	0.1%	NC VR + 1 other agency	34,856	29.4%
Dept. of Public Instruction	20,106	16.9%	NC VR + 2 other agencies	33,487	28.2%
DHHS, Division of Services for the Blind	280	0.2%	NC VR + 3 or more other agencies	29,060	24.5%
DHHS, Division of Social Services	33,812	28.5%	Total Unique Individuals	118,714	100.0%
Dept. of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions	64,127	54.0%	Individuals Receiving Services through the NCWorks Career Center System	54,210	45.7%
NC Community Colleges	54,073	45.5%			
UNC Constituent Universities	3,247	2.7%			

Source: NC Department of Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division

**Challenges the NC Workforce Development System on Whole Experiences When Fulfilling the Needs of Individuals with Disabilities**

This section reprints the second component of the survey of Workforce Board Directors. The three survey items were:

- (a) Identify challenges the NC Workforce Development System as a whole faces when fulfilling the needs of people with disabilities;
- (b) Identify what they thought could be done to overcome these challenges;
- (c) Identify what they thought DVRS and the State Rehabilitation Council could do to help in overcoming these challenges.

## Challenges and Solutions for the Workforce Development System

Challenges	Possible Solutions	What can VR and the SRC do?
Need more employers that are hiring, and overcoming employers' fears and concerns, along with the social stigma, that inhibits employers from hiring people with disabilities.	Continue to market our services. We need to re-educate employers on the advantages of hiring individuals with disabilities and ensure business outreach is conducted.	More staff and get more employers involved. Have more job developers working with employers. Increasing advertisements and media regarding the advantages and incentives for employers to hire people with disabilities, and build partnerships and train staff in the One Stop Centers.
Lack of education, awareness, funding, and a coordinated plan.	More coordination among state agencies.	Increase collaboration, education and outreach.
There is such a large range of disabilities that we could encounter and without being specialists or trained to identify and handle these disabilities; One Stop Career Centers are under-skilled at handling these situations. They may not even be able to identify that a client has a barrier to be able to refer to other agencies for support.	Have the state require training on disabilities for One Stop Career Center managers and staff members.	DVRS and the State Rehabilitation council could provide the training for One Stop Career Centers.

### Assessing the Need to Establish, Develop, or Improve CRPs

The Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) directly provide, or facilitate the provision of one or more 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 federal fiscal year 2015, DVRS held contracts or memoranda of agreement with over 135 CRPs across the state. For an organization to become a CRP with DVRS, the organization must be accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), the Council on Accreditation (COA), or the Council on Quality Leadership (COL) in the area of service provision and adhere to criteria set forth in rules by the Division. CRPs are periodically reviewed by DVRS Regional CRP Specialists, which are located throughout the state. The DVRS directly administers two community rehabilitation programs WorkSource East in Goldsboro and WorkSource West in Morganton.

In federal fiscal year 2015, 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 mandated 34 CFR §361.29 requirement that the CSNA include an assessment of the need to establish, develop or improve Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) is not satisfied by an individual, isolated activity. Rather, DVRS hold regularly scheduled DVRS/CRP Steering Committee meetings expressly for this purpose. Members include DVRS staff, including rehabilitation program specialists, office managers, the Chief Accountant for CRP services, and representatives from the NC DHHS Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services (MH/DD/SAS), and representatives from the CRP community appointed by DVRS, NC Association of

People Supporting Employment First (APSE), and the NC Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (NCARF). The steering committee meets on a quarterly basis and focuses on budgetary and program issues and makes recommendations to the DVRS Director. The overall goal of the committee is to help ensure the delivery of quality services with informed choice by our consumers. The committee's goals and recommendations along with the Division Director's feedback are posted on the DVRS public web site.

Examples of activities carried out during the past three years included:

- Review and ongoing revisions to rules and standards, including qualifications standards for CRP staff providing or supervising direct services to consumer, which were developed to address the need for service quality and uniformity.
- The development of a new evaluation instrument to assist with monitoring the quality of services being provided by CRPs, and also address the need for service quality and uniformity.
- The development of a website specific to CRP resources, such as vendor applications and rules and standards, which now includes a description of the process for becoming an approved vendor. This was done to address the need to communicate this information and make it more accessible to the public. The website with this information is:  
<http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dvrs/employ/rehab.htm>.
- An evaluation of fair rates and methods of compensation for CRPs and supporting activities such as transportation services provided to consumers, which addressed the need for fiscal responsibility in providing these services efficiently, yet fairly.
- The development of effective collaborative efforts with the NC DHHS-Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services (DMHDDSAS) to provide consistent funding for extended supported employment addressed the need for VR Program participants to receive follow-along services, even after their case was successfully closed.
- Information provided by CRPs and the steering committee was assimilated to help identify innovative activities and expansion projects using ARRA funding, including the maintenance of the CRP infrastructure during periods of high unemployment.

### ***Milestone System***

The most impactful changes with regard to the need to establish, develop or improve Community Rehabilitation Programs have so far resulted from a structured service delivery model that replaced the VR purchase of hourly-rate fee-for-services for work adjustment and supported employment with contracted outcome-based milestone system. Although some CRP services were already being purchased on performance-based contracts, most were not. The need for a milestone system arose from a combination of inconsistent or incomplete placement records for some providers; billing irregularities; feedback from VR staff on surveys pertaining to CRP services, the documentation and level of accountability required, and constraints on the resources required for monitoring and processing authorizations for hourly rate services. Having a milestone system was to address these issues: reduce billing irregularities, paperwork, and the need for documentation and monitoring, and to hold CRPs accountable for VR consumer outcomes.

Implementation of a milestone payment for work adjustment and supported employment job development and placement services was first initiated October 2012, following stakeholder input, internal cost analyses, and an evaluation of how other state VR programs had successfully implemented similar milestone payment systems.

Once the job development milestone was in place, a sample of 62 VR counselors who used CRP services were surveyed on their level of understanding of VR policy as it pertained to the CRP services. Of the 62

respondents, 23 (37%) indicated that they have excellent understanding while 36 (58%) indicated they had a good understanding, and 3 (5%) indicated an average understanding. In this survey, the counselors were asked about their current training needs as related to different CRP services categories, and about 24% indicated that they need training in policy and procedures; 21% said that they need training in follow-along services; and 19% wanted to have training in job development. Individual responses also indicated that DVRS should have more qualified staff working with the CRP so they can stay abreast of changes and the need for their services, and that there was a communication gap between the CRP and DVRS. Regarding their relationship with the CRPs in their catchment area 40% indicated that they have “excellent” relationship with the CRPs while 48% rated “good” relationship. This study resulted in the greater clarification of policies, a practice that carried over to the full implementation of the milestone system.

The complete milestone payment system for SE and work adjustment services was developed collaboratively with CRPs through the CRP Steering Committee and became effective November 1, 2013. As applicable, there are payments at the point of intake; for supplemental evaluation; job development and retention; training and stabilization; and successful case closure after at least 90 days employment. Evaluations of the new milestone payment system as it pertains to the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs will continue through the next CSNA cycle.

### ***Individual Placement and Supports (IPS)***

Another recent initiative is the Individual Placements and Supports (IPS) model of supported employment for individuals with serious mental illness (SMI), serious persistent mental illness (SPMI) and co-occurring disorders. Research into this model began in July 2012 and initiated discussions to become a part of Dartmouth Psychiatric Research Center’s IPS learning collaborative. In August 2012, the *Transitions to Community Living (TCL)*, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) Settlement Agreement with North Carolina, further established that people with SMI must be provided evidenced-based practice Supported Employment services. The Dartmouth research on IPS shows that implementing IPS to fidelity doubles the number of people in competitive employment at a rate of up to 60%, and the initiative is expected to provide NC additional resources to help overcome some of the barriers to employment for individuals with SMI and increase their participation in the labor market. The between DVRS and DMHDDSAS for collaboration for its implementation began in July 2013.

DMHDDSAS is the agency responsible for LTVS, which provides assistance with maintaining a job for participants, age 16 and over, who no longer need the intense level of Supported Employment Services. LTVS are provided because of specific needs of the consumer, including medical and behavioral needs, and supports regarding the social or environmental issues that are a part of successful employment.

North Carolina’s state definition of supported employment (SE) is now based on the SE-IPS model, and SE/Behavioral Health providers that have since signed contracts with their LME/MCO will be providing the IPS model of evidence-based SE as part of the TCL/DOJ initiative. These include the more than 130 VR supported employment providers throughout North Carolina.

There will be an ongoing assessment of the impact of the IPS model, and all sites providing evidence-based SE will be evaluated with a research-based fidelity measure, and will receive a rating and quality improvement report, not duplicative of monitoring; meaning that for the next needs assessment, VR will know the level of fidelity each site as implemented to guide further training, technical assistance, and quality improvement measures, and will be able to quantify the number of CRPs providing evidence-based supported employment to people with serious- or severe and persistent mental illness.

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

DSB is a DHHS division. DSB’s mission is to enable people who are blind, visually impaired or deaf blind to reach their goals of independence and employment. Eligible individuals are served in all 100 counties of North Carolina. DSB is the designated state unit recognized by the Rehabilitation Services

Administration (RSA) to deliver VR services to individuals who have significant visual disabilities. Consistent with the mandates of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, DSB conducts a comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) every three years. The State Rehabilitation Council collaborated with DSB in the completion of the DSB 2013 CSNA. The Division contracted the services of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Department of Allied Health Sciences, and the Division of Rehabilitation Counseling & Psychology to conduct the assessment that was completed on October 31, 2013. The following research questions were addressed.

- Who are the unserved and underserved groups of individuals that are blind or visually impaired in North Carolina who do not receive the services they need from DSB?
- What are the VR service needs of minorities with visual disabilities?
- What are the VR needs of individuals with visual disabilities, particularly the vocational rehabilitation services needs of individuals with the most significant visual disabilities, including their need for supported employment services?
- What are the vocational rehabilitation service needs of individuals with visual disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system?
- What is the need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs within the state?

## **Methodology**

Strategies identified in the VR Needs Assessment Guide (Shell, 2010), were used, including a review and analysis of archival data and literature consisting of the following sources.

- 2012 DSB Annual Report
- NC DSB's 2011 federal fiscal year State Plan
- Customer Satisfaction Survey Results
- CSNA reports from NC DSB and NC DVRS
- CSNA reports from Kentucky and Virginia
- NC DSB agency data (RSA-911) or Case Service Report for FYs 2009-2012
- American Community Survey, Center for Disease Control, Current Population Survey
- State Center for Health Statistics, NC Division of Public Health, NC Department of Health and Human Services
- Prevent Blindness America
- U. S. Bureau of the Census Data for the State of North Carolina

Various stakeholders participated in surveys, key informant interviews and focus groups. The participants included current and former DSB consumers, DSB staff, eye care providers, community rehabilitation program representatives, workforce development system partners, the State Rehabilitation Council, employers and advocacy group representatives. A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data was conducted.

## **NC Demographic Profile**

North Carolina had 9,752,073 residents in 2012 of which 64.7% were non-Hispanic White, 22% Black/African American, 8.7% Hispanic or Latino, 2.5% Asian, 1.5% American Indian and Alaska Native and 2.0% multiracial with 30% of the population living in rural areas. The median household income was \$46,291 in North Carolina. The average annual income from Social Security was \$16,695 and 16.1% of the population was below the poverty line (<\$15,000).

No specific group(s) of individuals were identified as unserved in the assessment. However, statistically more females than males have vision problems such as cataracts, glaucoma, low vision, age-related macular degeneration, or blindness yet still DSB serves equal number of males and females annually. This may suggest that women are underserved by DSB. Minorities, individuals who have limited incomes and individuals living in rural areas are also underserved by DSB. Consumers of Hispanics/Latino, Black/African-American, and American Indians/Alaska Native racial/ethnic background are underserved as well. One out of three DSB consumers is African American, meaning this group does access and receive services from DSB but was found to be less successful in securing employment than the non-Hispanic White group.

Older adults, transition-age-youth/adolescents, individuals who are deaf-blind or have other multiple disabilities were also noted to be underserved.

### **Employment and Community Participation**

The employment rate of individuals with disabilities in North Carolina is 36.7% (American Community Survey, 2011). Thirty-nine percent of DSB consumers who participated in the CSNA reported being unemployed and unemployment is higher in some minority groups (e.g., African Americans). Of the unemployed group who participated in the study (n=119), 47% said they would like to find a job, 37% said that they had been actively searching for a job, 21% sought out vocational services in the past year (primarily through DSB or DVRS) and 43% (n=132) of all consumers who participated said they would need more assistance to participate in the community.

Barriers to employment identified by DSB consumers included the following: lack of jobs; lack of transportation; lack of state funds or budget restrictions; lack of information regarding disability resources; health concerns; and the lack of qualified service providers

Services Needs/Gaps identified by Consumers included: **post-employment services; supported employment; vocational services; assistive technology; information and supports in accessing public transportation; medical services;** and services to improve independent living.

### **Recommendations**

#### Outreach to Unserved and Underserved Groups:

- Increase awareness of DSB services in the underserved communities; facilitate innovative outreach activities and events that target women, transition age youth, minorities, older adults, individuals living in rural areas and individuals with low income
- Educate the public about the presence and role of DSB in the community. Post flyers, brochures about DSB in doctor's offices, schools, hospitals, and community agencies.

#### Strategic Activities to Address Employment Needs:

- Improve the retention and rehabilitation rates for individuals who are underserved (women, transition age youth, minorities, older adults, individuals living in rural areas, and individuals with low income)
- Implement evidence-based practices in VR and assistive technology
- Counselors need to help consumers better understand labor market demands and select suitable job goals

#### Specific Service Areas:

- Improve post-employment services and supported employment and ensure better access for consumers who could benefit from them
- Educate consumers about advancements in assistive technology, available free applications that could be of use, as well as assistive technology services and resources available through DSB
- Ensure that counselors and field staff stay current regarding new technologies and continually

upgrade staff members' skills

- Advocate for improved/expanded access to public transportation and develop informational resources pertaining to public transportation for consumers.
- Identify and provide consumers community resource information such as computer classes at the local community colleges, medical consultation services, housing supports.
- Improve collaboration between NC DSB, NC DVRS and community partners.

**(k) Annual Estimates**

**Describe:**

- (1) The number of individuals in the State who are eligible for services.**
- (2) The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under:**
  - (A) The VR Program;**
  - (B) The Supported Employment Program; and**
  - (C) Each priority category, if under an order of selection.**
- (3) The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and**
- (4) The cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an order of selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category.**

**Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

DVRS estimates 48,000 individuals with a disability who have been determined eligible for VR services, exclusive of pre-employment transition services, will be in-service with the VR program during program year 2018. 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 *non-purchased* services are provided in-house by DVRS staff or as a comparable service or benefit.

Of this population of 48,000 individuals determined eligible for VR services, DVRS estimates a subgroup of 20,700 individuals will receive direct cost services provided with funds under the basic support grant during the fiscal year.

For federal fiscal year 2018, DVRS estimates total basic support grant expenditures of approximately \$82 million, exclusive of pre-employment transition services. This includes administrative costs, counseling and placement, and all purchased services, including supported employment.

DVRS does not expect to implement an order of selection process during federal fiscal year 2018. Services will be available for all client service categories.

In federal fiscal year 2017, DVRS paid for 2,858 individuals to receive supported employment (SE) services at total cost of nearly \$11 million and an average cost of \$3,824 per case. For federal fiscal year 2018 an estimated 2,900 individuals with most significant disabilities (MSD) will receive supported employment services funded through Title I Part B (basic support grant), for a projected total cost estimate of \$11 million.

Category	Title I or Title VI	Estimated Funds	Estimated Number to be Served	Average Cost of Services
Title I (Except Supported Employment)	Title I	\$71,000,000	45,000	\$1,578
Title I Supported Employment	Title I	\$11,000,000	3,000	\$3,667
				—
Totals (not including pre-employment transition services)		\$82,000,000	48,000	\$1,708

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

During FFY 2018, DSB estimates that 3,200 individuals will receive VR services using Title I funds. Projected costs of services are estimated to be \$14,000,000, exclusive of pre-employment transition services, without implementation of order of selection. This estimate includes (a) cases where purchased services were provided in accordance with the consumer’s individualized plan for employment; (b) cases where purchased services were provided toward the development of the consumer’s individualized plan for employment (e.g., diagnostic and assessment services provided by a community rehabilitation program); and (c) cases where non-purchased services were provided (e.g., vocational counseling and evaluations provided by DSB VR program staff).

During FFY 2017, DSB served 3,178 individuals with direct cost Title I case service funds with expenditures of nearly \$3,700,000 of which 9 individuals identified as having most significant disabilities received supported employment services at a total direct service cost of \$35,600. DSB anticipates similar expenditure amounts and number served for FFY 2018.

DSB provides VR services to all eligible individuals. While DSB has established an Order of Selection Plan for eligibility determination under the Rehabilitation Act as amended, it has not been implemented.

## **(I) State Goals and Priorities**

### **The Designated State Unit must:**

- (1) Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the State has a Council, and jointly agreed to any revisions.**
- (2) Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs.**
- (3) Ensure that the goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the following areas:**
  - (a) the most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates;**
  - (b) the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and**
  - (c) other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107.**

## **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

### **Priority 1. Improve Client Outcomes**

**Goal 1.1.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 1.1.1.** The total number of individuals exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

**Objective 1.1.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 50.4% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 55.8% in program year 2019.

**Goal 1.2.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with significant or most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 1.2.1.** Maintain that at least 75% of VR consumers who achieved competitive employment will be individuals with significant or most significant disabilities.

**Goal 1.3.** Increase earnings for individuals exiting the VR program in employment.

**Objective 1.3.1.** Increase average hourly earnings for individuals who exit the VR program in competitive employment from 48% the statewide average for all North Carolinians in federal fiscal year 2013 to at least 52% in program year 2019.

**Objective 1.3.2.** Increase the proportion of clients exiting the VR Program in competitive employment whose own income is their primary source of support at closure compared to the percentage whose own income is the primary source of support when they applied for VR services from 62.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to at least 65% in program year 2019.

### **Priority 2. Improve Outcomes for Minorities and Populations Identified as Underserved or Hard to Place in Employment**

**Goal 2.1.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *mental illness* and *substance abuse disorder* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 2.1.1.** The total number of individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year. The rehabilitation rate for individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 47.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in program year 2019.

**Goal 2.2.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *most significant disabilities* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 2.2.1.** The total number of individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

**Objective 2.2.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 44.8% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 50% in program year 2019.

**Goal 2.3.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities of *minority racial backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 2.3.1.** The total number of individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

**Objective 2.3.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 50.1% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 55.8% in program year 2019.

**Goal 2.4.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities with *criminal backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 2.4.1.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities and criminal backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 47% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in program year 2019.

### **Priority 3. Increase Client Satisfaction**

**Goal 3.1.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor's understanding of their VR needs.

**Objective 3.1.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied with their counselor's understanding of their VR needs from 84.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 90% in program year 2019.

**Goal 3.2.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of being easy to contact.

**Objective 3.2.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor was easy to contact from 86.0% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 90% in program year 2019.

**Goal 3.3.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of *working with them as an equal partner*.

**Objective 3.3.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor worked with them as an equal partner from 85.3% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 88% in program year 2019.

**Goal 3.4.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of *offering options that meet their work-related needs*.

**Objective 3.4.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor offered options that met their work-related needs from 79.9% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 84% in program year 2019.

**Goal 3.5.** Increase client satisfaction with their *level of involvement* in their VR program.

**Objective 3.5.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied with their level of involvement in their VR program from 81.5% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 85% in program year 2019.

**Goal 3.6.** Increase client satisfaction with *response time for services* provided by VR staff.

**Objective 3.6.1.** Increase the percent of clients who rate the response time for services provided by VR staff as *above average* or *excellent* from 63.4% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 67% in program year 2019.

**Goal 3.7.** Increase client satisfaction with their *overall experience* with the VR program.

**Objective 3.7.1.** Increase the percent of clients who rate their overall experience with the VR program as *above average* or *excellent* from 66.3% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 71% in program year 2019.

## **Division of Services for the Blind**

**Priority 1:** Increase the average wages and benefits of individuals closed with successful wage-earning employment outcomes

**Goal 1.1.** Individuals who are blind or visually impaired in North Carolina will have access to employment opportunities that provide good wages and level of benefits through use of expanded internships, work experiences, community based work adjustment, and expanded relationships with employer portals. Goal will be to increase successful employment outcomes with benefits by 2% (baseline 2013 - 72) and to increase average wage at closure by 1% (baseline 2013 - \$11.97 per hour).

**Goal 1.2.** Increase staff knowledge about careers, employment opportunities, and business relationship development. Goal will be measured by staff reports to supervisors, who in turn will share with program specialist for job development.

**Goal 1.3.** Increase the use of supported employment services to facilitate successful employment outcomes for persons with the most significant disabilities. Goal will be measured by availability of vendors in areas where there are none at this time, increased authorizations for supported employment services, and increased number of individuals closed in successful employment after receiving supported employment services.

**Goal 1.4.** Provide a holistic approach to service provision that will better enable individuals to obtain employment and maintain it after DSB VR case closure. Goal will be measured by feedback from individuals closed with successful employment on the satisfaction survey, increase in success rate, and a decrease in the number of cases referred to the agency again within 36 months of successful employment outcome.

**Priority 2.** Eligible individuals will have access to assistive technology required for employment

**Goal 2.1.** Provide assistive technology and training in its use for all eligible individuals who require specific equipment and software to obtain, maintain, and regain employment. Measurement criteria will be to increase the numbers of individuals who receive assistive technology services (equipment and/or training) by 1% (baseline 2013 – 429 individuals).

**Goal 2.2.** Assistive technology staff in all seven District Offices will receive training on latest software and hardware to enhance placement opportunities. Each field staff member will attend at least two training sessions (either on-line or in classroom) during the year on new technology.

**Priority 3.** Transition services will be available in all counties of North Carolina for students who are blind or visually impaired.

**Goal 3.1.** DSB will continue to provide transition services to students who are blind or visually impaired attending schools in all 115 Local Education Agencies (LEA's) of North Carolina. The goal will be to increase the number of individuals, ages 14-21, served by 2% (baseline for FFY2013 – 310).

**Goal 3.2.** DSB will provide continuing education training for transition program staff. This training includes Pre-Employment Transition Services

**Goal 3.3.** Rehabilitation Counselors will increase their awareness of opportunities for internships and work

experiences for transition age students.

**Priority 4.** Quality and knowledgeable outreach to individuals with disabilities, family members, and individuals who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities will be provided by DSB.

**Goal 4.1.** DSB's services will be provided to individuals, families, minority populations and those experiencing health disparities through targeted outreach activities. Data for the objectives will be captured and managed in DSB's new case management system called BEAM.

**Goal 4.2.** DSB will develop marketing opportunities to targeted audiences regarding specific agency programs.

**Goal 4.3.** DSB will identify ways by which DSB can assist veterans with disabilities to become able to obtain, maintain or regain employment. DSB will meet with officials working with veterans who are visually impaired, blind or deaf blind to educate them regarding services that are available to veterans with disabilities through DSB.

**Goal 4.4.** DSB will continually seek and identify ways in which to reach the growing minority populations across North Carolina.

**Priority 5.** Over the next two fiscal years, implementation of systematic program evaluations and consistent quality assurance methods will ensure the agency is meeting the mission of enabling individuals who are blind or visually impaired to achieve their goals of independence and employment.

**Goal 5.1.** To provide consistent and accurate data using the new case management system, BEAM, to assess program performance. Measurable criteria are the program will be in place and staff will have received training by the end of FFY 2019.

**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.

**(m) Order of Selection**

**Order of Selection. Describe:**

- (B) The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services.**
- (C) The justification for the order.**
- (D) The service and outcome goals.**
- (E) The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order.**
- (F) How individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and**
- (G) If the designated State unit has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of any established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.**

The North Carolina VR Programs are not under an order of selection, and the North Carolina designated state units do not plan to implement an Order of Selection during the period covered by the Unified State Plan.

**(n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI, Part B Funds**

- (1) Specify the State's goals and priorities for funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services.**
- (2) Describe the activities to be conducted, with funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities, including:**
  - (a) the provision of extended services for a period not to exceed 4 years; and**
  - (b) how the State will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.**

Title VI, Part B funds were last received in FFY 2017. North Carolina did not receive any additional funds under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services for FFY 2018, however, the Divisions forecast annual expenditures of approximately \$11 million for supported employment services that will be provided through the Title I basic support grant.

**(o) State's Strategies**

**Describe the required strategies and how the agency will use these strategies to achieve its goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion activities, and overcome any barriers to accessing the VR and the Supported Employment programs (See sections 101(a)(15)(D) and (18)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act and section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)):**

- 1. The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities.**
- 2. How a broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process and on a statewide basis.**
- 3. The outreach procedures that will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities, as well as those who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program.**
- 4. The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services).**
- 5. If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State.**
- 6. Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.**
- 7. Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals with disabilities.**
- 8. How the agency's strategies will be used to:**
  - (A) achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment;**
  - (B) support innovation and expansion activities; and**
  - (C) overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program.**

**Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**

**(1) The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities.**

The North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) is partnering with the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services (DMHDDSAS) and other divisions and departments in developing competitive, integrated employment opportunities.

DVRS establishes and maintains contracts or agreements with over 120 private for profit and non-profit VR service providers providing an array of services to DVRS consumers. One hundred two (102) 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 ultimate goal of competitive employment. Almost all supported employment and work adjustment services provided through community rehabilitation programs were transitioned from a fee for services hourly rate payment system to a milestone payment system. Additionally, performance-based cooperative agreements engaging non-

profit organizations encompass brain injury support services, multiple (currently 14) Project SEARCH™ sites and the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services. This system and its implementation were developed in collaboration with the community rehabilitation provider community through representation via the CRP-DVRS steering subcommittee and other means of stakeholder input.

**(2) Describe how a broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process and on a statewide basis.**

**Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Response**

Assistive Technology services and devices are provided to eligible individuals statewide who require them. Rehabilitation technology and assistive technology services are sponsored and provided to the degree necessary to complete the rehabilitation program. Included are services and devices which can supplement and enhance an individual's functions such as adapted computer access, augmentative communication, specialized seating and mobility, vehicle modifications, and services which can have an impact on the environment, such as accessibility, job re-design, work site modification and residence modification. Application of the available engineering and assistive technology services and technologies is important when making determinations of eligibility particularly for individuals with significant and most significant disabilities. Rehabilitation engineering evaluations and services are not subject to an individual's financial eligibility; however, devices, equipment and modifications recommended by the engineer are subject to financial eligibility. Applicants during the assessment phase, and consumers determined to be eligible for services in need of and who can benefit from rehabilitation engineering services, devices and assistive technology services can be referred to providers of these services, and these services can assist to assist with assessment processes. Presently within the state, these services are made available statewide 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 twenty staff serving the state of North Carolina, which includes the Director, Funding Specialist, AT Information and Referral Specialist, Intake Coordinator, 2 Processing Assistants, 4 Speech Language Pathologists (SLP) and 10 Assistive Technology Consultants. The 10 AT Consultants and 4 SLPs provide direct one-on-one services in the Assistive Technology Centers.

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) 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, 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 effective through FFY 2019:

**Priority 2. Improve Outcomes for Minorities and Populations Identified as Underserved or Hard to Place in Employment**

**Goal 2.1.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *mental illness* and *substance abuse disorder* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 2.1.1.** The total number of individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

**Objective 2.1.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 47.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in program year 2019.

**Goal 2.2.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *most significant disabilities* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 2.2.1.** The total number of individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

**Objective 2.2.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 44.8% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 50% in program year 2019.

**Strategy 2.1.** Continue collaborations with programs and partners to implement evidence-based practices that will increase employment outcomes for individuals with mental illness and substance disorder, including the Individual Placements and Supports (IPS) model, as appropriate.

**Goal 2.3.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities of *minority racial backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 2.3.1.** The total number of individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

**Objective 2.3.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 50.1% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 55.8% in program year 2019.

**Strategy 2.2.** Increase cultural competence among staff, methods and resources that can help staff to effectively reach and serve individuals with disabilities of minority backgrounds and/or Hispanic ethnicity who qualify for VR services.

**Strategy 2.3.** Encourage hiring of Spanish speaking staff members in areas with high concentrations of people of Hispanic ethnicity.

**Goal 2.4.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities with *criminal backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 2.4.1.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities and criminal backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 47% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in program year 2019.

**Strategy 2.3.** Partner with agencies, including NC Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice, associations, and employers to develop viable pathways to employment for consumers with criminal backgrounds.

**Strategy 2.4.** Identify and apply current best practices that will increase employment success of individuals with disabilities transitioning from a corrections environment or have experienced difficulties obtaining employment because of previous convictions.

**(4) The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services).**

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

In addition to a state level MOA, the DVRS VR unit offices and local education agencies (LEA) customize a local Third Party Cooperative Agreement (TPCA) to outline how the agencies will work together to ensure that 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. Under WIOA and as the Title IV regulations are finalized, DVRS will be enhancing programs and services to transition-aged youth with increased focus on students with disabilities and PETS. New programs are intended to align the Division with federal requirements under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, namely PETS, as well as provide improved transition services to students while they are in high school. DVRS expects that NC public schools will see a value-add for investing in the VR partnership.

DVRS plans to maintain and strengthen its programmatic relationships with school transition services through its continued active participation by the Division's Transition Program Specialist on the State Capacity Building Team for Transition. This team, including 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 in the Spring of 2016 to focus on the role of the VR Counselor in the IEP process.

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

**(5) If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State.**

DVRS continues to utilize two advisory workgroups or committees comprised of supported employment, other community rehabilitation program providers along with Division staff as an effective method to identify and update the needs, goals, and priorities as they pertain to community rehabilitation programs. This group annually establishes goals and makes recommendations to the DVRS Director regarding the directions in which the community rehabilitation programs should continue to develop and grow. Another venue that has effectively promoted healthy dialog between the community rehabilitation programs and the Division is the regional CRP summit. Typically, annually or semi-annually, as funding permits, regional summits are held where training and discussion of topics of mutual interest to both the CRP community and the Division.

Community rehabilitation programs are evaluated annually by the Division's local, regional, and state management in order to determine the appropriate level of service outcomes for purchase for the next funding cycle. The decision is based primarily upon need of consumers and availability of financial resources. The programs are also evaluated annually by the Division's local, regional, and state management relative to program capital and staffing needs for new and innovative programs. Priorities are developed and many of these needs are met through the Establishment Authority (the authority which makes funds available for the establishment of community rehabilitation programs) contingent upon the Division having funds available to do so.

The need for new community rehabilitation programs is also assessed continually, with special emphasis as part of the comprehensive statewide needs assessment process. New community rehabilitation programs are created, at least in part, to assist the Division in meeting identified needs and are typically

generated through local and sometimes legislative initiatives. In these cases, the Division can help expand and improve the programs through establishment projects as funds permit.

One important activity the Division is currently working on which will launch during federal fiscal year 2014 is migrating from older legacy systems to a new electronic case management system which will require a lot of effort on behalf of the Division's fiscal and program staff, community rehabilitation program representatives, and developers. The Division is looking to make the process of receiving documentation and invoicing for services as paperless as possible.

**(6) Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.**

At this time, DVRS and DSB are entering into the baseline year for the performance accountability measures under section 116 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

The Divisions realize that in order to perform better on the indicator concerning median quarterly earnings, they must help consumers to prepare higher paying positions, typically obtained through increased education, specifically through more individuals successfully completing their post-secondary degrees, then following through with jobs that match their employment potential. DVRS and DSB are currently looking for ways to adjust programs, services, and supports to accomplish this in a fiscally-responsible manner.

Further, DVRS' commitment to increasing client earnings is reflected in the elevated standing of importance that obtaining quality jobs for its consumers has and has made pursuit of this goal/priority 1: Employment Outcomes: Increase quantity and quality of employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with significant/most significant disabilities through a dual customer approach. Beyond increasing consumers' participation in career-oriented post-secondary education/training, some of the other strategies that DVRS has established under this goal are to develop and build quality relationships with businesses that offer strong salaries and benefits and to continue offering the internship services, which, compared to an OJT experience, are geared more toward individuals who have completed their specialized training and need work experience to get their careers established. This service has been very well received by staff and consumers and we expect to continue the service.

Another strategy that DVRS is employing to increase the earning potential of individuals who have entrepreneurial skills is through the support the Division has made available through a dedicated Small Business Specialist on staff who helps support staff and consumers in their assessment of this option as a fit and when it is mutually determined as such, coordination of local resources and ongoing supports for the consumer pursuing this option.

In 2013, DVRS participated in a NIDRR-funded Learning Collaborative administered by the Institute for Community Inclusion. DVRS submitted a proposal to focus on strategies that can be employed to increase the average hourly wage in two offices within the Western region with different economic climates and resources. Asheville, which is the larger economic environment, will employ different strategies and approaches to the Forest City office, which is largely manufacturing-based and rural. The project concluded in February 2014, and successful strategies were reviewed to determine whether they may have application to other economic areas in North Carolina.

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 staff to better determine which consumers with disabilities utilizing the centers should be referred to DVRS rather than being served through the NCWorks. First it is necessary to determine which consumers served by the NCWorks system have a disability. Strategies to improve this will be further explored via mutual collaboration between the Division and NCWorks Career Centers to establish training for its staff.

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;**
- (B) support innovation and expansion activities; and**
- (C) overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program**

Following a thorough analysis of the results of the 2013 Statewide Comprehensive Needs Assessment, the Division and its SRC, jointly established the prioritized goals below for the period 2015-17, which will carry over through to 2019:

**Priority 1. Improve Client Outcomes**

**Goal 1.1.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 1.1.1.** The total number of individuals exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

**Objective 1.1.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 50.4% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 55.8% in program year 2019.

**Goal 1.2.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with significant or most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 1.2.1.** Maintain that at least 75% of VR consumers who achieved competitive employment will be individuals with significant or most significant disabilities.

**Goal 1.3.** Increase earnings for individuals exiting the VR program in employment.

**Objective 1.3.1.** Increase average hourly earnings for individuals who exit the VR program in competitive employment from 48% the statewide average for all North Carolinians in federal fiscal year 2013 to at least 52% in program year 2019.

**Objective 1.3.2.** Increase the proportion of clients exiting the VR Program in competitive employment whose own income is their primary source of support at closure compared to the percentage whose own income is the primary source of support when they applied for VR services from 62.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to at least 65% in program year 2019.

**Priority 2. Improve Outcomes for Minorities and Populations Identified as Underserved or Hard to Place in Employment**

**Goal 2.1.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *mental illness* and *substance abuse disorder* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 2.1.1.** The total number of individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program in

employment will exceed that of the prior year. The rehabilitation rate for individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 47.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in program year 2019.

**Goal 2.2.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *most significant disabilities* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 2.2.1.** The total number of individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

**Objective 2.2.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 44.8% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 50% in program year 2019.

**Goal 2.3.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities of *minority racial backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 2.3.1.** The total number of individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

**Objective 2.3.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 50.1% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 55.8% in program year 2019.

**Goal 2.4.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities with *criminal backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

**Objective 2.4.1.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities and criminal backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 47% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in program year 2019.

### **Priority 3. Increase Client Satisfaction**

**Goal 3.1.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor's understanding of their VR needs.

**Objective 3.1.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied with their counselor's understanding of their VR needs from 84.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 90% in program year 2019.

**Goal 3.2.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of being easy to contact.

**Objective 3.2.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor was easy to contact from 86.0% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 90% in program year 2019.

**Goal 3.3.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of *working with them as an equal partner*.

**Objective 3.3.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor worked with them as an equal partner from 85.3% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 88% in program year 2019.

**Goal 3.4.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of *offering options that meet their work-related needs*.

**Objective 3.4.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor offered options that met their work-related needs from 79.9% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 84% in program year 2019.

**Goal 3.5.** Increase client satisfaction with their *level of involvement* in their VR program.

**Objective 3.5.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied with their level of involvement in their VR program from 81.5% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 85% in program year 2019.

**Goal 3.6.** Increase client satisfaction with *response time for services* provided by VR staff.

**Objective 3.6.1.** Increase the percent of clients who rate the response time for services provided by VR staff as *above average* or *excellent* from 63.4% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 67% in program year 2019.

**Goal 3.7.** Increase client satisfaction with their *overall experience* with the VR program.

**Objective 3.7.1.** Increase the percent of clients who rate their overall experience with the VR program as *above average* or *excellent* from 66.3% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 71% in program year 2019.

## **Division of Services for the Blind**

**Priority 1:** Increase the average wages and benefits of individuals closed with successful wage-earning employment outcomes

**Goal 1.1.** Individuals who are blind or visually impaired in North Carolina will have access to employment opportunities that provide good wages and level of benefits through use of expanded internships, work experiences, community based work adjustment, and expanded relationships with employer portals. Goal will be to increase successful employment outcomes with benefits by 2% (baseline 2013 - 72) and to increase average wage at closure by 1% (baseline 2013 - \$11.97 per hour).

**Goal 1.2.** Increase staff knowledge about careers, employment opportunities, and business relationship development. Goal will be measured by staff reports to supervisors, who in turn will share with program specialist for job development.

**Goal 1.3.** Increase the use of supported employment services to facilitate successful employment outcomes for persons with the most significant disabilities. Goal will be measured by availability of vendors in areas where there are none at this time, increased authorizations for supported employment services, and increased number of individuals closed in successful employment after receiving supported employment services.

**Goal 1.4.** Provide a holistic approach to service provision that will better enable individuals to obtain employment and maintain it after DSB VR case closure. Goal will be measured by feedback from individuals closed with successful employment on the satisfaction survey, increase in success rate, and a decrease in the number of cases referred to the agency again within 36 months of successful employment outcome.

**Priority 2.** Eligible individuals will have access to assistive technology required for employment

**Goal 2.1.** Provide assistive technology and training in its use for all eligible individuals who require specific equipment and software to obtain, maintain, and regain employment. Measurement criteria will be to increase the numbers of individuals who receive assistive technology services (equipment and/or training) by 1% (baseline 2013 – 429 individuals).

**Goal 2.2.** Assistive technology staff in all seven District Offices will receive training on latest software and hardware to enhance placement opportunities. Each field staff member will attend at least two training sessions (either on-line or in classroom) during the year on new technology.

**Priority 3.** Transition services will be available in all counties of North Carolina for students who are blind or visually impaired.

**Goal 3.1.** DSB will continue to provide transition services to students who are blind or visually impaired attending schools in all 115 Local Education Agencies (LEA's) of North Carolina. The goal will be to increase the number of individuals, ages 14-21, served by 2% (baseline for FFY2013 – 310).

**Goal 3.2.** DSB will provide continuing education training for transition program staff. This training includes Pre-Employment Transition Services

**Goal 3.3.** Rehabilitation Counselors will increase their awareness of opportunities for internships and work

experiences for transition age students.

**Priority 4.** Quality and knowledgeable outreach to individuals with disabilities, family members, and individuals who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities will be provided by DSB.

**Goal 4.1.** DSB's services will be provided to individuals, families, minority populations and those experiencing health disparities through targeted outreach activities. Data for the objectives will be captured and managed in DSB's new case management system called BEAM.

**Goal 4.2.** DSB will develop marketing opportunities to targeted audiences regarding specific agency programs.

**Goal 4.3.** DSB will identify ways by which DSB can assist veterans with disabilities to become able to obtain, maintain or regain employment. DSB will meet with officials working with veterans who are visually impaired, blind or deaf blind to educate them regarding services that are available to veterans with disabilities through DSB.

**Goal 4.4.** DSB will continually seek and identify ways in which to reach the growing minority populations across North Carolina.

**Priority 5.** Over the next two fiscal years, implementation of systematic program evaluations and consistent quality assurance methods will ensure the agency is meeting the mission of enabling individuals who are blind or visually impaired to achieve their goals of independence and employment.

**Goal 5.1.** To provide consistent and accurate data using the new case management system, BEAM, to assess program performance. Measurable criteria are the program will be in place and staff will have received training by the end of FFY 2019.

**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.

The Division of Services for the Blind (DSB) continues to work toward all listed strategies and goals.

**(p) Evaluation and Reports of Progress**

**Describe:**

- 1. An evaluation of the extent to which the VR program goals described in the approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year were achieved. The evaluation must:**
  - (A) Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.**
  - (B) Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.**
- 2. An evaluation of the extent to which the Supported Employment program goals described in the Supported Employment Supplement for the most recent program year were achieved. The evaluation must:**
  - (A) Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.**
  - (B) Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.**
- 3. The VR program’s performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA.**
- 4. How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized.**

**Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

**Priority 1: Improve Client Outcomes**

**Goal 1.1.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 1.1.1.** The total number of individuals exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.

Measure for Objective	Federal Fiscal Year					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
The number of persons achieving employment outcomes will equal or exceed the previous year.	6,303	6,758	6,723	6,310	6,317	6,127

***Performance Assessment***

During federal fiscal year 2016, the number of individuals exiting the Division’s VR program in employment decreased by about 3%. The Division maintains successful partnerships with community rehabilitation programs and an emphasis on vocational counseling and guidance, benefits counseling, rehabilitation services, and matching employers’ workforce needs with the skillsets of VR consumers through a Dual Customer Approach. Placements through community rehabilitation programs account for approximately more than a third of the clients who exited in employment. Other strategies employed to improve performance on this indicator are summarized in the strategies section of the Unified State Plan. The Division continues to utilize on-the-job training and internship services and has expanded brain injury support services and IPS supported employment.

**Objective 1.1.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 50.4% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 55.8% in federal fiscal year 2017.

Measure for Objective	Federal Fiscal Year					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
The percentage of all individuals who have achieved an employment outcome after exiting the program having received services will equal or exceed 55.8%.	56.5%	56.4%	50.4%	58.1%	55.1%	54.0%

**Performance Assessment**

The DVRS VR Program missed this objective by less than 2% in 2016. Success in 2014 was partially due to filling the previously higher than expected number of counselor vacancies. However, a considerable number of cases that would have been closed in a prior year remained open as a residual effect of these vacancies. Having increased staff provided the capacity to review and close these cases through 2016 in preparation for the new RSA-911 reporting requirements under WIOA, which include reports on open cases. The agency will continue to monitoring this indicator with increased emphasis of its importance through case management and reviews. DVRS expects this will be a gauge of the WIOA performance accountability measures related to the employment rate at the second and fourth quarter following case closure.

**Goal 1.3.** Increase earnings for individuals exiting the VR program in employment.

- **Objective 1.3.1.** Increase average hourly earnings for individuals who exit the VR program in competitive employment from 48% the statewide average for all North Carolinians in federal fiscal year 2013 to at least 52% in federal fiscal year 2017.

Measure for Objective	Federal Fiscal Year					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
The average hourly earnings of all individuals who exit the program in competitive employment as a ratio to the average hourly earnings for all employed North Carolinians will equal or exceed 0.52.	0.48	0.48	0.47	0.44	0.43	0.44

**Performance Assessment**

For federal fiscal year 2016, DVRS was not able to meet this RSA indicator, which continues to present a challenge, despite strategies to encourage additional education and training to increase client earnings. DVRS attributes its current performance on this indicator primarily as a result of two main factors: the large number of transition-age youth whose exit the VR program in entry-level positions and the number of individuals served through supported employment, which comprise nearly a fifth of the VR program’s employment outcomes. These individuals exit the VR program with earnings that are closer to minimum wage. Despite, the impact on performance for this measure, the DVRS maintains a strong commitment to supported employment and providing VR services for transition-age youth.

**Objective 1.3.2.** Increase the proportion of clients exiting the VR Program in competitive employment whose own income is their primary source of support at closure compared to the percentage whose own income is the primary source of support when they applied for VR services to at least 65% in federal fiscal year 2019. (RSA standard was 53%)

Measure for Objective	Federal Fiscal Year					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Of the individuals who achieve competitive employment, the difference between the percent who reported their own income as the largest single source of economic support at closure compared to the percent at application.	63.8	63.8	62.8	63.7	66.4	64.6

### ***Performance Assessment***

During federal fiscal year 2016, DVRS exceeded the former federal performance standard for this indicator, and expects continued performance that will achieve at least 65% by 2019. Approximately 76.8% of VR clients that exited in employment had their own income as their primary source of support. Of these, about 12.2% were retention cases where the individual with a disability was employed at the time of application with their own earnings as their primary source and the other 64.6% were primarily dependent on another source of income, such as public support or family and friends. This latter group moved towards self-sufficiency at the time of case closure and had reduced dependence on other sources of support to where they primarily depended on their own earnings.

### **Priority 2. Improve Outcomes for Minorities and Populations Identified as Underserved or Hard to Place in Employment**

**Goal 2.1.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *mental illness* and *substance abuse disorder* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.1.1.** The total number of individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.1.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with mental illness exiting the VR program after receiving services under an individualized plan for employment from 47.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in federal fiscal year 2019.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year		
	2014	2015	2016
The total number of individuals with mental illness and/or substance abuse disorder exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.	2,298	2,503	2,339
Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with mental illness and/or substance abuse disorder exiting the VR program after receiving services	52.8%	51.4%	50.4%

### ***Performance Assessment***

Since the most recently completed comprehensive statewide needs assessment, individuals with mental illness have comprised an increasing proportion of the employment outcomes and in 2016 accounted for about 38% of all employment outcomes. Success in this area is largely attributed to expanded use of community rehabilitation programs through the milestone system and collaborative interagency efforts, including those that specifically target this population such as the individual placement and supports model of supported employment.

**Goal 2.2.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with *most significant disabilities* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.2.1.** The total number of individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.2.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with most significant disabilities exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 44.8% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 50% in federal fiscal year 2019.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year		
	2014	2015	2016
The total number of individuals with Most Significant Disabilities exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.	1,575	1,713	1,747
Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with Most Significant Disabilities exiting the VR program after receiving services	54.8%	51.4%	52.8%

**Performance Assessment**

Since the last comprehensive statewide needs assessment was conducted, individuals with most significant disabilities have comprised an increasing proportion of the employment outcomes and in 2016 accounted for 28.5% of all employment outcomes. Many of these individuals are individuals with severe- or severe and persistent mental illness or transition-age youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Success in this area is largely attributed to a focus on services for transition-age youth with I/DD and expanded use of community rehabilitation programs through the milestone system, and collaborative interagency efforts, including those that specifically target this population such as brain injury support services and the individual placement and supports model of supported employment.

**Goal 2.3.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities of *minority racial backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.3.1.** The total number of individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.
- **Objective 2.3.2.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 50.1% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 55.8% in federal fiscal year 2019.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year		
	2014	2015	2016
The total number of individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program in employment will exceed that of the prior year.	3,097	3,182	3,105
Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities of minority racial backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services.	57.3%	54.6%	53.4%

**Performance Assessment**

In FFY 2016, individuals of minority backgrounds accounted for more than 50% 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.

**Goal 2.4.** Increase the number and proportion of individuals with disabilities with *criminal backgrounds* exiting the VR program in employment after services were provided under an individualized plan for employment.

- **Objective 2.4.1.** Increase the rehabilitation rate for individuals with disabilities and criminal backgrounds exiting the VR program after receiving services under and individualized plan for employment from 47% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 52% in federal fiscal year 2019.

Note: Data for the measure of this objective are pending.

**Priority 3. Increase Client Satisfaction**

**Goal 3.1.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor’s understanding of their VR needs.

- **Objective 3.1.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied with their counselor’s understanding of their VR needs from 84.7% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 90% in federal fiscal year 2019.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year			
	2013	2014	2015	2016*
Percent of clients satisfied with their counselor in terms of understanding their VR needs	84.7%	83.2%	83.1%	85.4%

**Goal 3.2.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of being easy to contact.

- **Objective 3.2.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor was easy to contact from 86.0% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 90% in federal fiscal year 2019.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year			
	2013	2014	2015	2016*
Percent of clients satisfied with their counselor in terms of being easy to contact	86.0%	84.3%	84.0%	87.3%

**Goal 3.3.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of *working with them as an equal partner*.

- **Objective 3.3.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor worked with them as an equal partner from 85.3% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 88% in federal fiscal year 2019.
-

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year			
	2013	2014	2015	2016*
Percent of clients satisfied with their counselor in terms of working with them as an equal partner	85.3%	83.6%	83.9%	86.3%

**Goal 3.4.** Increase client satisfaction with their counselor in terms of *offering options that meet their work-related needs*.

- **Objective 3.4.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied that their counselor offered options that met their work-related needs from 79.9% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 84% in federal fiscal year 2019.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year			
	2013	2014	2015	2016*
Percent of clients satisfied with their counselor in terms of offering options to meet their needs related to work	79.9%	78.0%	77.0%	79.4%

**Goal 3.5.** Increase client satisfaction with their *level of involvement* in their VR program.

- **Objective 3.5.1.** Increase the percent of clients who are satisfied or very satisfied with their level of involvement in their VR program from 81.5% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 85% in federal fiscal year 2019.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year			
	2013	2014	2015	2016*
Percent of clients satisfied or very satisfied with their level of involvement in their VR program.	81.5%	80.9%	81.8%	86.3%

**Goal 3.6.** Increase client satisfaction with *response time for services* provided by VR staff.

- **Objective 3.6.1.** Increase the percent of clients who rate the response time for services provided by VR staff as *above average* or *excellent* from 63.4% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 67% in federal fiscal year 2019.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year			
	2013	2014	2015	2016*
Percent of clients satisfied or very satisfied with the response time for services provided by VR staff.	63.4%	62.2%	57.6%	87.3%

**Goal 3.7.** Increase client satisfaction with their *overall experience* with the VR program.

- **Objective 3.7.1.** Increase the percent of clients who rate their overall experience with the VR program as *above average* or *excellent* from 66.3% in federal fiscal year 2013 to 71% in federal fiscal year 2019.

Measures for Goal	Federal Fiscal Year			
	2013	2014	2015	2016*
Percent of clients satisfied or very satisfied with their overall experience in the VR Program.	66.3%	64.3%	60.5%	87.2%

\*Note: The question wording and response scales for the satisfaction survey were revised for 2016 and responses for this year are approximate equivalent with those of prior years.

**Performance Assessment for Goal 3.**

For federal fiscal year 2016, the percentages on the measures of customer satisfaction were above 80% for all measures except the item on the client’s satisfaction with help deciding on job choices, which was 79.4%. The Division has improved in this area as a result of low staff vacancy rates, increased client contact, and a focus on case services quality.

**Supported Employment Goals and Strategies**

2. An evaluation of the extent to which the Supported Employment program goals described in the Supported Employment Supplement for the most recent program year were achieved. The evaluation must:
  - (A) Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.
  - (B) Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.

**Response:** Goals for the supported employment program included:

**Supported Employment Goal 1:** Increase the number of individuals with most significant disabilities who receive supported employment services during the program year.

Measures for SE Goal 1: Objective 1. Increase the number of individuals with most significant disabilities who receive supported employment services.	Federal Fiscal Year					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>Measure SE.1.</b> Number of individuals receiving supported employment services.	4,372	4,305	3,979	3,217	2,960	2,868
<b>Measure SE.2.a.</b> Number of individuals exiting the VR program in employment in an integrated setting with supports.	968	1,023	989	939	1,110	1,208
<b>Measure SE.2.b.</b> Of the individuals who receive supported employment services, the percent who exit the VR program with an employment outcome.	49.0%	49.8%	43.3 %	55.8%	54.4%	51.5%

**Performance Assessment for SE Goal 1: *Increase the number of individuals with most significant disabilities who receive supported employment services during the program year.***

The reported number of VR consumers who received supported employment services through the Division has decreased year-over-year while the number of SE employment outcomes in 2016 is at a 6-year high. This is largely attributed to the implementation of the pay-for-performance milestone system toward the end of 2013. Prior to implementation of the milestone system, services were paid at an hourly rate and many SE clients accrued many hours of job development prior to or without being placed in employment. With the implementation of the milestone payment system, SE clients progressed through job development to placement and stability more quickly. This decreased the total volume of clients receiving such services in a given year and increased both the number of employment outcomes and the success rate. Services might be further expanded; however, this is limited by a longstanding shortage of funds dedicated to LTVS for this population.

**Supported Employment Goal 2:** Identify and begin implementing practices that can increase the successful closure rate of individuals receiving supported employment services.

**Performance Assessment for SE Goal 2: *Identify and begin implementing practices that can increase the successful closure rate of individuals receiving supported employment services.***

During federal fiscal year 2016, 1,208 individuals who received supported employment services exited the VR program successfully employed in an integrated setting with supports. The issues identified in the assessment of SE Goal 1 regarding the availability of supported employment services also adversely impact the ability of service providers to achieve employment outcomes for VR consumers. To adapt to the changing and challenging economy, the Division had in 2014 implemented an outcome-based milestone payment system for community rehabilitation programs that were previously billing at an hourly rate for supported employment job development and intensive training services. This change positively impacted services on a systems level to the benefit of VR consumers in that the payment to the CRP is since contingent on the consumers' success. Additionally, an increasing number of SE outcomes are attributed to Project Search and the individual placement and supports model of supported employment and partnerships with new providers.

**Supported Employment Goal 3: *In search of improved supported employment services delivery models and practices, continue assessing the positive components gained through experience with the ARRA-funded innovative collaborative projects that concluded with federal fiscal year 2011.***

**Performance Assessment:** During federal fiscal year 2012, the Division worked to establish two programs as an extension of programs that were funded under the ARRA contracts that the Division had established during federal fiscal year 2010-11 to help meet the needs of consumers with significant and most significant disabilities in areas of employment training, employment-related transportation, and the creation of CRP-based enterprises for purposes of training. Two of the programs that were extended follow the Project Search model, to provide internships and supports for transition-age youth.

**Supported Employment Goal 4: *Support increased training/qualification requirements for job coaches and their supervisory staff. Collaboratively increase supported employment training to DVRS rehabilitation counselors and Community Rehabilitation Program direct service staff through the addition of a web-based (and other forms of) curriculum development.***

**Performance Assessment:** The CRP-DVRS steering committee has established a subcommittee to focus on this area and are assessing the current training needs of CRP staff. The committee will continue to work with the regional TACE to implement components of the training effort addressing this area as resources allow. The Division's rules addressing these requirements are also in process.

**Supported Employment Goal 5:** *Continue collaboration with the Division of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Substance Abuse Services to secure reporting of the expenditures of the Long Term Support service definition in order to ensure consistent administration of these funds.*

**Performance Assessment:** Collaboration with DMHDDSA since 2015 continues to improve as both agencies work to provide secure resources for recipients of supported employment services.

**Requirement:**

3. The VR program's performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA.

RSA exercised its transition authority under WIOA to delay the implementation of the RSA-911 federal report and consequently the common performance measures by one year. Due to the newness of this data collection process, sufficient data are not yet available for an accurate forecast.

**Requirement:**

4. How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized.

Innovation and expansion funds were utilized during FFY 2014-15 to purchase demonstration devices for use with the North Carolina Assistive Technology Program to expand their device loan and assistive technology assessment capabilities using more current employment-related assistive technologies.

Specialized Supported Employment Demonstration Project: In collaboration with NC Easter Seals/UCP, a demonstration program that targets the provision of extensive wrap around support services for dually-diagnosed individuals with mental and mobility impairments that have not been successful with traditional supported employment programs was funded. During SFY 2013, the demonstration program reported that 14 individuals were successfully placed, reached stabilization or achieved a successful employment outcome.

Beginning October, 2015 and continuing into FFY 2017, innovation and expansion funds are being utilized through a financial assistance contract with the Statewide Independent Living Council to further their progress in achieving goals and strategies within the current State Plan for Independent Living.

**Support of Activities of the State Rehabilitation Council**

During federal fiscal year 2012, the Division worked to establish two programs as an extension of programs that were funded under the ARRA contracts that the Division had established during federal fiscal year 2010-2011 to help meet the needs of consumers with significant and most significant disabilities in areas of employment training, employment-related transportation, and the creation of CRP-based enterprises for purposes of training. Two of the programs that were extended follow the "Project Search" nationally known model to provide training for transition-aged students in the Durham and Charlotte areas. These programs are described as business-led, one year school-to-work programs that are

embedded within an actual workplace. The VR program has since expanded use of this model to other sites throughout the state.

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

**Priority 1:** Increase the average wages and benefits of individuals closed with successful wage-earning employment outcomes

**Goal 1.1.** Individuals who are blind or visually impaired in North Carolina will have access to employment opportunities that provide good wages and level of benefits.

**Objective 1.1** DSB VR staff will receive specialized training to assist them with targeting in demand job fields that will bring higher salaries and more stable positions.

DSB staff have since 2015 received specialized training to improve the quality of employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. As a result, client average hourly earnings at closure have increased from \$11.15 in FFY 2015 to \$13.18 in 2017.

**Objective 1.1.2.** Division staff will have resources of community-based work adjustment services through community rehabilitation programs for eligible individuals who require this service for successful employment. It is a resource for individuals who need short-term job coaching to be successful on the job, but do not require long-term support services afforded by supported employment services. The goal for FFY 2020 will be five successful employment closures with use of this program.

DSB had 5 individuals exiting VR in supported employment each year for FFY 2016 and 2017.

**Goal 1.2.** Increase staff knowledge about careers and employment opportunities in the State and the requirements of these positions.

**Objective 1.2.1.** Provide ongoing training experiences for all Division VR counselors, business representatives and community employment specialists about career opportunities in North Carolina's changing economy to include a segment on job analysis and use of assistive technology.

DSB VR counselors were provided ongoing information and training about career opportunities and specific position requirements consistent with employer needs in NC. Many of these opportunities were the result of business relationships developed through CSAVR's National Employment Team.

Some of these business relationships were developed through referrals from OFCCP to Vocational Rehabilitation, and it is anticipated that both sources of business referrals and subsequent knowledge of employer needs will grow in importance for educating VR counselors on NC career opportunities. Meeting the assistive technology needs of consumers was addressed through training VR counselors to both utilize referrals to the Division's Assistive Technology Consultants and to use the Job Accommodation Network to identify AT accommodations as a means to educate themselves and employers. During job development and placement trainings, assistive technology solutions used by consumers to achieve successful employment were shared between VR counselors to advance knowledge of AT solutions. The emphasis on assistive technology as a vital component for successful employment is a practice supported by the Division's management, and information on new AT products and solutions is routinely shared across the agency with all VR counselors.

**Objective 1.2.2.** Expand the use of the office plan in each seven district offices for contacting businesses in the locations that targets employers offering higher wages and career advancement.

Each office did complete an office plan for targeting employers that offered higher wages and advancement opportunities. This objective will be continued into next year with more supervision by the Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services and technical assistance from the program specialist for job development and placement.

**Objective 1.2.3.** Provide targeted one-on-one training by the Program Specialist for Job Development and Placement to each rehabilitation counselor and business representative that will consist of job coaching through an employer interview. In those areas and for those staff with lower numbers of business contacts and successful placements, a follow-up session will be held.

Targeted one-on-one training has been offered to each new counselor and business representative and to those who have lower numbers of business contacts and successful placements. This has become an established practice and will be continued and maintained as a high priority in the coming year.

**Goal 1.3.** Increase community rehabilitation counselor awareness of opportunities for internships and other work experiences for transition age students, especially in areas where specialized transition programs are not available.

**Objective 1.3.1.** Maintain a section on the agency's web page that will include information about opportunities for transition-age and college age students for job internship opportunities, work experiences, conferences and ideas, to be maintained by the Program Specialist for Transition with contributions made by the specialized transition programs staff.

The agency's web page has a targeted area for services available for transition age students. However, due to changes in the state's regulations and policies regarding web-page content and maintenance, other ways of intra-agency information sharing and presentations outside the agency are being developed. Internship opportunities through employers or national and local organizations, including unique requirements and deadlines, were provided to all VR counselors who shared that information with their transitioning students.

**Objective 1.3.2.** Provide training workshops for community new rehabilitation counselors on transition services that needs to be provided to students attending schools where the Division does not have a formal Transition Program.

Training for new counselors, called Best Practices for New DSB VR Counselors, includes a major section on provision of services to students in secondary schools. During FFY2013, it was revamped by the Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services to ensure it included definitions and acronyms used

within schools, to identify key individuals to whom contact is to be made, and to denote the importance of reaching individuals at an early age.

**Priority 2.** Eligible individuals will have access to assistive technology (at) required for employment

**Goal 2.1.** Provide accessible technology for all eligible individuals who require specific equipment and software in order to obtain maintain and regain employment.

**Objective 2.1.1.** The DSB AT policy will be re-examined and research conducted to allow for additional and more appropriate AT support of clients seeking employment to increase employability and success in career positions.

DSB now provides assistive technology to individuals who require it for employment without regard to income. During FFY2013, 429 individuals were provided assistive technology services, and case service funds of \$188,813 were spent on technology devices to include hardware and software. This number increased to 435 in 2017.

**Goal 2.2.** Assistive technology staff in all seven District Offices will receive training on latest software and hardware to enhance placement opportunities.

**Objective 2.2.1.** Provide training for the Rehabilitation Engineer, Assistive Technology Consultants, and Assistive Technology teachers and instructors about new and innovative products

During FFY2013, DSB field AT staff and Rehabilitation Center for the Blind AT staff attended the NC Assistive Technology Project/NC Rehabilitation Association Conference for 2012 in December, 2012, and for 2013 in August, 2013. This conference provided numerous presentations about use of AT with persons with blindness and visual impairments as well as about use with other disabling conditions. The largest vendor hall available in North Carolina is provided at these conferences, allowing staff to meet and talk with vendors from multiple companies and areas of specialty.

**Objective 2.2.2.** Partner with the NC Assistive Technology Project and the NC Rehabilitation Association to sponsor the annual "GREAT" (Global Rehabilitation Enhanced by Assistive Technology) (formerly the NC Assistive Technology Expo) to be held December 5-7, 2012, and identify at least two presentations about access technology for individuals who are blind or who have visual impairments.

DSB partnered with other sponsors of this event by submitting a contribution in excess of \$2,500 to each conference and by providing presenters for three concurrent sessions. Participation in this program reach numerous individuals outside DSB that reach persons from a variety of targeted populations, as it is attended by other VR agencies, private non-profit organizations and private individuals.

**Priority 3:** Transition services will be available in all counties of North Carolina for students who are blind or visually impaired.

**Goal 3.1.** The Division will continue to provide transition services to students who are blind or visually impaired attending schools in all 115 Local Education Agencies (LEA's) of North Carolina. The goal will be to increase the number of individuals, ages 14-21, served by more than 2% (baseline for FFY2011: 290)

**Objective 3.1.1.** Current Cooperative Agreements with fifteen LEAs' will be maintained, as economic instability continues and projected budget shortfalls are projected to increase in the next fiscal year. LEA's in North Carolina are searching for programs to cut in order to preserve their own staffs.

Despite significant budget cuts for school systems, the cooperative agreements with the 15 local education agencies (LEA) were maintained. The number of students served in these programs during FFY2013 is 288 students, which is a 6.7% increase from FFY2011 (270 served).

**Objective 3.1.2.** Transition services to students attending schools without Division cooperative agreements will be served by Division VR counselors in the counties where the schools are located.

The number served by community counselors in LEA's not covered by cooperative agreements significantly decreased during FFY2013. Due to state personnel initiated hiring freeze effects, several counselor positions that normally provided services remained vacant. The work load prevented outreach to students in these LEA's, as well as to private schools and home-schooled individuals within the 14 to 21 age range. This will remain as these freezes have slowly been lifted during FFY2014.

**Goal 3.2:** The Division will provide continuing education training for transition program staff.

**Objective 3.2.1.** Transition Staff that have enrolled in Certificate in Transition with Winston-Salem State University will complete the program.

Two individuals enrolled into this program. However, due to funding streams, program changes occurred and Winston-Salem State temporarily suspended this program. When it is reinitiated, the Program Specialist for Staff Development will distribute information regarding this opportunity with intent to have individuals participate.

**Objective 3.2.2.** All Transition Staff will complete training in the Discovery Process provided Southeast Regional TACE program, so they can begin to use the process with the students in their programs during this Fiscal Year.

All transition staff participated in this training. Reports from staff indicate that some of the information was found to be useful. However, other information included in this training was found to not be appropriate for students being served who are blind or visually impaired but otherwise independent.

**Objective 3.2.3.** The Program Specialist for Transition Services will continue to have transition staff meetings and/or provide ongoing trainings quarterly to increase staff awareness and knowledge about transition issues and policy.

Due to the state imposed hiring freeze, the program specialist position has remained vacant for over a year. Meetings were limited, although the transition staff across the state shared information throughout the year.

**Goal 3.3.** Each Rehabilitation Counselor in areas where specialized transition programs are not available will increase awareness of opportunities for internships and work experiences for transition age students.

**Objective 3.3.1.** Provide current information about opportunities for transition age individuals on the agency's web-page or other media

The agency's web page has a targeted area for services available for transition age students. However, due to changes in the state's regulations and policies regarding web-page content and maintenance, other ways of intra-agency information sharing and presentations outside the agency are being developed.

**Objective 3.3.2.** Provide training to new Rehabilitation Counselors on Transition Services available to eligible students on their caseloads.

Training for new counselors, called Best Practices for New DSB VR Counselors, includes a major section on provision of services to students in secondary schools. During FFY2013, it was revamped by the Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services to ensure it included definitions and acronyms used

within schools, to identify key individuals to whom contact is to be made, and to denote the importance of reaching individuals at an early age. This training is held annually.

**Objective 3.3.3.** Program Specialist for Transition Services and the Transition Counselor in each area will continue to be available for consultation regarding transition services

While the Program Specialist for Transition Services position remained vacant most of the year, the Chief of Rehabilitation Field Services was available to work with staff regarding transition services. The Chief and the Transition Counselors worked with the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind in development of the SAVVY summer program for students (Summer Adaptation Vital to Visually-impaired Youth). This program provided a four-week in-house training that was divided into three segments. First, for the younger students who need more independent living skills training, the Summer Adjustment Vision for Youth was held. Secondly, for students wanting to learn more about employment, the WOW (World of Work) program provided paid internships for them to explore work interests. Thirdly, for students who are rising seniors and heading for colleges, the Summer College Prep program is offered that enhances their assistive technology skills and allows them to experience a true college classroom with the assistance of the Center staff. During the summer of FFY2013, 84 youth participated in these Rehabilitation Center training programs.

**Priority 4:** Quality and knowledgeable outreach to individuals with disabilities, family members, and individuals who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities will be provided by the division.

**Goal 4.1:** The Division's services will be provided to individuals, families, and minority populations through targeted outreach activities.

**Objective 4.1.1.** Outreach activities will result in the increase of total consumers served who are Hispanics/Latinos by more than 2% during the period October 1, 2012 to September 30, 2013. (The baseline for FFY 2011 was 140). During FFY2013, DSB provided services to 159 individuals who stated they are of Hispanic ethnicity. This represents a 13% increase over the number served during FFY2011. This goal is met, but the goal will need to continue as these efforts must be continued due to change in the state's population.

**Objective 4.1.2.** Outreach activities will result in the increase of total consumers served from the African American, Native Americans and other minority groups by more than 2% from October 1, 2012. (The baseline for FFY 2011 was a total of 1526, 1446 African-American, 80 Native American) During FFY2017, DSB provided services to 1633 individuals who stated they are African American, Native American or other minority group, with 1,614 being African American and 19 as from other minority groups. This represents a 7% increase over the number served during FFY 2011. Due to the limitations of existing data collection systems, these groups cannot be broken into further detail; the new data collection system that was anticipated to be in operation for this reporting is not operational at this time. This goal is met, but the goal will need to continue as these efforts must be continued due to change in the state's population.

**Goal 4.2.** The Division will develop marketing opportunities to targeted audiences.

**Objective 4.2.1.** The Division will utilize social media as a method for Division VR Counselors to communicate with employers with the goal of establishing relationships with five new employers through this network. Due to state and department policies and procedures, involvement and use of social media is not allowed. Therefore this objective is removed.

**Objective 4.2.2.** The Division will use the available employer portal in BEAM, the new case management system, to establish contact with employers who would like to post job opportunities, with the goal of having ten job opportunities posted after the initiation of the system in October 2012.

Due to complications in the development of this system, BEAM is not operational at this point. This strategy will be continued until BEAM is in place.

**Goal 4.3:** The Division will identify ways by which the Division can assist veterans with disabilities to become able to obtain, maintain or regain employment.

**Objective 4.3.1.** Through contacts with the Veterans Administration, Disabled Veterans of America, and the American Legion, the Division will educate these organizations on ways the Division can assist veterans through a continuum of independent living and employment services.

During FFY 2013, DSB collaborated with organizations who serve veterans to provide information about how veterans can access DSB VR and Independent Living services. DSB has visited VA offices/facilities across the state to actively collaborate and partner with them to improve services to veterans without duplication.

**Goal 4.4.** The Division will continually seek and identify ways in which to reach the growing minority populations across North Carolina.

**Objective 4.4.1.** Increase the number of The Division employees who are of an ethnic or racial minority by more than 2.5 percent for FFY 2018.

During FFY2013, the agency actually experienced a decrease in the number of staff members who state they are of an ethnic or racial minority. In FFY2012, 88 staff members reported they are of an ethnic or racial minority (81 African American, 3 Native American, 2 Hispanic, and 2 other). In FFY2013, the number dropped by 3% to 85 staff members (79 African American, 2 Native American, 1 Hispanic, and 3 other). During FFY2013, the agency experienced an increased number of retirements and a hiring freeze, which decreased the number of active staff. This goal will continue to be monitored.

**Objective 4.4.2.** During FFY 2013, eight Division staff will utilize the Spanish training modules to acquire some level of proficiency in speaking and/or understanding Spanish.

**Goal 5.1.** To provide consistent and accurate data for use for assessing program performance.

**Objective 5.1.1.** The agency will provide refresher training, support, and problem-solving upon the scheduled “go-live” of October 1, 2012, for the agency’s new case management system, BEAM. All issues regarding BEAM used by staff using assistive technology will be resolved during the first year of its use.

Due to complications in the development of this system, BEAM is not operational at this point. This strategy will be continued until BEAM is in place.

**Objective 5.1.2.** Monthly reviews of outcome data by rehabilitation program chiefs and managers was completed with supervisors and other program staff.

Reviews of outcome data from the agency's archaic system continues to be reviewed on monthly basis by management staff and local supervisors, examining it for trends or problems indicated by the data.

**Goal 5.2.** To provide holistic, consistent, and accurate methods of quality assurance and program evaluation.

**Objective 5.2.1.** Develop an up-to- date Quality Assurance Manual outline identifying areas requiring specific methods of quality assurance based on outcome measures with consideration of BEAM. The manual will be written, edited and approved by FFY 2020.

Due to complications in the development of this system, BEAM is not operational at this point. This strategy will be continued until BEAM is in place.

**Objective 5.2.2.** To obtain reviews and input from all program managers to develop draft methods to achieve holistic, consistent, and accurate measures.

Due to multiple personnel changes, mostly initiated by retirements, reviews are done and input regarding implications for change is recorded. This will continue throughout FFY2015, as a new Chief of Field Services who is responsible for quality assurance will be in place and can initiate input into measures and methodology.

## **DSB's evaluation of the extent to which Supported Employment goals have been achieved:**

Strategies that contributed toward achieving progress toward the following supported employment goals:

### **Supported Employment Goals:**

In all 100 counties, DSB plans to identify individuals with disabilities that have traditionally been underserved and not served, who will require Supported Employment services in order to achieve a successful employment outcome by using the following objectives:

1. Provide training to new rehabilitation counselors that will assist in their ability to identify and to refer individuals with the most significant disabilities for supported employment services.

**Progress Evaluation and Strategies Employed:** DSB has provided Best Practices Training to all new rehabilitation counselors to instruct them on issues regarding blind rehabilitation, policy and appropriate rendering of VR services. This training is required for all new staff and has included an emphasis on Supported Employment (SE) Services. In addition, DSB held a VR Counselor Training in annually to specifically address (among other things) SE client services, vendors, and documentation. During this time, SE case scenarios and policy application were reviewed and questions were answered.

2. DSB's program specialist for supported employment will provide training to community rehabilitation program staff, as requested, on information about working with individuals who are blind or visually impaired to assist in job development and placement.

**Progress Evaluation and Strategies Employed:** DSB was successful in both identifying new vendors to provide SE Services to clients and in providing additional training to these vendors to assist them in best working with blind, visually impaired and deaf-blind clients. More than twice as many new vendors have been identified through the recent establishment of the new BEAM case management system. Through this system, we have combined the DSB vendor listing with that of our sister agency, DVR. This has given both agencies access to the other's vendors which has opened many doors for the DSB SE Program. The DSB SE Program Specialist has also met with several new and existing vendors one on one and through meeting

demonstrations to make sure that they were aware of the DSB Supported Employment Program, its requirements, etc. DSB has also invited Community Rehabilitation Program Staff to come to the Rehabilitation Center for the Blind to attend the same training new DSB staff receive entitled NEST or New Employee Sensitivity Training. This is a one week intensive training program where staff experience hands on training, often under the blindfold, in several aspect of blind awareness, vocational rehabilitation for the blind and blind specific skill training. As of 2017, DSB has had 3 new vendors that have had a total of 4 employees that have taken advantage of this opportunity. These staff have reported a much greater understanding and willingness to work with blind, visually impaired and deaf-blind clients and are having great success in working with DSB clients as a result. This is a service that we will continue to promote statewide and we expect continued success. DSB did have additional requests for CRP staff to attend that could not be accommodated at the time secondary to a lack of space. However, these staff will have additional opportunities to attend in the near future.

3. Community rehabilitation programs will identify individuals with the most significant disabilities who want to work, and refer them to DSB for VR services, which may include supported employment services.

**Progress Evaluation and Strategies Employed:** DSB has made an effort through direct education of vendors and through offering Community Rehabilitation Program agency staff the NEST program to educate community rehabilitation programs in what we do as an agency and the qualifications for eligibility. This will allow them to see that they might have clients they presently work with that may benefit from DSB Supported Employment (SE) Services. This will allow them to make appropriate referrals when needed and to contribute valuable feedback during the SE process.

4. During Fiscal Year 2016, DSB plans to close ten (3) individuals indicating successful employment outcomes after receiving supported employment services.

**Progress Evaluation and Strategies Employed:** Although these numbers have been very low in past years, DSB is striving to improve them. DSB has provided training for VR staff and field supervisors to make sure that they fully understood the definitions of SD and MSD status and the qualifications for the Supported Employment (SE) Program. Training on Supported Employment (SE) was held in 2016 and 2017 on SE to VRC staff and to CRPs in 2017. DSB also provided 2 CRP trainings that covered this topic and blindness skills as well as disability sensitivity issues. There are more such trainings planned for the next year across the state.

They were reminded of all the benefits clients receive as a part of the SE Program and how to help them access these services. Also reviewed were the vendors that can be used and what to do should a vendor has some apprehension. The new DSB SE Program Specialist for has also planned additional training for 2016 and plans to visit field offices to increase awareness and knowledge about the program. In 2015, DSB increased the number of clients receiving Supported Employment services by 50% while the number of those closed successfully has remained basically the same. This shows that DSB efforts to increase the Supported Employment Program are working, but we need to continue our efforts. DSB will continue to strive to help the program grow as we do realize that it has great potential and it is a vital employment service provided to those we serve. DSB Program Specialist also review VRC client case files that have been in status 20 (ready for work) for an extended period of time to help identify potential SE participants.

B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities. (DSB)

The factors identified that have impeded the achievement of DSBs supported employment goals and priorities are the following:

- Vacancy of the Transition and Supported Employment VR Program Specialist for over 2 years.

- Need for additional training in assessing what clients are appropriate for supported employment services, how to access services and how clients might benefit.
- Lack of vendors that can provide appropriate job development and coaching services for MSD clients that are blind, deaf-blind or visually impaired in addition to secondary impairments.

**(q) Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services**

**Include the following:**

- 1. The quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.**
- 2. The timing of transition to extended services.**

**Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services:**

The North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services in cooperation with the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services, provided grant funding in 1985 to 6 service providers in North Carolina to implement supported employment services. In 1986 the Division was awarded funding from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services to create a systems-change approach to implementing supported employment services in North Carolina. Since 1987 the Division's effort has grown to a statewide system of approximately 118 supported employment programs. During federal fiscal year 2017, nearly 3,000 individuals received supported employment services and 1,530 of these individuals achieved a successful employment outcome. Supported employment providers receive vendorship funding through the utilization of Title VI, Part B funds and General services fund (110). Title VI, Part B funds will continue to be utilized to supplement funds under Part B of Title I for the cost of supported employment services to persons with the most significant disabilities. However, the extent of services offered to a particular individual is determined on an individual basis incorporating the individual's informed choice pertaining to their need to achieve and to maintain a vocational goal. Examples of populations that will be served include (but are not limited to) individuals with severe and persistent mental illness, significant cognitive impairments, cerebral palsy, autism, and traumatic head injury. Supported employment services will be provided on a time-limited basis to individuals with the most significant disabilities. These services may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- development of and placement in jobs based on client informed choice in an integrated setting for the maximum number of hours possible based on the unique strengths, resources, interests, concerns, abilities, and capabilities of individuals with the most significant disabilities;
- intensive on-site job skills training and other training provided by skilled job trainers, co-workers, and other qualified individuals, including fading and stabilization;
- extended follow along services, including regular contact with employers, trainees, parents, guardians, or other suitable professional and informed advisors, in order to reinforce and stabilize the job placement; and
- post-employment services may be funded under Title I of the Act following the individual's transition to extended services if the required services are unavailable from the extended service providers and if they are necessary to maintain the job placement.

Under federal regulations, the time-limited VR supported employment services to be provided are not to exceed 24 months funding unless the individualized plan for employment indicates that more than 18 months of services is necessary in order for the individual to achieve job stability prior to transition to extended services. The transition process from 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 and the long-term support provider begins providing extended services.

### **Division of Services for the Blind**

DSBs supported employment services program is more cost effective since it was converted to performance-based outcomes, and eligible individuals are able to achieve their employment goals more quickly.

DSB's supported employment services program through policy changes, purchase of supported employment services from private nonprofit Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP's), good practice guidelines, updated training and technical assistance to DSB staff, and training to private nonprofit CRP staff, employers, eligible individuals, families and advocates, has moved the program towards an improved quality of services.

Quality outcomes emphasize achievement of a successful stable employment outcome as determined by the individual, DSB's VR counselor, the CRP job coach, and the employer. Stable employment is achieved when all four parties agree that stabilization has occurred. The individual is encouraged to exercise informed choice in determining if a quality outcome has been achieved. DSB's objective is for the individual to make employment choices consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, and interests in the most integrated setting possible.

DSB ensures that the extended long-term support services identified on the Individualized Plan for Employment are provided by the contracted private nonprofit organization to begin when stabilization has been determined and to continue for as long as the individual requires the service.

### **Scope**

The scope of supported employment services includes all of DSB's services provided under Title I, and in addition, the coordination of extended long-term support services and the development of natural

supports. The expanded scope of supported employment long term supports requires a continuation of DSB's involvement in the coordination and collaboration with the private nonprofit CRP's, employers and families. Post-employment services are provided when supports and services needed by the individual exceed the responsibility of the extended long-term support services provider.

### **Extent**

DSB purchases supported employment services from private nonprofit CRP's in the individual's locality, and offers supported employment services to eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities in all 100 counties of the state. In addition, supported employment services are available to high school students participating in the DSB's transition programs in all 100 counties if required for successful employment outcomes.

DSB continues to identify more private nonprofit CRP's for the development of contracts to provide supported employment services. This will allow eligible individuals to have more choices available to them for supported employment services that can assist them in reaching their employment goals.

DSB's extended long term services are provided in three phases to allow the individual choices in the level of service desired and required to achieve longevity of employment. The individual makes the final decision about their movement through the phases of extended services. The phases of extended long-term services are:

**Phase 1:** The CRP providing the extended services meets with the individual twice monthly at the place of employment for at least 6 months. When the six-month period ends, the CRP, the individual, and the employer review the individual's progress. If all parties agree that the individual is performing the job without any difficulties and no other problems are present with the placement, the individual can move to the next phase. This action requires the individual's signature on a waiver for this change in level of service. If the individual feels that they are not ready to move to the next phase, then they remain in Phase 1. An individual can remain in any phase indefinitely.

**Phase 2:** The CRP meets with the individual at the place of employment at least once every six months for at least 2 years to review progress of placement. The meetings can take place more often if necessary to resolve any minor problems. After 2 years, another review is conducted with the individual, the CRP, and the employer. If all agree that the individual remains stable in the placement, they can move to the last phase. The movement requires the signature of the individual on a waiver agreeing to the move.

**Phase 3:** The individual and employer understand that if a problem occurs, the CRP will be contacted to meet and to complete an assessment of the problem. If the problem can be resolved quickly with short-term intervention such as a few visits, the individual will remain in this phase. If the problem is new or difficult to resolve without DSB's intervention, the individual will be referred back to the DSB for further assistance. The goal of this action is to allow the individual to either retain the job or to begin the process for obtaining new employment in the quickest and most effective manner as to minimize the interruption of employment. DSB will, at the time of the referral, make a determination whether the problem can be resolved in Status 32 Post Employment Services or whether a new case will be required.

DSB is continually striving towards improving its supported employment program to provide the best service possible to the individual. Therefore, DSB uses the following strategies to work towards this objective: (a) identify additional private nonprofit CRP's with supported employment service programs to expand its supported employment program and to provide eligible individuals with more choices of service providers available to them; (b) provide training to new CRP vendors with DSB's supported employment program to assist them in working with individuals who are blind or visually impaired; (c) provide ongoing training to CRP staff already working with DSB's supported employment program; and (d) develop natural supports for its individuals to assist them in becoming more independent in their communities, to include self-pay, co-workers, employers, and family/friends.

## VII Appendix

### Core Programs

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

## Core Programs

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

## Mandatory One-stop Delivery System Partners

## Core Programs

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

## Core Programs

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

## Core Programs

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

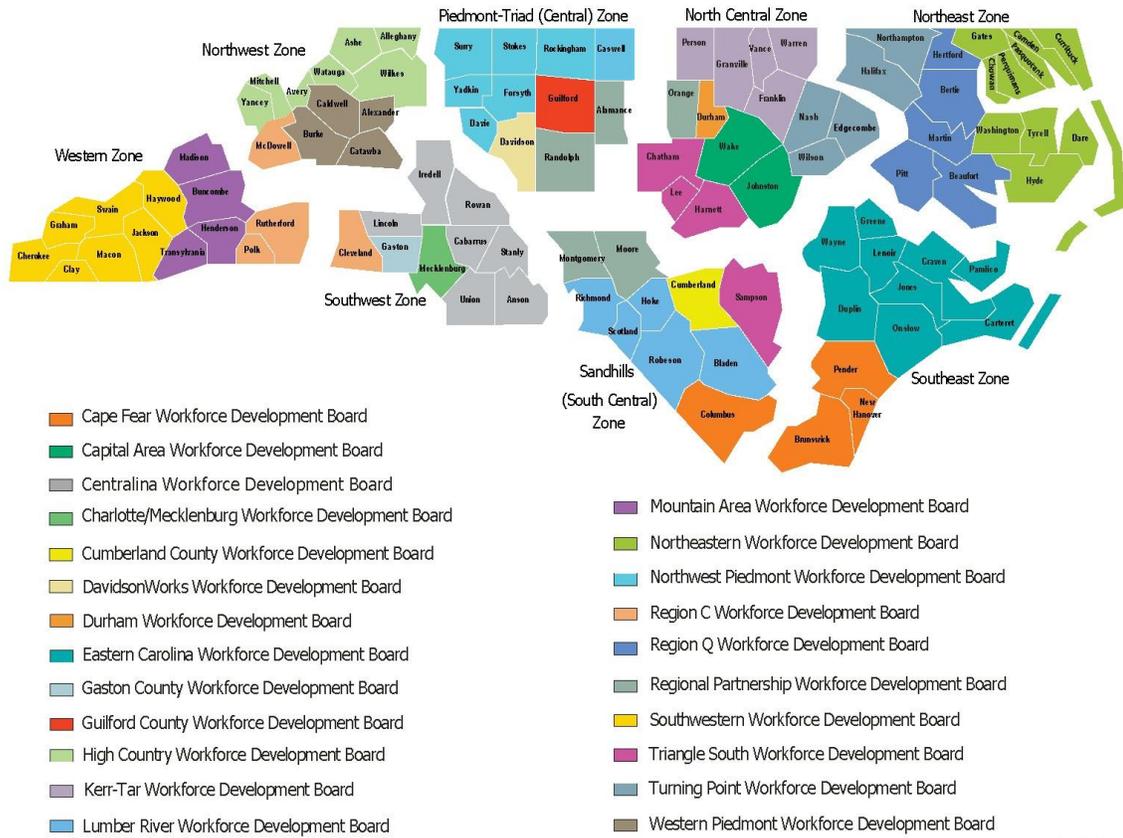
## Additional State Workforce Partners

Agency	Program	Program and Activities with Target Population
North Carolina Community College System	Apprenticeship	<p>The Apprenticeship program through the North Carolina Community College System provides on-the- job learning with job related education experience. Working with the community colleges, technical institutions, universities, and individual employers, registered apprentices are provided a structured training that enhances their skills on the job.</p> <p>The program is designed to serve incumbent workers and business owners.</p>
North Carolina Community College System	BioNetwork Program	<p>The BioNetwork through the North Carolina Community College System provides education and training resources for the biotechnology and life science industry sector and for community college credit and non-credit programming through the customized training program, laboratory resources, course development and delivery, e-learning tools, workshops, and collaborative projects. BioNetwork also provides teacher training, STEM outreach, and career guidance to K-14.</p> <p>The program is designed to serve individuals, students, teachers, and employers.</p>

## Additional State Workforce Partners

Agency	Program	Program and Activities with Target Population
North Carolina Community College System	Customized Training Program	The Customized Training program through the North Carolina Community College System supports the economic development efforts of the State by providing education and training opportunities for individuals at eligible businesses and industries. The program is designed to react quickly to the needs of businesses to ensure the presence of a well-trained workforce. Services may include pre-employment training and post-employment training. The program is designed to serve incumbent workers and new, expanding and existing businesses.
North Carolina Community College System	Human Resources Development	The Human Resource Development program through the North Carolina Community College System provides skill assessment services, employability skills training, and career development counseling to unemployed and underemployed adults based on six core components of assessment, positive self-concept, employability skills, communication skills, problem-solving skills, and awareness of the impact of information technology in the workplace. The program is designed to serve unemployed or underemployed job seekers.
North Carolina Community College System	Small Business Center Network	The Small Business Center Network program through the North Carolina Community College System provides education and training, counseling, referral, and information to prospective and existing North Carolina small business owners. With one location at each community college, the 58 Small Business Centers are community-based providers of entrepreneurship training, business counseling, referral and information. The program is designed to serve individuals interested in starting a business and current business owners.
North Carolina Community College System	Workforce Continuing Education	The Workforce Continuing Education program through the North Carolina Community College System provides post-secondary students the opportunity to attain education and training through participation in one of 800+ short-term training courses. These programs provide instruction around skill competencies that lead to a recognized credential (licensure, certification, renewal, registry listing) and/or meets local workforce labor needs. The program is designed to serve the general population, unemployed or underemployed job seekers, and incumbent workers.
North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services	Food and Nutrition Services, Employment and Training	The Food and Nutrition Services, Employment and Training program through the Department of Health and Human Services prepares adult Food and Nutrition Services recipients' for employment through assistance with job searches and other work activities as well as short-term training opportunities. The program is designed to serve low-income job seekers.

# North Carolina Workforce Development Boards and Prosperity Zones



Map revised 11-18-15