

PREPARING NORTH CAROLINA'S
WORKFORCE FOR TODAY AND
TOMORROW

NCWorks Commission Biennial Strategic Plan

2026-2028





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OVERVIEW

The 2026–2028 NCWorks Commission Strategic Plan aligns with Governor Josh Stein's ambitious vision for workforce and opportunity in North Carolina. The Governor's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships advances a unified, statewide approach that more tightly aligns education, workforce, and economic development around measurable goals. It prioritizes employer leadership, expanding apprenticeships and work-based learning, and sector-based strategies in high-growth industries to ensure the workforce system responds directly to labor market demand. The strategic plan also elevates system modernization through data integration, statewide outreach, and clearer career pathways that expand access for rural communities, veterans, individuals with disabilities, and justice-involved people. This positions the workforce system to deliver scalable, equitable, and future-ready talent solutions that support economic growth and opportunity in every region of the state.

In 2026, ***Site Selection Magazine*** ranked North Carolina **#1 in the nation for workforce**, citing the state's strong talent pipeline, employer engagement, and alignment between education, workforce development, and economic growth. North Carolina also consistently ranks among the top states for business climate, underscoring the critical role a skilled, adaptable workforce plays in attracting and retaining employers across industries.



BACKGROUND

NCWORKS COMMISSION

The NCWorks Commission serves as North Carolina's State Workforce Development Board under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), providing strategic leadership and oversight of the state's workforce development system. The Commission develops and approves the WIOA Unified State Plan, establishes statewide workforce policy, aligns education, workforce, and economic development efforts, and evaluates the effectiveness of workforce programs to ensure accountability and continuous improvement. In this role, the Commission advises the Governor and General Assembly and coordinates partners to ensure employers have the talent they need and North Carolinians have clear pathways to education, training, and good-paying jobs.

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL ON WORKFORCE AND APPRENTICESHIPS

The Governor's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships is an advisory body housed within the NCWorks Commission that brings together state leaders, employers, education partners, and workforce experts to advance a coordinated, statewide workforce strategy. Established by Governor Josh Stein, the Council develops data-informed goals and actionable recommendations to expand apprenticeships, strengthen work-based learning, align education and training with employer needs, and increase economic opportunity for all North Carolinians.

Governor Stein's *Executive Order (EO) Number 11*, signed on March 25, 2025, directed the Council to develop strategic, quantifiable goals, along with relevant strategies designed to meaningfully and holistically grow and prepare North Carolina's workforce development efforts over the next four years. As the first stage of this work, the Governor tasked the Council with recommending goals by June 15, 2025, which would address, among other topics, the following:

1. Credential and degree attainment.
2. Labor market alignment.
3. Pre-apprenticeships and registered apprenticeships.
4. Sector-based strategies in emerging areas.
5. State government employment.
6. Work-based learning opportunities.

In June 2025, the Governor's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships formally adopted [11 strategic workforce development goals](#) to guide North Carolina's efforts in building a more responsive, future-ready workforce system over the next four years. These goals establish a unified vision for expanding access to career-connected learning, strengthening employer engagement, and improving outcomes for all North Carolinians. On November 6, 2025, the Council advanced this vision by approving 30 actionable strategies aligned to the goals, providing a clear roadmap for implementation, coordination, and measurable impact across education, workforce, and economic development sectors.

Each goal identifies a target to be achieved within the next four years, during which the Council will provide annual updates to the Governor. These goals are based on existing local, state, and national data. The Council designed these goals to be responsive to current and anticipated economic needs, with the understanding that technology and policy are changing at a rapid pace.

The report on [strategies, issued by the Council in December 2025](#), outlines a bold plan to build a workforce system that can continue to earn top accolades for years to come. It also provides the framework for this strategic plan.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2026–2028 NCWorks Commission Biennial Strategic Plan Framework

The NCWorks Commission's 2026–2028 Biennial Strategic Plan establishes a unified framework for advancing Governor Stein's workforce and opportunity agenda by fully integrating the priorities and recommendations of the Governor's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships into the state's workforce system. The Commission serves as the primary policy, coordination, and accountability body responsible for translating the Council's vision, goals, and strategies into actionable statewide and local implementation.

Central to this framework is the elevation of the Governor's Council as the strategic compass for North Carolina's workforce efforts. The Council's 11 workforce development goals and 30 strategies provide the foundation for prioritizing investments, aligning agency action, and coordinating education, workforce, and economic development partners around shared outcomes. This approach ensures that workforce development is not programmatic or siloed, but instead intentionally designed to respond to employer demand, expand access to opportunity, and strengthen the state's long-term economic competitiveness.

The biennial plan prioritizes four integrated focus areas: increasing education and credential attainment; expanding apprenticeships and high-quality work-based learning; strengthening employer engagement and sector-based strategies; and modernizing and aligning the workforce system through data, policy, and statewide outreach. Across each focus area, the Commission will advance the Council's recommendations by promoting employer leadership, embedding equity and access, and supporting scalable solutions that serve learners, jobseekers, and businesses in every region of the state.

Implementation of this framework relies on close coordination among state agencies, local workforce development boards, education partners, employers, and community-based organizations. The Commission will use its statutory authority to align policy, oversee performance, and monitor progress toward the Council's goals, while ensuring transparency and accountability through regular reporting and data-informed decision-making.

Through this biennial strategic plan, the NCWorks Commission commits to operationalizing the Governor's workforce vision, building a future-ready system that connects North Carolinians to meaningful careers, provides employers with the talent they need, and ensures that opportunity is accessible across all communities.





CROSSWALK:

BIENNIAL STRATEGIC PLAN → GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL GOALS AND STRATEGIES

OBJECTIVE 1

Increase Education, Credential, and Degree Attainment

Strategic Plan Focus: Preparing North Carolinians for success through postsecondary readiness, industry-valued credential attainment, and seamless transitions across education and workforce pathways.

NCWorks Commission Committee: Education and Credential Attainment

Council Goals: 1, 2, and 3 (see Appendix, page A.6)

- ▶ Tracking and increasing credential and degree attainment
- ▶ Labor market alignment

Council Strategies 1 through 8 (see Appendix, pages A.7-A.8)

- ▶ Expand industry-valued credentials aligned to employer demand
- ▶ Implement Workforce Pell for short-term workforce training
- ▶ Strengthen credit for prior learning, military service, and work experience
- ▶ Expand advising and career navigation supports (K-12 through adult learners)

How the Plan Operationalizes This: The Commission prioritizes data integration, statewide credential alignment, and learner-centered pathways to ensure credentials lead directly to employment and advancement.

OBJECTIVE 2

Expand Apprenticeships and High-Quality Work-Based Learning

Strategic Plan Focus: Doubling apprenticeships and scaling work-based learning experiences at all levels across education, workforce, and employer partners.

NCWorks Commission Committee: Apprenticeships and Work-Based Learning

Council Goals 4, 5, 6, and 7 (see Appendix, page A.9)

- ▶ Pre-apprenticeships and registered apprenticeships
- ▶ Work-based learning opportunities
- ▶ Engage with 50,000 employers

Council Strategies 1 through 11 (see Appendix, pages A.10-A.11)

- ▶ Expand registered and youth apprenticeships
- ▶ Embed credentials and degrees into apprenticeship models
- ▶ Incentivize employer participation in work-based learning
- ▶ Reduce regulatory and administrative barriers for employers
- ▶ Expand work-based learning in state government and priority sectors

How the Plan Operationalizes This: The Commission develops policy, encourages employer engagement and makes recommendations to braid funding streams, to make apprenticeships a primary talent development strategy statewide.

OBJECTIVE 3

Strengthen Employer Engagement and Sector-Based Strategies

Strategic Plan Focus: Creating a workforce system that is responsive to the economy by centering employer leadership and sector-based partnerships

NCWorks Commission Committee: Future Ready Workforce and Employer Partnerships

Council Goals 8, 9, and 10 (see Appendix, page A.12)

- ▶ Sector-based strategies in emerging and high-demand industries
- ▶ Employer engagement
- ▶ AI Leadership Council recommendations
- ▶ Decrease state employment vacancy rate

Council Strategies 1 through 7 (see Appendix, page A.13)

- ▶ Develop statewide sector strategies in advanced manufacturing, education, and health care
- ▶ Formalize employer-led partnerships across education and workforce agencies
- ▶ Align training investments to regional and sector-specific demand
- ▶ Expand employer engagement across small, medium, and large businesses
- ▶ Improve recruitment and retention in state government

How the Plan Operationalizes This: The Commission uses the Council's sector strategies to prioritize investments, coordinate partners, and ensure workforce efforts directly support economic growth.

OBJECTIVE 4

Modernize and Align a Future-Ready Workforce System

Strategic Plan Focus: Improving system access, alignment, integration, and modernization through policy, tracking accountability and performance data, and statewide outreach.

NCWorks Commission Committee: Modernizing and Aligning the Workforce System

Council Goal 11 (see Appendix, page A.14)

- ▼ Labor market alignment
- ▼ System access and modernization

Council Strategies 1 through 4 (see Appendix, pages A.14-A.15)

- ▼ Launch a coordinated statewide outreach and awareness initiative
- ▼ Integrate NCWorks.gov, NCcareers.org, and related platforms
- ▼ Improve data collection, disaggregation, and transparency
- ▼ Modernizing policies through WIOA State Plan and Commission Policy Statement(s)

Tracking System Accountability and Performance: Measure and report on the effectiveness of the workforce development system including the usage and quality of services by collecting, understanding, tracking, disaggregating, and sharing data effectively to strengthen a responsive and successful workforce development system, including evaluating the current system to identify and help advance any changes to maximize outcomes for local communities and the state of North Carolina.

- ▼ The NCWorks Commission will use this data to ensure alignment of workforce development programs in North Carolina

by working with partners to develop the Annual Program Review and the Annual Workforce System Performance Report.

- ▼ The NCWorks Commission guides and facilitates improvements to the NCWorks Career Center system through the criteria certification process as detailed in the USDOL, Training and Employment Guidance Letter 16-16. This ensures a customer-focused integrated system, and continuous improvement of service delivery at certified NCWorks Career Centers.

How the Plan Operationalizes This:

The Commission serves as the coordinating authority to modernize systems, align agencies, and ensure accountability through performance reporting. It also will manage the outreach and advocacy efforts.

OBJECTIVE 5

Expand Access and Opportunity for Underserved Populations

Strategic Plan Focus: Ensuring workforce opportunities reach all North Carolinians, regardless of geography or background.

NCWorks Commission Committee: All

Council Goals Supported:

- ▼ Workforce participation and access

Council Strategies Activated:

- ▼ Expand workforce services for rural communities
- ▼ Strengthen reentry and justice-involved workforce pathways
- ▼ Increase employment opportunities for veterans and individuals with disabilities

How the Plan Operationalizes This:

- ▼ Equity and access are embedded across all goals, with targeted strategies to remove barriers and expand participation in education, training, and employment.

STRATEGIC CROSSWALK:

NCWORKS COMMISSION BIENNIAL STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK → GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL GOALS & STRATEGIES

Biennial Strategic Framework Priority	Governor's Council Workforce Goals	Council Strategies Activated	How the NCWorks Commission Leads & Integrates
Education, Credential & Degree Attainment	Credential & degree attainment Labor market alignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Align industry-valued credentials to employer demand Implement Workforce Pell for short-term training Expand credit for prior learning, military service, and work experience Strengthen advising and career navigation 	Aligns policy, funding, and data systems to ensure credentials lead to employment and advancement; tracks statewide attainment progress and outcomes
Apprenticeships & Work-Based Learning	Pre-apprenticeships & registered apprenticeships Work-based learning opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand registered and youth apprenticeships Embed credentials into apprenticeship models Incentivize employer participation Expand work-based learning in state government 	Uses policy authority and funding levers to scale apprenticeships and work-based learning statewide and remove barriers for employers and learners
Employer Engagement & Sector Strategies	Sector-based strategies in key industries Employer engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop statewide sector strategies (advanced manufacturing, education, health care) Formalize employer-led partnerships Align training investments to regional demand 	Coordinates employers, education, and workforce partners to ensure training aligns with real-time labor market needs
System Modernization & Alignment	Labor market alignment System access & modernization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch statewide outreach and awareness initiative Integrate NCWorks.gov, NCcareers.org, and related platforms Modernize policies through WIOA State Plan and Commission Policy Statement(s) 	Coordinates employers, education, and workforce partners to ensure training aligns with real-time labor market needs
Access, Equity & Workforce Participation	Workforce participation & access State government employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand services for rural communities Strengthen reentry pathways Increase opportunities for veterans and individuals with disabilities Improve recruitment and retention in state government 	Embeds opportunity across all strategies, ensuring opportunity reaches all regions and populations

Strategic Alignment

The Governor's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships establishes North Carolina's workforce goals and strategies, while the NCWorks Commission operationalizes those priorities through policy alignment, system coordination, funding oversight, and performance measurement—ensuring measurable progress toward Governor Stein's workforce and opportunity agenda.



WHO LEADS/ WHO SUPPORTS

Governance and Implementation Roles

The **NCWorks Commission** serves as North Carolina's **State Workforce Development Board** pursuant to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). In accordance with WIOA requirements, the Commission provides strategic oversight of the statewide workforce development system and is responsible for developing, approving, and modifying the State Workforce Plan; setting statewide workforce development policies; establishing performance accountability measures; and ensuring alignment across core WIOA programs and partner agencies. The Commission advises the Governor, General Assembly, and state agencies on workforce policy and system improvements and evaluates the effectiveness of workforce programs to promote continuous improvement and compliance with federal and state requirements.

The **Governor's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships**, established by Executive Order and housed within the NCWorks Commission, functions as an advisory body that supports the Commission in fulfilling its WIOA responsibilities. The Council provides strategic input and recommendations related to workforce priorities, including apprenticeships, work-based learning, sector partnerships, employer engagement, workforce participation, and access to opportunity. The Council's goals and strategies inform the Commission's policy development, planning, and oversight activities but do not supplant the Commission's statutory authority under WIOA.

State agencies administering WIOA core programs and required partner programs—including the N.C. Department of Commerce, Division of Workforce Solutions, ApprenticeshipNC, Department of Public Instruction, North Carolina Community College System, Department of Health and Human Services, and other designated partners—are responsible for the implementation and administration of workforce programs consistent with Commission-approved policies and the State Plan. These agencies coordinate

service delivery, share data, align resources, and collaborate to support seamless access to workforce services for jobseekers and employers, as required under WIOA.

Local Workforce Development Boards carry out workforce development activities at the local level in accordance with WIOA and Commission policy. Local boards develop and implement local workforce plans aligned with the State Plan, oversee the operation of NCWorks Career Centers, engage employers, and coordinate education, workforce, and economic development partners to address regional labor market needs. Local boards are accountable for performance outcomes and compliance with federal and state requirements.

Employers, education providers, economic development organizations, and community-based partners support implementation through participation in sector partnerships, provision of work-based learning opportunities, co-design of training programs, and delivery of supportive services. This governance structure ensures that strategic guidance from the Governor's Council is integrated into the Commission's WIOA-mandated leadership role, resulting in a coordinated, accountable, and employer-responsive workforce system that advances economic opportunity across North Carolina.



CONCLUSION

This biennial strategic plan reflects the scale of opportunity and responsibility before North Carolina. Achieving its ambitious goals will require unified leadership from the NCWorks Commission and the Governor's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships, strong partnership across the workforce ecosystem, and sustained commitment from staff at every level. By aligning strategy, policy, and execution around a shared vision, we can accelerate progress, expand access to opportunity, and deliver measurable results for employers, workers, and communities across the state. Together, we have the foundation, the momentum, and the resolve to ensure North Carolina's workforce system meets the demands of today while preparing for the opportunities of tomorrow.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The NCWorks Commission gratefully acknowledges the Commission members, designees, subject matter experts, and staff whose leadership and expertise supported the development of this strategic plan. We extend our sincere appreciation to the members of Governor Stein's Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships ("The Council"), an advisory body within the Commission, for their commitment to shaping North Carolina's workforce future through the development of 11 statewide goals and 30 actionable strategies. We also thank the elected officials, workforce development boards, education partners, employers, and workforce professionals across the state whose collaboration and dedication continue to strengthen North Carolina's workforce development system and advance economic opportunity for all North Carolinians.

MEMBERSHIP

Governor Josh Stein

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Chris Arabia

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- ▼ NC Community College System
- ▼ NC Department of Administration
- ▼ NC Department of Health and Human Services
- ▼ NC Department of Public Instruction
- ▼ NC Independent Colleges and Universities
- ▼ NC Department of Commerce
- ▼ NC Association of Workforce Development Boards
- ▼ NC Local Education Agencies
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- ▼ 20 Local Workforce Development Boards
- ▼ The UNC System
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Appendix

GOVERNOR'S COUNCIL
ON WORKFORCE AND
APPRENTICESHIPS



Strategies to Advance North Carolina's Workforce Development Progress

DECEMBER 2025



Strategies to Advance North Carolina's Workforce Development Progress

DECEMBER 2025



*Cover photos courtesy of:
North Carolina Community College System
North Carolina Department of Public Instruction*

VISION

North Carolina is committed to creating opportunity for every person in every corner of the state.

Opportunity for youth to see a fulfilling career in North Carolina and to know the path to get there. Opportunity for people – regardless of age, location, or background – to access education and training to create careers that enable them to support their family. Opportunity for existing businesses to expand with their pool of employees growing alongside. Opportunity for new businesses to call NC home, adding more good-paying jobs to our state.

To achieve this vision, K-12 schools, postsecondary partners, state agencies, and private employers are working together to expand opportunity for our state's greatest asset – our people.



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December 15, 2025

Dear Governor Stein:

As the co-chairs of your Council on Workforce and Apprenticeships ("The Council"), established by Executive Order No. 11, we are pleased to present our second formal report. In June of this year, we identified 11 goals, which are designed to meaningfully and holistically grow and prepare North Carolina's workforce development efforts. Now, after additional consideration, discussion, and input from a variety of stakeholders during meetings of our subcommittees and of the full Council, we recommend a set of strategies which we believe will help our state attain those goals.

In accordance with your Executive Order, this report reiterates the 11 goals along with baseline data illustrating the current status of each one (when available). To assist with organization and implementation, we have now grouped the goals under four objectives:

1. Prepare more North Carolinians for good jobs by increasing attainment of industry-valued credentials and degrees.
2. Create more pathways to good jobs by increasing work-based education and training opportunities and empowering employer leadership in the education-to-workforce continuum.
3. Focus on key workforce sectors – advanced manufacturing, education, health care, and state government – to maximize existing and emerging opportunities, including AI skills development, to build a future-ready workforce.
4. Amplify the impact of workforce programs for all North Carolinians – learners, jobseekers, employees, and employers – through a coordinated and comprehensive public outreach campaign.

Under each objective, we have listed the corresponding strategies to achieve the goals within the objective, the current status of each strategy, and the partner(s) that will be responsible for providing leadership to carry out each strategy. It is important to note that to successfully implement most of the strategies, partners will need to realign their existing funding in new ways, and in other cases, seek investments of additional resources from state, federal and/or private sources. We know that the General Assembly shares our desire to continue to expand workforce development across the state, and its support will be particularly critical to advancing this work.

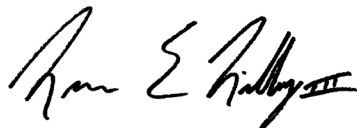
We again express our sincere appreciation to the many talented individuals from across North Carolina who serve on this Council, to the subject matter experts who have informed our work, and to the professional staff of the NCWorks Commission, the North Carolina Department of Commerce, the North Carolina Business Committee for Education, and the North Carolina Community College System, who have all supported us.

The members of The Council look forward to continuing to work together with you, using the goals and strategies we have identified to make real the promise that all across North Carolina, opportunity is built here.

With gratitude for the opportunity to serve,



President Jeff Cox



Secretary Lee Lilley



Senator Eddie Settle

Objective 1

Prepare more North Carolinians for good jobs by increasing attainment of industry-valued credentials and degrees.

GOALS

1. Ensure that at least two million North Carolinians ages 25-44 will have earned an industry-valued credential or degree by 2030.

Background: To ensure North Carolina remains economically competitive now and into the future, in 2019, with bipartisan support in the General Assembly and a signature from the Governor, the state adopted one of the most ambitious goals in the nation—to have 2 million North Carolinians aged 25-44 hold an industry-valued credential or postsecondary degree by 2030.

Baseline Data: As of 2023, North Carolina had an estimated 1,664,892 adults ages 25-44 with a high-quality degree or credential; this is 13,000 individuals below where the state needed to be, at that time, to be on target for the 2 million by 2030 goal.

2. By graduation, every high school student will have completed coursework that results in transferable credit or credentials/certifications in preparation for the postsecondary pathway of their choice. The coursework includes dual enrollment, Career & Technical Education (CTE) concentrator, Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps (JROTC), Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate, and work-based learning courses.

Background: This reflects a commitment to equipping every high school graduate with tangible outcomes from their education. By expanding access to these options and ensuring all students graduate with meaningful credits or credentials/certifications, North Carolina can strengthen its talent pipeline and create more seamless transitions into postsecondary pathways that meet the needs of students and the evolving economy.

Baseline Data: For the graduating high school class of 2024, approximately 93% of students met this goal.

3. For graduating high school students, increase postsecondary enrollment, employment, or enlistment in the military within 12 months of high school graduation.

Background: Clear postsecondary plans and engagement post high school graduation is a strong precursor to future success including earning a degree or industry-valued credential. In the next phase of The Council's work, this goal will be further refined to determine the target increase and identify the data to better measure enrollment and enlistment.

Baseline Data: 82% of students in the graduating class of 2023 were either enrolled or employed within 12 months of high school graduation.

STRATEGY	STATUS	RESPONSIBLE PARTNERS *
1. Continue to develop and expand an interoperable data system (e.g., digital transcripts), that allows for real-time, seamless transitions across education, workforce and licensure pathways, along with robust tracking to understand and evaluate learner-level outcomes.	IN PROGRESS	myFutureNC Board of Directors NC Community College System NC Department of Commerce NC Department of Public Instruction North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities University of North Carolina System

*Per Executive Order 11, each goal or strategy has specific organizations (represented by Council members) assigned to it. The assigned partners are responsible for providing leadership to move the work forward, track progress, and report on results.

STRATEGY	STATUS	RESPONSIBLE PARTNERS
<p>2. Further align the state's industry-valued credentials list with employer demand and expand access to relevant credentials. Leverage the list to support implementation of Workforce Pell.</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>myFutureNC Board of Directors NC Community College System NC Department of Commerce NC Department of Public Instruction North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities University of North Carolina System</p>
<p>3. Strengthen and coordinate programs that ensure learners are on track and re-engage adults who stop before finishing a credential or degree. Create clear and consistent ways to give credit for prior learning, military service, and work experience.</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>myFutureNC Board of Directors NC Community College System NC Department of Commerce NC Department of Public Instruction North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities University of North Carolina System</p>
<p>4. Align and strategically expand funding and partnerships to support learners with essential needs like child care, transportation, food, and housing, especially for people in rural communities, justice-involved people, people with disabilities, and veterans and their families.</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>myFutureNC Board of Directors NC Community College System NC Department of Commerce NC Department of Public Instruction North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities University of North Carolina System</p>
<p>5. Promote awareness and increase uptake of Workforce Pell, NC College Connect, Next NC and the NC Need-Based Scholarship to provide direct admission to North Carolina colleges and universities and financial aid to support the cost of attendance, making financial aid more flexible to cover tuition, credentials, and licensing costs—especially in high-demand career fields.</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>myFutureNC Board of Directors NC Community College System NC Department of Commerce NC Department of Public Instruction North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities University of North Carolina System</p>
<p>6. Review and adjust the high school course quality points system, encouraging parity across prioritized course types (Advanced Placement/International Baccalaureate/Cambridge International Education, Career and Technical Education, and Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps).</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>NC Community College System NC Department of Public Instruction NC General Assembly North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities University of North Carolina System</p>

STRATEGY	STATUS	RESPONSIBLE PARTNERS
<p>7. Ensure every K-12 student develops a meaningful career development plan, supported by well-trained advisors across schools, colleges, and workforce programs. Expand successful advising models, such as Advise NC and the NC Career Coach program, to more high schools, so all students receive high-quality guidance as they explore and prepare for their future.</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>myFutureNC Board of Directors NC Community College System NC Department of Commerce NC Department of Public Instruction North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities University of North Carolina System</p>
<p>8. Increase the number of school counselors to ensure that North Carolina meets the American School Counselor Association student-to-counselor ratio of 250 to 1.</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>NC Department of Public Instruction NC General Assembly</p>

Objective 2

Create more pathways to good jobs by increasing work-based education and training opportunities and empowering employer leadership in the education-to-workforce continuum.

GOALS

4. Double the number of registered apprentices.

Background: Registered Apprenticeship is a highly effective form of work-based learning, combining hands-on training with classroom instruction, structured wage progression, and nationally recognized credentials that provides strong return on investment for both employers and students. This goal includes participation in both registered apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships.

Baseline Data: Between July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024, there were 9,698 active registered apprentices and pre-apprentices registered with ApprenticeshipNC.

5. Increase participation in work-based learning:

- Double the number of work-based learning experiences through the NCWorks system with funding from *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title I* and the Native American Workforce Program.
- Double the number of high school students participating in (high quality) work-based learning.
- Increase by 25% the number of community college students participating in work-based learning courses.
- Increase by 25% work-based learning experiences including Correction Enterprises roles and work-release at state correctional facilities.
- Increase by 15% work-based learning experiences for individuals with disabilities through *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Title IV* funds.
- Double the number of students participating in the state government internship program.

Background: Work-based learning experiences exist on a continuum allowing learners and jobseekers to explore and experience the world of work. Importantly, work-based learning allows for employers to work with potential and recent hires to develop important durable and technical skills to enhance engagement, learning, and productivity. Multiple programs serve individuals and employers through work-based learning experiences.

Baseline Data: Between July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024, there were 56,893 work-based learning experiences that learners and jobseekers participated in across various programs from the NC Department of Commerce, NC Community College System, Department of Public Instruction, Department of Adult Correction, Department of Health and Human Services, and Department of Administration. For the purposes of this report, experiential work-based learning opportunities are defined as multi-week opportunities that provide hands-on work experiences to learners and jobseekers. This may include a course, internships, on-the-job training, or incumbent worker training.

6. Engage 50,000 employers to partner with The Council on achieving its goals.

Background: In response to the need for greater employer engagement, this goal casts a wide net to employers across the state, recognizing that not all 50,000 will engage in the same way.

Baseline Data: As of the fourth quarter, 2024, North Carolina is home to 379,313 business establishments. Currently, the state does not have a comprehensive and systematic approach to engage business in workforce and education initiatives.

7. Establish and expand coordinated partnerships between education and workforce agencies and employers

to increase alignment of resources to better address current and projected employer needs. Partnerships will result, on an annual basis, in the identification of local industry-valued training across the education continuum, shared planning for educational courses to meet these training needs, and increased use of available federal and state funds to support training in these programs.

Background: Coordination and alignment among our education, workforce, and employer partners is essential to ensuring employers have access to well-trained talent and North Carolinians are on pathways to good paying jobs across the state.

Baseline Data: While there are some local examples of collaboration in place, they do not cover the entire state, nor are there shared expectations and deliverables.

STRATEGY	STATUS	RESPONSIBLE PARTNERS
1. Develop an employer-centered model for shared training and education of talent, to create a unified, statewide, tiered employer engagement system that incentivizes varying levels of employer participation.	NOT STARTED	NC Department of Commerce
2. Leverage existing state and local business councils, professional associations, etc. , to identify barriers to the expansion of apprenticeships and work-based learning; build strategic partnerships; and recommend incentives for pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and work-based learning opportunities.	IN PROGRESS	NC Community College System NC Department of Commerce Department of Public Instruction
3. When possible, embed credentials and degrees into apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeship programs.	IN PROGRESS	NC Community College System Department of Public Instruction
4. Explore opportunities to strengthen and integrate Perkins V K-14 Business Advisory Councils and local area workforce development boards to formalize commitments and shared goals among education and workforce partners.	IN PROGRESS	NC Community College System NC Department of Commerce NC Department of Public Instruction
5. Across agencies, review policies and procedures to reduce regulatory burdens for employers and update policies and procedures to foster an aligned multi-sector ecosystem that supports ApprenticeshipNC and partners.	IN PROGRESS	NC Community College System NC Department of Administration NC Department of Adult Correction NC Department of Commerce NC Department of Health and Human Services NC Department of Public Instruction

STRATEGY	STATUS	RESPONSIBLE PARTNERS
<p>6. Secure stable and sustainable funding to organizations that will expand apprenticeships and work-based learning, with an emphasis on funding necessary offsets to known budget shortfalls, at ApprenticeshipNC and in other organizations supporting work-based learning and apprenticeships such as NCWorks, NC Department of Adult Correction, NC Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, and the NC Department of Health and Human Services, to meet the needs of employers as they serve people in rural communities, justice-involved people, people with disabilities, and veterans and their families.</p>	<p>NOT STARTED</p>	<p>NC Community College System NC Department of Adult Correction NC Department of Commerce NC Department of Health and Human Services NC Department of Military and Veterans Affairs NC General Assembly</p>
<p>7. Grow and unify workforce professionals supporting students and engage Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to address barriers, so that more North Carolinians can gain access to education and training that will lead to advancement opportunities.</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>NC Community College System NC Department of Administration NC Department of Adult Correction NC Department of Commerce NC Department of Health and Human Services NC Department of Public Instruction</p>
<p>8. Extend the existing Youth Apprenticeship Tuition Waiver to all apprentices. Waivers will be granted regardless of age or prior enrollment in a pre-apprenticeship.</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>NC Community College System NC General Assembly</p>
<p>9. Create the Apprenticeship County Match Fund that provides matching funding to counties that support registered apprenticeships by paying the related instruction at community colleges in partnership with companies that pay apprenticeship wages. Funds would be matched on a sliding scale basis based on a county's Tier designation.</p>	<p>NOT STARTED</p>	<p>NC Community College System NC General Assembly</p>
<p>10. Implement a tax credit for companies on the wages spent on apprenticeship salaries.</p>	<p>NOT STARTED</p>	<p>NC General Assembly</p>
<p>11. Launch ApprenticeshipNC Partnership with UNC that creates new opportunities for ApprenticeshipNC to place apprentices within the UNC System in partnership with local community colleges in areas like industrial maintenance, skilled trades, scientific associate research roles, and health care occupations.</p>	<p>NOT STARTED</p>	<p>NC Community College System NC General Assembly University of North Carolina System</p>

Objective 3

Focus on key workforce sectors – advanced manufacturing, education, health care, and state government – to maximize existing and emerging opportunities, including AI skills development, to build a future-ready workforce.

GOALS

8. Create statewide sector-based workforce development strategies for at least three key industries, including, but not limited to, advanced manufacturing, education, and health care.

Background: To ensure North Carolina's workforce is prepared to meet the demands of a rapidly changing economy, the state is committed to developing strategic, industry-specific sector-based strategies. NC Department of Commerce, in collaboration with state and local partners, recently launched an initiative to design sector-based strategies that align talent development with employer needs in key industries. These strategies will focus on high-demand fields such as advanced manufacturing, education, and health care—sectors essential to the state's economic growth and community well-being. This coordinated, statewide approach will strengthen the talent pipeline, improve employment outcomes, and promote economic resilience across North Carolina.

Baseline Data: As of 2024, North Carolina lacks fully developed, statewide sector strategies across the targeted industries. While some regional and sectoral efforts exist, they are not coordinated at a statewide level. Fifteen current regional sector partnerships exist in industries including advanced manufacturing, health care, maritime, etc., as well as certified career pathways in 19 local areas in health care/life science and 18 local areas in advanced manufacturing.

9. Develop a plan to integrate Artificial Intelligence (AI) skills development into sector-based strategies and work-based learning in key industries to build a future-ready workforce.

Background: The rapid evolution of AI is transforming workplaces across industries, creating both challenges and opportunities. Business leaders across the country have identified workforce skill gaps as a significant barrier to AI adoption, highlighting the urgent need for coordinated statewide action. Learners, jobseekers, and employers need support to fully realize and prepare for AI workforce opportunities.

Baseline Data: Currently, North Carolina lacks a centralized state plan around the implementation of AI in education, workforce, and business settings. A coordinated approach will ensure North Carolina develops a workforce capable of thriving in an AI-transformed economy by systematically addressing skill gaps and aligning education with emerging industry needs.

10. Reduce state government vacancy rate to 15%.

Background: To ensure state government operates at the highest levels and can continue to offer necessary services to the growing population of North Carolina, the NC Office of State Human Resources, with the support of the Governor, General Assembly, and partner agencies, seeks to lower the state vacancy rate to its historical average. This will be accomplished through increased recruitment and retention efforts and a focus on work-based learning initiatives.

Baseline Data: As of February 2025, the vacancy rate for the State of North Carolina was 20.1%. The state defines vacancy rate as number of positions vacant in relation to the total number of positions. The calculation is as follows: Number of vacant positions at the end of a selected period/total number of positions at the end of the period (where total number of positions is headcount + vacant positions).

STRATEGY	STATUS	RESPONSIBLE PARTNERS
<p>1. Create a governance structure to organize existing industry groups, leaders, and councils within advanced manufacturing, education, and health care to develop and refine statewide sector strategies.</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>NC Department of Commerce NC General Assembly</p>
<p>2. Equip local and regional stakeholders with the tools, knowledge, and support needed to implement and scale sector-based strategies aligned with statewide sector strategies.</p>	<p>NOT STARTED</p>	<p>NC Department of Commerce NC Community College System</p>
<p>3. In collaboration with the North Carolina AI Leadership Council, develop an AI curriculum addressing needs from K-12 to postsecondary that can be integrated into existing coursework to support AI fluency for all North Carolinians, especially people in rural communities, justice-involved people, incumbent workers, people with disabilities, and veterans and their families.</p>	<p>NOT STARTED</p>	<p>NC Business Committee for Education NC Community College System NC Department of Public Instruction North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities University of North Carolina System</p>
<p>4. Work with employers to understand and expand the skills related to AI adoption that are most needed by their current and future workforce.</p>	<p>NOT STARTED</p>	<p>NC Business Committee for Education</p>
<p>5. Improve public perception and attractiveness of state government jobs, by having a dedicated public relations effort to rebrand state government employment, enhancing competitive compensation, benefits, and opportunities for advancement.</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>NC General Assembly Office of State Human Resources</p>
<p>6. Expand the partnership with education institutions to create a workforce pipeline into state government.</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>Office of State Human Resources</p>
<p>7. Increase use of work-based learning in state government for high-volume, entry-level positions (nurses, CNAs, direct support professionals, correctional officers, teachers, etc.) to utilize apprenticeships and trainee pathways to develop talent and fund continuing education opportunities to support retention and advancement.</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>Department of Health and Human Services Department of Public Instruction Office of State Human Resources</p>

Objective 4

Amplify the impact of workforce programs for all North Carolinians – learners, jobseekers, employees, and employers – through a coordinated and comprehensive public outreach campaign.

GOAL

11. Launch a coordinated statewide public outreach effort to broaden awareness and participation in workforce development programs by employers, learners, jobseekers, and incumbent workers, with an emphasis on reaching under-tapped talent pools like rural communities, veterans and their families, individuals with disabilities, and justice-involved people.

Background: There is a critical need for a comprehensive public outreach campaign that will leverage a communication strategy that increases public awareness, reduces participation barriers, and creates more inclusive pathways to economic opportunity for employers, learners, jobseekers, and incumbent workers, with a specific focus on rural communities, veterans and their families, individuals with disabilities, and justice-involved people.

Baseline Data: Currently, there are no workforce development outreach campaigns with documented outcomes.

STRATEGY	STATUS	RESPONSIBLE PARTNERS
<p>1. Fully fund an outreach and awareness campaign, built around a unifying theme related to "opportunity," seeking to broaden trust and increase engagement in workforce development services across North Carolina, among both employers and jobseekers.</p>	<p>NOT STARTED</p>	<p>NC Department of Commerce NC General Assembly</p>
<p>2. Create a single user-friendly platform that incorporates NCWorks.gov, NCcareers.org, and other statewide career resources to better assist users through seamless connectivity, elimination of redundancy, shared reporting, and overall improvement of site performance, data/information quality, and customer service.</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>NC Department of Commerce</p>

STRATEGY	STATUS	RESPONSIBLE PARTNERS
<p>3. Deliver regular, coordinated training across schools, community colleges, NCWorks Career Centers, and community-based organizations to ensure that all counselors, advisors, and career coaches are fully equipped to guide students toward informed, seamless postsecondary and career pathways.</p>	<p>NOT STARTED</p>	<p>NC Community College System NC Department of Administration NC Department of Adult Correction NC Department of Commerce NC Department of Health and Human Services NC Department of Public Instruction</p>
<p>4. Expand access to workforce opportunities that bring career services directly to residents, including people in rural communities, justice-involved people, people with disabilities, and veterans and their families.</p>	<p>IN PROGRESS</p>	<p>NC Department of Commerce</p>

The 30 strategies herein identified by The Council are not intended to represent all possible strategies. They reflect the "best bets" for advancing The Council's goals, based on current priorities and opportunities. Additional strategies may be needed, and other partners—including, but not limited to, the North Carolina General Assembly—will play a critical role in achieving The Council's objectives.



NEXT STEPS

Together, these 30 strategies reaffirm North Carolina's commitment to expanding opportunity for every resident and strengthening the state's long-term economic vitality. By preparing more people for good jobs, creating clearer and more abundant pathways to employment, focusing on high-impact workforce sectors, and elevating public understanding of available resources, North Carolina is building a truly connected education-to-workforce continuum. Through collaboration among schools, colleges, employers, and state partners, we can ensure that every North Carolinian—regardless of background or location—has the tools, skills, and support needed to thrive in a rapidly changing economy and contribute to a stronger, more prosperous future for our state.

As we move into 2026, The Council will continue to meet, on a quarterly basis as a whole, as well as in its various subcommittees. The Council will focus its work on several key initiatives in the coming year, including implementing strategies, providing guidance on the implementation of Workforce Pell, launching a comprehensive employer engagement campaign, expanding apprenticeships in both the private and public sectors, and developing a comprehensive reporting structure for our next report, due in December 2026.

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