



NCWorks Commission Quarterly Business Session

Wednesday, August 9, 2023

NC State University McKimmon Center | Webinar

1:00 – 2:00 P.M. | Raleigh, N.C.

Minutes

Present:

Chair Tom Rabon, Andrea DeSantis (*Governor Roy Cooper*), D. Jordan Whichard IV (*Secretary Machel Baker Sanders*), Broxton Ashburn, Sherry Carpenter, Rodney Carson, Chris Egan (*Secretary Kody Kinsley*), Christopher Gergen, Stephen Con Hunt, Suzanne Johnson, Paul Lawler, Candace Lowry, Secretary Pamela B. Cashwell, Cheryl Richards, Sandra Thompson, Dan Segovia, Tammy Simmons, John Loyack (*Jeff Cox*), Cynthia Speight, Kristie Van Auken (*Superintendent Catherine Truitt*), Hope Williams, Pam Townsend, Cameron McDonald, Hugh Allen, Marti Martin Mathews, Mike Okun, Nikki Nissen, Olalah Njenga, Shawn Brown, and Annie Izod

Absent:

Jeffrey Frederick, Himanshu Karvir, Jim Van Camp, Leslie Walden, Daniel Briggs, John Wesley Davis, Kim Toler, Ronnie Smith, Byron Hicks (*Peter Hans*)

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Chair Tom Rabon welcomed the commission members and thanked the McKimmon Center for hosting the meeting, and for being a key workforce development partner in this region.

He began the meeting by announcing that for the second year in a row, CNBC named North Carolina as *America's Top State for Business* – and that they specifically cited North Carolina's workforce as a primary reason why. In a recent statement, Secretary of Commerce Machel Baker Sanders thanked the commission, as well as the NCWorks Career Centers and Local Area Workforce Development Boards for being partners in fostering economic development success. Also, for the second year in a row, North Carolina received Area Development magazine's *Platinum Shovel Award*, for work above and beyond the gold standard for investment and job creation. North Carolina is the only state recognized for this award this year.

Chair Rabon confirmed in June, the Task Force on Talent First Economics released recommendations for connecting underutilized workers for jobs. This taskforce was led by Institute for Emerging Issues Practitioner-in-Residence, Philip Cooper and NCWorks Commission Executive Director, Dr. Annie Izod. More than 70 experts served on the task force.

In other workforce news, Chair Rabon confirmed on June 6th that Gov. Roy Cooper was recognized at the 20th annual World Stem Cell Summit in Winston-Salem for his role in developing the life sciences. Gov.

Cooper received the *Regenerative Medicine Action Leadership Award* from the Regenerative Medicine Foundation, a non-profit organization that promotes the development of regenerative medicine to improve health and deliver cures. Additionally, Chair Rabon noted that North Carolina received approval for a \$7.5 million federal grant from the U.S. Department of Labor to help workers who were affected by the Pactiv Evergreen layoffs in Canton and Waynesville. About \$2.5 million was made available immediately, and the remainder will be distributed as needed. The Division of Workforce Solutions will use this grant in partnership with the Southwestern and Mountain Area Workforce Development Boards. Chair Rabon thanked the NCWorks team in that region for everything they're doing to help those workers find new jobs and train for new careers.

For commission member news, Chair Rabon announced that Jeff Frederick was invited to be a part of the North Carolina delegation of policy, community, and academic leaders who traveled to the United Kingdom in June. He was selected due to his expertise in workforce development. The delegation focused on the workforce and clean energy during visits to Manchester and Liverpool, England, along with northern Wales. Rabon congratulated commission member Cheryl L. Richards, a 2023 winner in Charlotte Business Journal's *Most Admired CEO Awards*! He reflected on Cheryl's previous notable recognitions including *Most Admired CEO*, *Smart CEO*, *10 Most Influential Women Leaders*, *2014 Woman of the Year*, *50 Most Influential Women*, *Top 25 Woman in Business*, and *40 Under Forty leader*.

May Minutes Approval

Chair Rabon asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the May 10th quarterly business session. Hope Williams made the motion to approve, and John Loyack seconded the motion. There being no corrections, the minutes were unanimously approved as written.

Presentation: 2023 Annual Program Review

Chair Rabon introduced Wendy Johnson, senior workforce development analyst for the NCWorks Commission. Wendy began by thanking the agencies for their participation and insights on the survey. The survey focused on 19 programs and their commonalities in serving individuals and businesses. The many services provided to individuals and businesses included everything from interview and resume assistance to career coaching, tax credits information, job applicant screenings and employer workshops. Less common services to individuals are support for childcare and other basic needs. Another employer service is providing labor market information to help guide business decisions, such as for hiring, expansions and wage considerations.

Wendy remarked that 71 percent of the agencies are referring customers to www.ncworks.gov. There was also a 10 percent increase over last year in the use and referral to NCcareers.org. Additionally, 71 percent of the programs stated they offer to engage with customers virtually and, depending on customer preference, jobs fairs, workshops, career advising, and other services are also offered virtually. The top work-based learning activities for individuals and businesses are career fairs, worksite tours, and guest speakers. The main challenges reported this year are staffing recruitment/retention, obtaining upgraded technology, better broadband access in service areas, finding talent for employers, and mental health/substance abuse barriers for participants. Wendy confirmed the agencies also reported marked program improvements such as increased enrollments via partner referrals; development of industry association partnerships; the agencies utilized customer feedback to improve core programs; and they ensured staff had adequate training, support, and resources.

Committee Updates

Skills and Education Attainment Committee

Chair Sherry Carpenter reported that the Skills and Education Attainment Committee welcomed new commission member Sandra Thompson, who is the Associate Vice President of College and Career Readiness and the State Director of WIOA Title II, NC Community College System. Sherry also discussed the new partnership with the Governor's Office, in which nine WIOA NextGen students from the Capital Area Workforce Development Board region participated in the Governors Page Week Program, where they learned about state government and policy proposals, toured government buildings and historic sites, and met with government officials to discuss their work. This was the first time that NextGen students participated in the program. Chair Carpenter reported the NC Career Pathways Evaluation Study is still on schedule to be completed by September. The committee will receive an update from the researchers in their next meeting on August 22nd. The Career Pathways Review Subcommittee recently distributed its career pathways survey to the Local Area Workforce Development Board Directors. The survey goal was to deepen the understanding about the pathways programs and learn how to better leverage respective services to provide full service to individuals seeking to attain credentials to secure sustaining wages. Lastly, the commission updated its section of the Department of Commerce's website to include a [career pathways webpage](#) with links directing traffic to the Workforce Development Boards' websites for more information.

Employer Leadership Committee

The Employer Leadership Committee report was given by Dr. Annie Izod. The group last met on June 12th, 2023, and held a subcommittee meeting on June 21st to continue discussing and reviewing potential questions for the 2023 Employer Needs Survey. The members discussed the intended purpose and methodology of the survey. They agreed that some questions could be revised to reflect timely workforce issues, actionable outcomes, and future policy recommendations. Committee members also prioritized aligning the survey to the new NCWorks Commission Strategic Plan. In July, the final draft of questions was emailed to the committee for their review with anticipation of sharing the questions with The Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services by late August. Another committee interest is the recent Business Pulse Survey final report. The survey, which was the first of its kind undertaken by NC Commerce, began in October 2021 as North Carolina was navigating economic changes brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Staffing levels and remote work were two items of particular interest in the survey.

Local Innovation Committee

Chair Cynthia Speight reported that the committee met on May 18th and June 8th to finalize the selection of the Innovation Grant awardees. The committee continues to work on upcoming meetings with vital programs such as the NCWorks Mobile Career Center to share the work the unit provides to help during job fairs, special events for veterans, and with employers who ask for Rapid Response services. It allows job seekers to gain access to career counseling, resume preparations, free internet access, while assisting with the use of NCWorks.gov. Additionally, the committee met with innovative groups around the state such as Benevolence Farm which promotes sustainable livelihoods of women impacted by the legal system in North Carolina, NC Tech Paths whose mission is to provide rural neighbors with access to the tech economy through skills training, professional development, job placement and wraparound services. In recent meetings, the committee spent most of its time evaluating the Local Innovation Fund Grant applications. The committee was extremely impressed with the groundbreaking work that is being

done across the state. Chair Speight then introduced the 2023 Local Innovation Fund grantees for presentations on both Local Innovation Fund Grants.

Presentation: Building Hope

Nora El-Khoury Spencer, Hope Renovations Founder and CEO, shared with the commission that Hope Renovations-Building Hope is a two-year project funded for \$225,000, and is supported by Capital Area Workforce Development Board and Wake Tech Community College. The project addresses worker shortages and gender pay gap by increasing the number of women in skilled trades. It serves individuals in Chatham, Johnston, Lee, Orange, and Wake counties. Hope Renovations provides career coaching, case management, training, supportive services, and employment services, along with the many services available through Capital Area Workforce Development and Wake Tech. The program offers: workplace safety training, education and employability skills in carpentry, electrical, plumbing, and HVAC, followed by work-based learning experiences. The grant program participants will receive three credentials – a pre-apprenticeship certificate, NCCER (National Center for Construction Education and Research) or HBI (Home Builders Institute) core certificate, and OSHA-10 certification, followed by employability training via a six-week career development program, complimented by internship opportunities. The expected outcomes from the grant are to increase personal confidence and skills for the participants as they complete the career development and internship programs, followed by direct employment opportunities in the construction field.

Presentation: OPT-IN & J.E.T.

Sara Crisp and Deisy Vazquez, of Work in Burke, informed the commission that Work in Burke is a shared project of Burke Development Inc. and The Industrial Commons. Their mission is to increase postsecondary credential attainment and make local workforce connections by providing mentorship and education on skilled pathways to gainful employment for opportunity youth in Burke County. It is a collaboration with Burke County Public Schools and Western Piedmont Community College. The Work in Burke Local Innovation grant was funded for \$225,000 over a two-year period, and it involves 2 programs, OPT-IN (Opportunity Internship) and J.E.T. (Jobs, Education, & Training), supported by Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board. The OPT-IN program is an 8-week exploratory program for recently graduated high school seniors, it involves 3 important pieces: Work Experience, Mentorship, and Professional Development. Interns are matched with a local employer to learn skills on the job site. Additionally, OSHA-10 and CPR/First Aid certifications are provided to all grant participants. Each intern has a community mentor to coach and support them throughout the grant cycle. Employers provide a buddy at each internship site to serve as the point of contact for the intern. The outcomes are permanent employment and/or enrollment at Western Piedmont Community College. The J.E.T. program will officially launch in October 2023 with a small pilot cohort of opportunity youth. Participants will have 42 hours of paid professional development over the course of three months and receive a community mentor at their place of employment. Participants for both programs are WIOA eligible. The program goals are to decrease the number of opportunity youth in Burke County by serving at least 25 participants through the J.E.T. program in the first year, then expand OPT-IN programming by increasing the number of participants served to 75 participants by the end of the grant (June 2025). The overall goal of the program is that every participant from both programs will have quality employment and/or be enrolled in a postsecondary program by the time the grant concludes.

Governance & System Alignment Committee

Chair Chris Egan reported that the committee last met on August 2nd, where they heard several reports by Wendy Johnson and James Bain, on the progress of several recent committee work streams. The committee was updated on the final version of the 2025 Career Center Certification Criteria. The new criteria are designed to streamline the career center certification process, while ensuring North Carolina remains in compliance with federal regulations. Wendy also presented the results of the 2023 Annual Program Review. Additionally, James updated the committee on the 2024 WIOA Unified State Plan process and the USDOL Research and Evaluation Peer Learning Cohort and the resulting research project with LEAD (Labor and Economic Analysis Division) which is currently underway.

Presentation: First Economics Recommendations

Sarah Langer Hall, director of the NCSU Institute for Emerging Issues, delivered an update on Talent First Economics Recommendations: *Removing Barriers for Underrepresented Workers*, which was inspired by the advisory Task Force on Talent First. [The report](#) focused on five underrepresented workers: disability/neurodiversity, families with young children, justice-involved, transitioning military and their families, and the opportunity youth. The underrepresented also includes older adults, bilingual/bicultural, and rural individuals. There are 18 recommendations and 56 tactics. Some of the cross-cutting recommendations discussed were:

- Make resources more accessible and relevant.
- Create comprehensive career pathways that meet the needs of businesses and underrepresented groups.
- Revise job postings to reach a greater applicant pool – emphasize skills needed and ensure it's easy to review and complete.
- Invest in the workforce behind the workforce.
- Create new funding models that make it easier for service providers to meet the unique needs of underrepresented populations.
- Create opportunities for peer-to-peer learning among employers, workforce developers, and service providers.
- Co-locate trusted service providers with workforce services to more effectively influence the support providers to meet the needs of underrepresented individuals.

Sarah stated the commission can assist by promoting and sharing the report within their networks; participate and provide thought partnership and be a resource; and provide ideas connections, education, and advocacy. The needle can be moved in three areas by: increasing the number of community health workers with skills in workforce development; increasing the number of career centers who are braiding funding; and identifying the federal, state, and local workforce around services for transitioning military and families.

Closing Remarks

Dr. Izod announced that the *2023 NCWorks Partnership Conference* runs from October 11th– 13th at the Four Seasons/Koury Center in Greensboro. There will be a luncheon for commission members on October 12th at 12:00PM and the Governors Awards Banquet will follow later that evening. Furthermore, commission members received in their packets the revised 20 Local Area Workforce Development Board maps—which became effective on July 1st, and a final report on the Business Pulse Survey. The survey, which ran from October 2021 through June 2023, asked business leaders to provide ongoing, timely

insights into conditions around the state. Also in the packet were the quarterly commission meeting dates for 2024. The next quarterly business session will be on November 8th in Cullowhee at Western Carolina University.

Chair Rabon thanked Tom White, director of the Economic Development Partnership at NC State University for organizing the workforce tour of NCSU Golden LEAF Biomanufacturing Training and Education Center (BTEC) that preceded the meeting.

With no further questions, comments or business, Chair Rabon thanked everyone for their participation and the meeting was adjourned at 2:05 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Annie Izod

Approved on November 8, 2023